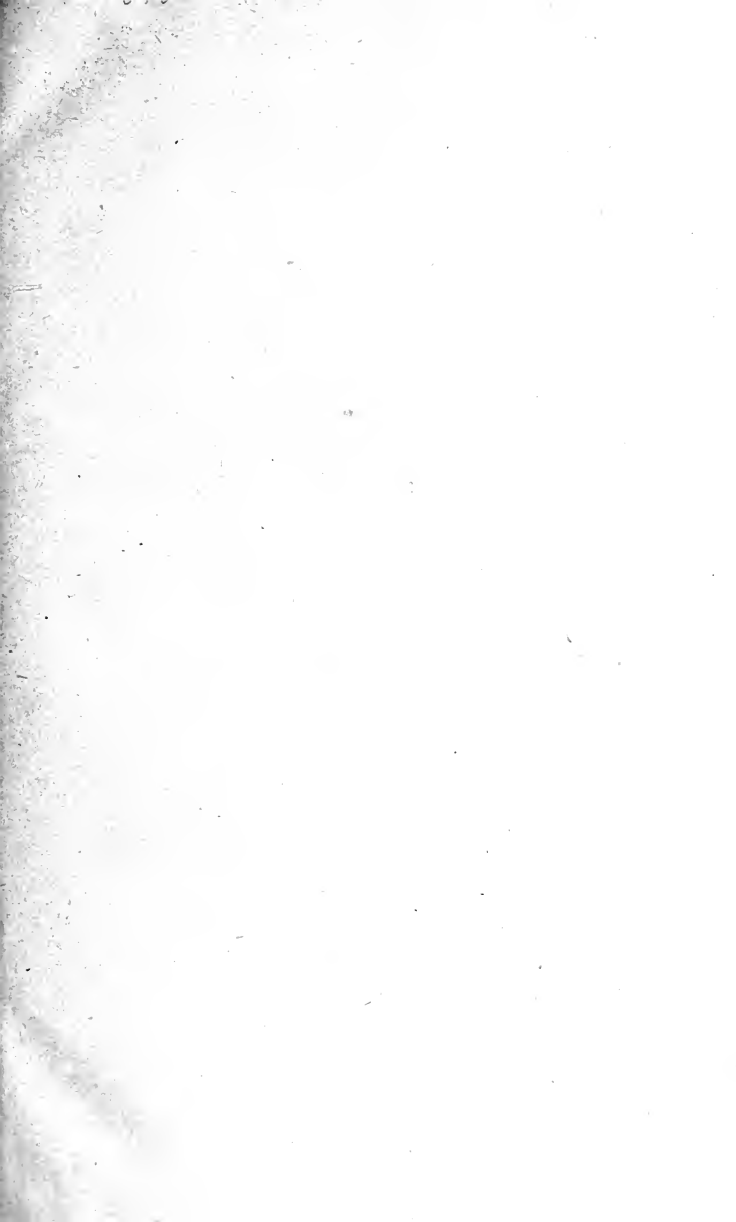
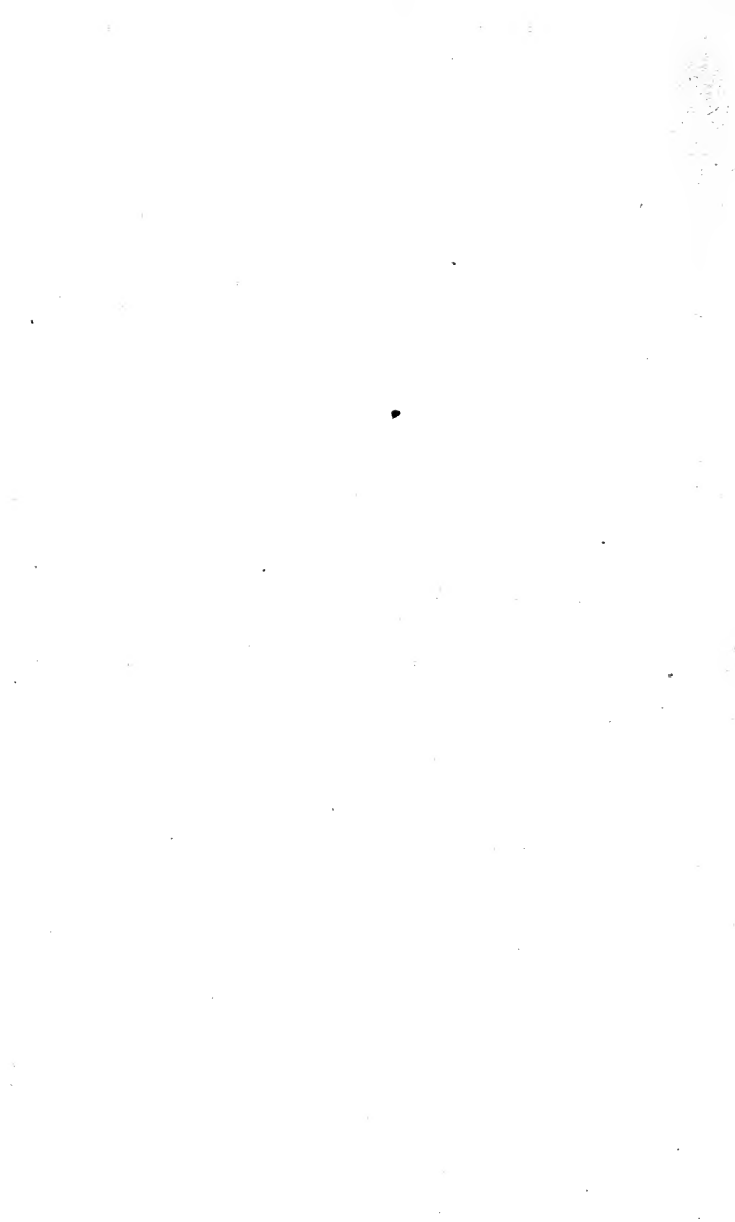


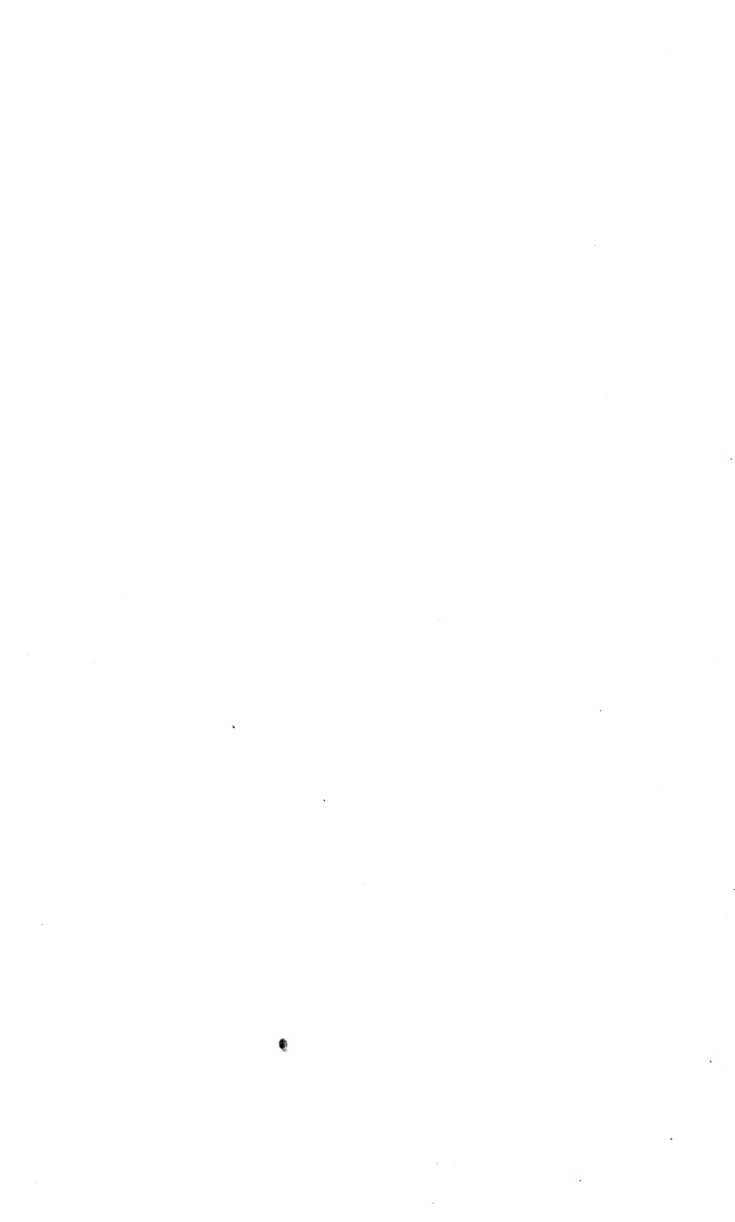


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LIFE OF THE AUTHOR.

BY D'ALEMBERT.

JOHN-BAPTIST MASSILLON was born in 1663, at Hieres, in Provence. His father was a poor citizen of that small city. The obscurity of his birth, which gives such a relief to the splendour of his personal merit, should be the first topic of his praise; and it may be said of him, as of that illustrious Roman who owed nothing to his ancestors, "*Videtur ex se natus*,—He was the son of himself alone." But his humble origin not only reflects high honour upon his own person; it is still more honourable to that enlightened government, which, having taken him from the midst of the people to place him at the head of one of the most extensive diocesses of the kingdom, confronted the prejudice too common even in our days, that Providence has not destined great places to the genius which it has produced in the lower ranks of society: if the disposers of ecclesiastical dignities had not possessed the wisdom, courage, or good fortune, sometimes to forget this maxim of human vanity, the French clergy would have been deprived of the glory of reckoning the eloquent Massillon among their bishops.

After finishing his grammatical studies, at the age of seventeen he entered into the Oratory. Resolved to consecrate his labours to the church, he preferred, to indissoluble bonds which he might have assumed in some one of our very numerous religious orders, the free engagements contracted in a congregation on which the great Bossuet has bestowed this rare eulogy,—“That every one obeys, yet no one commands.” Massillon preserved to the close of his life the most tender and pleasing recollection of the lessons he had received and the principles he had imbibed in this truly re-

spectable society, which, without intrigue and ambition, cherishing and cultivating literature through the sole wish of being useful, has acquired a distinguished name in the annals of art and science; and which, sometimes persecuted, and almost always little favoured, even by those from whom it might expect support, has done all the good it was permitted to do, without injuring a single person, even an enemy; which, in fine, has at all times obtained the regard of the wise by practising religion without littleness, and preaching it without fanaticism.

Massillon's superiors soon formed a presage, from his first essays, of the honour he would confer on the congregation. They destined him to the pulpit; but it was only from obedience that he consented to fulfil their intentions: he alone did not foresee the celebrity with which they flattered him, and which was to be the recompense of his modesty and submission. There are some confident minds which recognize, as it were by instinct, the object marked out for them by nature, and seize it with vigour; while others, humble and timid, require to be apprised of their powers, and by this honest ignorance of themselves are rendered only the more interesting, and the more worthy of being snatched from obscurity and presented to the renown which awaits them.

The young Massillon at first did what he could to withdraw himself from this glory. He had already, from pure obedience, while yet in the province, pronounced funeral orations on M. de Villeroy, archbishop of Lyons, and M. de Villars, archbishop of Vienne; and these two discourses, which were indeed first attempts, but attempts of a young man who already announced what he afterward became, had the most brilliant success. The humble orator, affrighted at his rising reputation, and fearing, as he said, "the demon of pride," resolved to escape from him for ever, by devoting himself to the profoundest and even most austere retirement. He went and buried himself in the abbey of Sept-fons, where the same rule is followed as at La Trappe, and there took the habit. During his noviciate, the Cardinal de Noailles sent to the abbot of Sept-fons, whose virtue he respected, a charge which he had just published. The abbot, more religious than eloquent, but still retaining a degree of self-love, at least on

account of his community, wished to make the prelate a reply worthy of his charge. He committed the task to his exoratorian novice, and Massillon executed it with as much success as promptness. The cardinal, astonished at receiving from this Thebais a work so well written, was not afraid of wounding the vanity of the pious abbot by asking him who was the author. The abbot named Massillon; and the prelate told him that it was not fit such a genius should, in the Scripture-phrase, remain "hidden under a bushel." He required the novice to quit his habit, and resume that of the Oratory; and he placed him in the seminary of St. Magloire, at Paris, with an exhortation to cultivate pulpit eloquence. At the same time he took upon himself, as he said, the young orator's *fortune*; which Massillon limited to that of the apostles, that is, to the merest necessaries, and the most exemplary simplicity.

His first sermons produced the effect that his superiors and the Cardinal de Noailles had foreseen. Scarcely did he begin to show himself in the pulpits of Paris, than he eclipsed almost all those who at that period shone in the same career. He had declared "that he would not preach like them," not through a presumptuous confidence in his superiority, but through an equally just and mature idea that if the minister fails with such a theme, he must be destitute of Christian eloquence. He was persuaded that if the preacher of God's word on the one hand degrades himself by uttering common truths in trivial language; on the other, he misses his purpose by thinking to captivate his audience with a long chain of reasoning which they are incapable of following: he knew that if all hearers are not blessed with an informed mind, all have a heart, whence the preacher ought to seek his arms; that, in the pulpit, man ought to be shown to himself, not so much to disgust him by a shocking portrait, as to afflict him by the resemblance; and, in fine, that if it is sometimes useful to alarm and disquiet him, it is still more so to draw from him those tears of sensibility which are much more efficacious than the tears of despair.

Such was the plan Massillon proposed to himself, and he executed it like one who had conceived it; that is, like a master. He excels in that part of oratory which may stand

instead of all the rest,—that eloquence which goes right to the soul, but which agitates without confounding, appals without crushing, penetrates without lacerating it: he goes to the bottom of the heart in search of those hidden folds in which the passions are enwrap, —those secret sophisms which they so artfully employ to blind and seduce us. To combat and destroy these sophisms it merely suffices him to develope them; but he does it in a language so affectionate and tender, that he subdues less than he attracts; and, even in displaying before us the picture of our vices, he knows how to attach and please us. His diction, always easy, elegant, and pure, never deviates from that noble simplicity without which there is neither good taste nor genuine eloquence. This simplicity, being joined in Massillon to the softest and most seducing harmony, borrows from it still new graces; and, what completes the charm of this enchanting style is, that so many beauties are felt to flow freely from the spring, without expense to their author. Sometimes, even, there escape from him, either in the expressions, the turns, or the sweet melody of his periods, negligencies which may be called happy, since they perfectly efface not only the stamp, but even the suspicion, of labour. It was by this inattention to self that Massillon made as many friends as auditors: he knew that the more an orator seems occupied in catching admiration, the less his hearers are disposed to grant it; and that this ambition is the rock fatal to so many preachers, who, intrusted (if I may so express myself) with the interests of God himself, choose to mix with it the little interests of their vanity. Massillon, on the contrary, thought it a very empty pleasure “to have to do,” as Montaigne expresses it, “with people who always admire and make way for us;” especially at those seasons when it is so delightful to forget one’s self, in order to be solely occupied with those unfortunate beings whom duty enjoins to console and instruct. He compared the studied eloquence of profane preachers to those flowers which stifle the products of harvest, and, though very agreeable to the sight, are equally hurtful to the crop.

It seemed wonderful that a man, devoted by station to retirement, should know the world so well as to draw such exact pictures of the passions, especially of self-love. “I

have learned to draw them," he candidly said, "by studying myself." He proved it in a manner equally energetic and ingenuous, by his confession to one of his brethren, who congratulated him on the success of his sermons: "The devil," he replied, "has already told it me more eloquently than you."

Massillon derived another advantage from that eloquence of the soul which he so well understood: as, in speaking to the heart of man, he spoke the language of all conditions. All went to hear his sermons; even unbelievers attended upon him, and often met with instruction where they only sought amusement. The reason was, that Massillon knew how to descend on their account to the only language they would hear, that of a philosophy, purely human in appearance, but which, finding every access to their hearts open, prepared the way for the Christian orator to approach them without effort and unresisted, and to obtain a conquest even without a combat.

His action was perfectly suited to his species of eloquence. On entering the pulpit, he appeared thoroughly penetrated with the great truths he was about to utter: with eyes declined, a modest and collected air, without violent motions, and almost without gestures, but animating the whole with a voice of sensibility, he diffused over his audience the religious emotion which his own exterior proclaimed, and caused himself to be listened to with that profound silence by which eloquence is better praised than by the loudest applauses. The reputation of his manner alone induced the celebrated Baron to attend on one of his discourses: on leaving the church, he said to a friend who accompanied him, "This man is an orator, and we are only players."

The court soon wished to hear him, or rather to judge him. Without pride, as without fear, he appeared on this great and formidable theatre. He opened with distinguished lustre; and the exordium of his first discourse is one of the master-strokes of modern eloquence. Louis XIV. was then at the summit of power and glory, admired by all Europe, adored by his subjects, intoxicated with adulation, and satiated with homage. Massillon took for his text a passage of Scripture apparently least applicable to such a prince,— "Blessed are they that mourn;" and from this he had the art to

draw a eulogy the more noble and flattering, as it seemed dictated by the gospel itself, and such as an apostle might have made: "Sire," said he, "if the world were here speaking to your majesty, it would not address you with 'Blessed are they that mourn;' 'Blessed,' would it say, 'the prince who never fought but to conquer; who has filled the universe with his name; who, in the course of a long and flourishing reign, has enjoyed with splendour all that men admire, the greatness of his conquests, the love of his people, the esteem of his enemies, the wisdom of his laws:—but, Sire, the gospel speaks not as the world speaks.'" The audience of Versailles, accustomed as they were to the Bossuets and Bourdaloues, were unacquainted with an eloquence at the same time so delicate and so noble; in consequence, it excited in the assembly, notwithstanding the gravity of the place, an involuntary expression of admiration. There only wanted, to render this passage still more impressive, that it should have been pronounced in the midst of the misfortunes which succeeded our triumphs, and at a time when the monarch, who, during fifty years, had experienced nothing but prosperity, lived only to sorrow. If ever Louis XIV. heard a more eloquent exordium, it was perhaps that of a religious missionary, who, on his first appearance before the king, thus began his discourse:—"Sire, I mean not to pay a compliment to your majesty, I have found none in the gospel."

Truth, even when it speaks in the name of God, ought to content itself with knocking at the door of kings, and should never break it open. Massillon, convinced of this maxim, did not imitate some of his predecessors, who had displayed their zeal by preaching Christian morality in the mansions of vice with an austerity capable of rendering it odious, and of exposing religion to the resentment of haughty and offended power. Our orator was always firm, but always respectful, while he announced to his sovereign the will of the Judge of kings. He filled the measure of his ministry, but he never surpassed it; and the monarch, who might have left his chapel discontented with the liberty of some other preachers, never left it after a sermon of Massillon, but "discontented with himself." These were the very words of the prince to this orator; words which contained the highest eulogy he

could give; yet one, which so many preachers before and since Massillon have not even wished to obtain, while they were more solicitous to please the critics than to convert sinners.

Successes so brilliant and repeated did not fail of their usual effect; they created Massillon implacable enemies, especially among those who considered themselves as his rivals. Their aim was, if possible, to shut the mouth of so formidable a competitor; but this was only to be done by an accusation against his doctrine, and on this delicate point the preacher gave not the least scope to their charitable intentions. He was, indeed, member of a congregation, the opinions of which were then much the object of suspicion; and through this pious consideration several of his brethren had been dexterously excluded from the pulpit of Versailles. But Massillon's sentiments, daily exposed to court criticism, were so irreproachably orthodox that they baffled the keenest scrutiny of hatred. The church and the nation already destined him to the episcopacy; and envy, usually blind to its own interests, might, with subtler policy, have regarded this dignity as a decent mode of burying his talents, by banishing him to a distance from Paris and the court. It did not carry so far its dangerous penetration; but, considering a bishopric only in the light of a splendid recompense, it resolved to make a last effort to deprive the orator of what he had so well merited. The means employed were to calumniate his morals; and, according to custom, ears were found ready to hear, and hearts to believe, the charge. The sovereign himself, so artful is falsehood in insinuating itself to the presence of monarchs, was shaken, if not convinced: and the same prince, who had told Massillon, "that he meant to hear him every two years," seemed to fear giving to another church the orator he had reserved to himself.

Louis XIV. died; and the Regent, who honoured the talents of Massillon, and despised his enemies, nominated him to the bishopric of Clermont. He wished also that the court should hear him once more; and engaged him to preach a Lent course before the King, then nine years of age.

These sermons, composed in less than three months, are known by the name of *Petit Carême* (Little Lent). They are,

perhaps, if not the master-piece, at least the true model, of pulpit eloquence. The great sermons of this orator may have more animation and vehemence: the eloquence of the *Petit Carême* is more pathetic and insinuating; and the charm resulting from it is augmented by the interesting nature of the subject, and by the inestimable value of those simple and affecting lessons which, intended to penetrate with equal force and softness, the heart of a monarch yet a child, seem to prepare the happiness of millions of men, by showing what they have a right to expect from the prince who is to govern them. Here the preacher places before the eyes of sovereigns the dangers and the evils of supreme power; truth flying the throne, and concealing herself even from the princes who seek her; the unmeasured confidence with which even the justest praises may inspire them; the almost equal danger of that weakness which has no opinion of its own, and that pride which never listens to another's; the fatal influence of their vices in corrupting and debasing a whole nation; the detestable glory of conquering kings cruelly purchased by blood and tears; in fine, the Supreme Being himself, placed between oppressor kings and oppressed people, to intimidate the one and avenge the other: such is the object of the *Petit Carême*, worthy of being learned by all children destined to the throne, and mediated by all men intrusted with governing the world. Some severe censurers, however, have charged these excellent discourses with being too uniform and monotonous: they contain, according to them, but a single idea constantly recurring—that of the kindness and beneficence due from the great and powerful of the earth to the little and feeble, whom nature has created their fellows, humanity has made their brethren, and fortune has doomed to wretchedness. But, without inquiring into the justice of this censure, we may say that the truth here mentioned is so consolatory to all who groan under affliction, so precious in the education of a prince, and especially so necessary to be impressed on the callous hearts of courtiers, that humanity may bless the orator who has inculcated it with so much force and perseverance.

The year in which Massillon pronounced these Discourses, was that in which he entered the French Academy. The date of his admission was February 23d, 1719. The Abbé

Fleury, who received him in his capacity of director, among other praises, gave him that of having accommodated his instruction to the tender age of the king. "You seem," said he, "to have imitated the prophet, who, in order to resuscitate the son of the Shunamite, contracted as it were his dimensions, by placing his mouth upon the mouth, his eyes upon the eyes, his hands upon the hands of the child; and, having thus recalled the vital heat, restored him alive and vigorous to his mother."

The director's discourse contains another passage equally edifying and remarkable. Massillon had just been consecrated a bishop; and no place at court, no business, no pretext could be urged to keep him from his diocese. The Abbé Fleury, an inflexible observer of the canons, while he admitted the new member, had his eyes fixed upon the rigorous duties which the episcopacy imposed upon him, in comparison with which, those of academicalian entirely disappeared. Far, then, from inviting him to frequent attendance on the academy, he exhorted him to a perpetual absence; and he rendered his counsel more cogent by the obliging manner in which he expressed his regret for its necessity. "We foresee with grief," said he, "that we are about to lose you *for ever*, and that the *indispensable* law of residence will sequester you without return from our assemblies: we cannot hope to see you again, but when some *veratious* business shall, *in spite of yourself*, tear you from your church."

This counsel had the more weight, as he to whom it was addressed had already given it himself. He departed for Clermont, and only returned on indispensable, consequently rare, occasions. He gave all his cares to the happy flock intrusted to him by Providence. He did not conceive that his episcopal function, which he had acquired in consequence of his success in the pulpit, gave him a dispensation from again ascending it, and that he ought to cease being useful because he had been rewarded. He consecrated to the instruction of the poor, those talents which had so often been applauded by the great; and preferred, to the noisy praises of courtiers, the simple and serious attention of a less brilliant but more docile audience. Perhaps the most eloquent of his discourses are his conferences with his clergy. He preaches to

them the virtues of which he gave the example;—disinterestedness, simplicity, forgetfulness of self, the active and prudent ardour of enlightened zeal, widely different from that fanaticism which is only a blind, and often a very suspicious zeal: moderation was, indeed, his ruling character. He loved to assemble at his country seat, Oratorians and Jesuits, whom he accustomed to endure, and almost to love each other. He set them to play together at chess, and exhorted them never to engage in more serious warfare. The conciliatory spirit which shone in his conduct, and his well-known sentiments on the scandal of theological quarrels, caused the government to wish that he should try to bring to an agreement the Cardinal de Noailles, and those who attacked the doctrine of this pious archbishop; but this impartiality in this negotiation produced its usual effect, of dissatisfying both parties. His sage remonstrances in favour of peace and union were fruitless; and he learned, by his own experience, that it is often easier to persuade unbelievers, than to reconcile those who have so much interest in uniting to confound them.

Deeply penetrated with the real obligations of his station, Massillon was especially attentive to fulfil that first and most respectable of episcopal duties, the duty, or rather the pleasure, of beneficence. He reduced his rights as bishop to very moderate sums, and would entirely have abolished them, had he not thought himself obliged to respect the patrimony of his successors, that is, to leave them wherewith to perform good actions. Within two years he sent twenty thousand livres to the hospital of Clermont. All his revenue belonged to the poor. His diocess preserves the remembrance of his deeds after thirty years; and his memory is daily honoured with the most eloquent of funeral orations—that of the tears of one hundred thousand distressed objects. During his life-time he had anticipated this testimony. When he appeared in the streets of Clermont, the people prostrated themselves before him, crying, “Long live our father!” Hence it was a frequent observation of this virtuous prelate, that his episcopal brethren did not sufficiently feel the degree of consideration and authority they might derive from their station; not, indeed, by pomp, or by a punctilious devotion, still less by the grimaces and in-

trigues of hypocrisy, but by those virtues which are recognised by the hearts of the people, and which, in a minister of true religion, represent to all eyes that just and beneficent Being of which he is the image.

Among the countless alms he gave, there were some which he concealed with the greatest care, not only to favour the delicacy of unfortunate individuals, but sometimes to spare whole communities the sensation of inquietude and fear, however groundless, which these donations might occasion them. A numerous convent of nuns, had, for several days, been without bread. The sisterhood had resolved to perish rather than make known their shocking distress, through the apprehension that it might cause the suppression of their house, to which they were more attached than to life. The Bishop of Clermont learned at the same time their extreme necessity and the motive of their silence. Eager to give them relief, he was fearful of alarming them by seeming informed of their situation; he therefore secretly sent them a very considerable sum, which rendered their subsistence secure, till he had found means to provide them with other resources; and it was not till after his death that they became acquainted with the benefactor to whom they were so greatly indebted.

He not only lavished his fortune upon the indigent; he farther assisted them, with equal zeal and success, by his pen. Being a witness, in his diocesan visits, of the wretchedness under which the inhabitants of the country groaned, and finding his revenue insufficient to supply with bread so many miserable creatures who asked it, he wrote to the court in their favour; and, by the strong and affecting picture he drew of their necessities, he obtained for them either donations, or a considerable diminution of their taxes. His letters on this interesting subject are said to be masterpieces of pathetic eloquence, superior to the most touching of his sermons.

The more sincerely he respected religion, the more he despised the superstitions which degrade it, and the more zealous he was to destroy them. He abolished, though not without difficulty, some very ancient and very indecent processions which the barbarism of the dark ages had established

in his diocess, and which travestied the divine worship into a scandalous masquerade. The inhabitants of Clermont were used to run to these exhibitions in crowds, some through a stupid devotion, others to turn this religious farce into ridicule. The clergy of the city, through fear of the people, who were attached to these shows in proportion to their absurdity, dared not publish the mandate for their suppression. Massillon ascended the pulpit, published his own mandate, and caused himself to be heard by a tumultuous audience who would have insulted any other preacher:—such was the fruit of his virtue and beneficence!

He died, as Fenelon died, and as every bishop ought to die, without money and without debts. It was on the 28th of September, 1742, that the church, eloquence, and humanity, sustained this irreparable loss.

A recent incident, well calculated to affect feeling hearts, affords a proof how dear the memory of Massillon is, not only to the indigent, whose tears he dried, but to all who have known him. Some years since, a traveller who happened to be at Clermont, wished to see the country-seat where the prelate was accustomed to pass great part of the year. He applied to an ancient grand-vicar, who, since the bishop's death, had not had resolution to return to this country mansion, now deprived of its inhabitants. He consented, however, to satisfy the traveller's desire, notwithstanding the pain he expected from revisiting a spot so sadly dear to his remembrance. They went together, and the grand-vicar showed every thing to the stranger. "Here," said he, with tears in his eyes, "is the alley where this worthy prelate took his walks with us: here is the arbour under which he used to repose while he read: this is the garden which he cultivated with his own hands." They then entered the house, and when they came to the chamber in which Massillon had breathed his last, "This," said the grand-vicar, "is the place where we lost him;" and, as he spoke these words, he fainted away. The shade of Titus or Marcus Aurelius might have envied such a homage!

Massillon has been compared with Bourdaloue, as often as Cicero with Demosthenes, and Racine with Corneille. Parallels of this kind, fertile topics for antithesis, prove

nothing more than the degree of ingenuity in him who makes them. We shall resign this common-place matter without regret, and confine ourselves to a single reflection. When Bourdaloue appeared, the pulpit was yet barbarous; rivalling, as Massillon himself observed, the theatre in buffoonery, or the schools in dryness. That Jesuit orator, was the first who gave to Religion a language worthy of her: it was solid, serious, and, above all, strictly and closely logical. If he who enters an untrodden path has many thorns to obstruct him, he also enjoys great advantages, for his advance is more marked, and his immediate celebrity greater, than those of his successors. The public, long accustomed to the reign of Bourdaloue, who had been the first object of their veneration, were long persuaded that he could have no rival, especially while Massillon was living, and Bourdaloue from his tomb no longer heard the cry of the multitude in his favour. At length, Death, which brings justice in its train, has assigned to each orator his proper place: and Envy, which had excluded Massillon from that which was his due, may now seat him in it without the fear of his enjoying it. We shall, however, refrain from giving him a pre-eminence which grave authorities would disallow: it is Bourdaloue's greatest glory, that the superiority of Massillon is still disputed; but if it were to be decided by the number of readers, the advantage would be on the side of Massillon. Bourdaloue is little read but by preachers and devotees; his rival is in the hands of all who read; and we must be permitted to say, as completing his Eulogy, that the most celebrated writer of our age and nation, is particularly assiduous in the perusal of this great orator's sermons; that Massillon is his model for prose, as Racine is for verse; and that the *Petit Carême* is always laid on his table by the side of *Athaliah*.

If, however, a kind of parallel were to be drawn between these two illustrious orators, we might say, with an intelligent judge, that Bourdaloue argues the best, and Massillon is the most pathetic; and that a sermon excellent in all respects would be one, of which Bourdaloue should write the first head, and Massillon the second. Perhaps a still more perfect discourse would be one in which they should not ap-

pear apart, but their talents, melted together, should, as it were, mutually penetrate each other, and the logician should at the same time write with pathos and sensibility.

We ought not to conceal, that all the sermons of our eloquent academicien, as well as his *Petit Carême*, are accused of the fault of frequently presenting in the same page only a single idea, varied, indeed, with all the richness of expression, but, by its fundamental uniformity, somewhat dragging in its enunciation. The same criticism has been made upon Seneca, but with more justice: that writer, solely ambitious of astonishing his reader by the profusion of wit with which he overwhelms him, becomes the more wearisome, as he seems to weary himself by a pompous display of riches, which he collects on all sides with manifest effort. Massillon, having his heart solely filled with the interest of his hearer, appears to present before him in many forms the truth he wishes to impress upon him, only through fear lest he should not engrave it deeply enough on his soul. Not only, therefore, do we pardon him these tender repetitions, but we feel obliged to him for the motive which has multiplied them: we are convinced that they proceed from one who delights in the love of his fellow-creatures, and whose overflowing sensibility requires room for expansion.

It is surprising that the French clergy, who possessed so eminent an orator, should not once have nominated him to preach in their assemblies. He never desired this honour, but left to moderate capacities and ambitious tempers a petty glory of which he had no need. He was even rarely chosen a member of the Assembly; and readily consented, as he said, that prelates less attached than himself to residence should have recourse to this decent excuse for intermitting it. The marked indifference which his episcopal brethren seemed to display toward him was neither intentional on their parts nor even voluntary: it was the obscure work of some men in place, who, from motives worthy of them, secretly kept Massillon out of the view of the court, not as an intriguer,—for they knew him too well to believe him one,—but as an illustrious and respected prelate, whose superiority, viewed too near, might have shone with a lustre which power-

ful men of inferior capacity can never bear. But what a loss to such an auditory was a preacher such as Massillon! What could be a more interesting topic than to address the assembled princes of the church on the august duties imposed on them by their dignity; on the great examples expected from them by a whole people; on the right they may acquire, from the sanctity of their character and of their lives, to speak the truth to kings, and to lay at the foot of the throne the complaint of the innocent and the oppressed? Could it be thought that Massillon was unworthy to treat so grand a subject, or was it rather feared that he would treat it with too much eloquence?

This great orator, either before or after becoming a bishop, pronounced some funeral orations, the merit of which was eclipsed by that of his sermons. If he had not that inflexibility which proclaims the truth with harshness, he had that candour which does not permit to disguise it. Even through the praises which in these discourses he grants to decorum, or perhaps to truth, the secret judgment of his own heart concerning the persons whom it was his office to celebrate, escapes from his natural frankness, and swims on the surface, as it were, in spite of himself: and it is apparent, on reading them, that there are some of his heroes whose history he would rather have composed than their eulogy.

Once alone, a failure of memory happened to him on preaching. Deceived by the mortification this slight accident caused him, he thought it would be much better to read than to repeat his sermons. We venture to differ from him in this point. Reading forces an orator either to renounce that free action which is the soul of the pulpit, or to render it ridiculous by an air of preparation and exaggeration which destroys its nature and truth. Massillon seems himself to have been sensible that the greatest merit in an oratorical discourse, with regard to effect, is, that it should appear produced on the spot, without any trace of premeditation; for, when he was asked, which of his sermons he thought the best, he replied, "that which I recollect the best."

Though by taste and duty devoted to Christian eloquence, he sometimes, by way of relaxation, exercised his faculties

upon other objects. It is asserted that he left in manuscript a life of Corregio. He could not have selected for his subject a painter whose talents were more analogous to his own; for he himself was, if the expression may be allowed, the Corregio of orators. It may be added, that as Corregio had formed himself by opening a new track after Raphael and Titian, so Massillon, who had also found out a new walk of pulpit eloquence, might have said, on comparing himself to other orators, what Corregio did on viewing the pictures of other artists,—“ I too am a painter.”

S E R M O N S.

S E R M O N I.

ON SALVATION.

“ My time is not yet come ; but your time is always ready.”—JOHN vii. 6.

THE reproach which is here directed by Jesus Christ, against his relations according to the flesh, who pressed him to show himself to the world, and to go up to Jerusalem, in order to acquire those honours which were due to his great talents, may with propriety be directed against the greatest part of this audience. The time which they give to their fortune, to their advancement, to their pleasures, is always ready ; it is always time to labour toward the acquirement of wealth and glory, and to satisfy their passions : that is the time of man ; but the time of Jesus Christ, that is to say, the time of working out their salvation, is never ready ; they delay, they put it off ; they always expect its arrival, and it never arrives.

The slightest worldly interests agitate them, and make them undertake every thing ; for what is the world itself, whose deceitful ways they follow, but an eternal agitation, where the passions set every thing in motion ; where tranquillity is the only pleasure unknown ; where cares are honourable ; where those who are at rest think themselves unhappy ; where all is toil and affliction of spirit ; in a word, where all are in motion, and all are deceived ? Surely, my brethren, when we see men so occupied, so interested, so patient in their pursuits, we would suppose them labouring for everlasting ages, and for riches which ought to secure their happiness : how can we comprehend, that so much toil and agitation has nothing in view but a fortune, whose duration scarcely equals that of the labours which have gained it ; and that a life so rapid is spent with so much fatigue, in the search of wealth which must perish along with it ?

Nevertheless, a mistake, which the slightest investigation is sufficient to expose, is become the error of by far the majority. In vain does religion call us to more necessary and more important cares ; in vain it announces to us, that to labour for what must pass away, is only amassing, at a great expense, heaps of sand, which tumble upon our heads, as fast as we raise them up ; that the highest pitch of elevation to which we can attain here below, is always that which verges upon our death, and is the gate of eternity ; and that nothing is worthy of man, but what will endure as long as man. The cares of the passions are always weighty and important : the steps alone which we take for heaven, are weak and languid : salvation alone we consider as an amusement : we toil for frivolous riches, as if we laboured for eternal possessions ; we labour for eternal possessions, as if we toiled for frivolous riches.

Yes, my brethren, our cares for this world are always animated ; obstacles, fatigues, disappointments, nothing can repulse us : our cares for this world are always prudent ; dangers, snares, perplexities, competitions, nothing can make us mistake our aim : whereas, our cares for salvation bear a very different character ; nothing can be more languid, or less interesting to us, although obstacles and disgusts there, are so much to be dreaded ; nothing can be more inconsiderate, although the multiplicity of ways, and the number of rocks for us to split upon, render mistakes in it so familiar and common.

We must labour, therefore, toward its accomplishment, with fervour and prudence : with fervour, in order not to be repulsed ; with prudence in order not to be mistaken.

PART I.—Undoubtedly nothing in this life ought to interest us more than the care of our eternal salvation. Besides that this is the grand affair upon which our ALL depends, we even have not, properly speaking, any other upon the earth ; and the infinite and divers occupations attached to our places, to our rank, to our situations in life, ought to be only different modes of labouring toward our salvation.

Nevertheless, this care so glorious, to which every thing we do, and whatever we are, relate, is of all others the most despised ; this chief care, which should be at the head of all our other pursuits, gives place to them all in the detail of our actions ; this care so amiable, and to which the promises of faith, and the consolations of grace, attach so many comforts, is of all others become for us the most disgusting, and the most melancholy. And, behold, my brethren, from whence springs this want of fervour in the business of our eternal salvation ; we pursue it without esteem, without preference, and without inclination. Let us investigate and illustrate these ideas.

It is a very deplorable error, that mankind has attached the most pompous names to all the enterprises of the passions ; and

that the cares for our salvation have not, in the opinions of men, been capable of meriting the same honour and the same esteem. Military toils are regarded by us as the path of reputation and glory; the intrigues and the commotions which contribute to our advancement in the world, are looked upon as the secrets of a profound wisdom; schemes and negociations which arm mankind against each other, and which frequently make the ambition of an individual the source of public calamities, pass for extent of genius and superiority of talents; the art of raising, from an obscure patrimony, a monstrous and overgrown fortune, at the expense often of justice and probity, is the science of business and individual good management. In a word, the world has found out a secret of setting off, by honourable titles, all the different cares which are connected with the things of this earth. The actions of faith alone, which shall endure eternally, which shall form the history of the age to come, and shall be engraven during all eternity upon the immortal columns of the heavenly Jerusalem, are accounted idle and obscure occupations, the lot of weak and limited souls, and have nothing which exalt them in the eyes of men. Such, my brethren, is the first cause of our indifference toward the business of our salvation: we do not sufficiently esteem that holy undertaking, to labour at it with fervour.

Now I do not think it necessary to stop here, and combat an illusion, which so flagrantly violates right reason. For what is it that can render a work glorious to the person who undertakes it? Is it the duration and the immortality which it promises in the memory of man? Alas! all the monuments of pride will perish with the world which has reared them up; whatever we do for the earth, will experience the same destiny which it will one day undergo: victories and conquests, the most splendid enterprises, and all the history of the sinners whose names adorn the present age, will be effaced from the remembrance of men; the works of the just alone will be immortal, and, written for ever in the book of life, will survive the entire ruin of the universe. Is it the recompense which is held out to us for it? But whoever is unable to render us happy, is consequently unable to recompense us; and there is no other who has that power but God himself. Is it the dignity of the occupations to which they engage you? But the most honourable cares of the world are merely games, on which our error and absurdity have bestowed serious and pompous names. Here, on the contrary, every thing is great: we love the Author of our existence alone; we adore the Sovereign of the universe; we serve an Almighty Master; we covet only eternal riches; we form projects for heaven alone; we labour for an immortal crown.

What is there upon the earth, then, more glorious or more worthy of man than the cares of eternity? Prosperities are honourable anxieties; splendid enjoyments an illustrious ser-

virtude; reputation is frequently a public error; titles and dignities are rarely the fruit of virtue, and, at the most, serve only to adorn our tombs and embellish our ashes; great talents, if faith does not regulate their use, are only great temptations: deep knowledge, a wind which inflates and corrupts, if faith does not correct its venom; all these are only grand, by the use which may be made of them toward salvation: virtue alone is estimable for itself.

Nevertheless, if our competitors are more successful and more elevated than we in the world, we view their situation with envious eyes; and their aggrandisement, in humbling our pride, reanimates the fervour of our designs, and gives new life to our expectations; but it happens sometimes, that the accomplices of our pleasures, changed suddenly into new men, nobly break all the shameful bonds of the passions, and, borne upon the wings of grace, enter, in our sight, into the path of salvation, whilst they leave us behind them, to wander still unfortunately at the pleasure of our illicit desires. We view with a tranquil eye the prodigy of their change; and their lot, far from exciting our envy, and awaking in us any weak desires of salvation, only induces us, perhaps, to think on replacing the void which their retreat has made in the world: of elevating ourselves to those dangerous offices from which they have just descended through motives of religion and faith:—what shall I say? we become, perhaps, the censurers of their virtues: we seek elsewhere than in the infinite treasures of grace, the secret motives of their change; to the work of God we give views entirely worldly; and our deplorable censures become the most dangerous trials of their repentance. It is thus, O, my God! that Thou sheddest avenging darkness over iniquitous passions! Whence comes this? We want esteem for the holy undertaking of salvation: this is the first cause of our indifference.

In the second place, we labour in it with indolence, because we do not make a principal object of its attainment, and because we never give a preference to it over our other pursuits. In effect, my brethren, we all wish to be saved; the most deplorable sinners do not renounce this hope; we even wish, that amongst our actions there may always be found some which relate to our salvation; for none deceive themselves so far as to believe, that they shall be entitled to the glory of the holy, without having ever made a single exertion toward rendering themselves worthy of it; but the point in which we commonly deceive ourselves is, the rank which we give to those works, amidst the other occupations which divide our life.

The trifles, the attentions which we lavish so profusely in our intercourse with society, the functions of a charge, domestic arrangements, passions and pleasures, their times and their moments marked in our days;—where do we place the work of sal-

vation? What rank do we give to this special care, above our other cares? Do we even make a business of it? And, to enter into the particulars of your conduct, what do you perform for eternity, which you do not for the world an hundred-fold? You sometimes employ a small portion of your wealth in religious charities; but what are these when compared to the sums which you sacrifice every day to your pleasures, to your passions, and to your caprices? In the morning you, perhaps, raise up your mind to the Lord in prayer; but does not the world, in a moment, resume its place in your heart, and is not the remainder of the day devoted to it? You regularly attend, perhaps, in order to fulfil the external duties of religion; but, without entering into the motives which frequently carry you there, this individual exercise of religion, is it not compensated by devoting the remainder of the day to indolent and worldly pursuits? You sometimes correct your inclinations; you perhaps bear with an injury; you undertake the discharge of some pious obligation; but these are individual and insulated exertions, out of the common track, and which are never followed by any regular consequences; you will be unable to produce, before the Lord, a single instance of these in your favour, without the enemy having it at the same time in his power to reckon a thousand against you: salvation occupies your intervals alone; the world has, as I may say, the foundation and the principal: the moments are for God, our entire life is for ourselves.

I know, my brethren, that, with regard to this, you feel sensibly the injustice and the danger of your own conduct. You confess, that the agitations of the world, of business, and of pleasures, almost entirely occupy you, and that a very little time, indeed, remains for you to reflect upon salvation: but, in order to tranquillize yourselves, you say, that some future day, when you shall be more at ease; when affairs of a certain nature shall be terminated; when particular embarrassments shall be at an end; and, in a word, when certain circumstances shall no longer exist, you will then think seriously upon your salvation, and the business of eternity shall then become your principal occupation. But, alas! your deception is this, that you regard salvation as incompatible with the occupations attached to the station in which Providence has placed you. For, cannot you employ that station as the means of your sanctification? Can you not exercise in it all the Christian virtues? Penitence, should these occupations be painful and distressing; clemency, pity, justice, if they establish you in authority over your fellow-creatures? Submission to the will of Heaven, if the success does not correspond sometimes with your expectations? A generous forgiveness of injuries, if you suffer oppression or calumny in that station? Confidence in God alone, if in it you experience the injustice or the inconstancy of your masters? Do not many individuals of your rank and station, in the same predicament as you find yourselves, lead a pure and

Christian life? You know well, that God is to be found every where; for, in those happy moments when you have sometimes been touched with grace, is it not true, that every thing recalled you to God? That even the dangers of your station became the vehicles of instruction, and means of cure for you; that the world disgusted you even with the world; that you found, continually and every where, the secret of offering up a thousand invisible sacrifices to the Almighty, and of making your most hurried and tumultuous occupations the sources of holy reflections, or of praiseworthy and salutary examples? Why do you not cultivate these impressions of grace and salvation? It is not your situation in life, it is your infidelity and weakness, which have extinguished them in your heart.

Joseph was charged with the management of a great kingdom; he alone supported the whole weight of the government; nevertheless, did he forget the Lord, who had broken asunder his chains and justified his innocence? Or, in order to serve the God of his fathers, did he delay till a successor should come and restore that tranquillity to him which his new dignities had necessarily deprived him of? On the contrary, he knew how to render serviceable, toward the consolation of his brethren, and the happiness of the people of God, a prosperity which he acknowledged to be held only from his Almighty hand. That officer of the Queen of Ethiopia, who is mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, had the sole government of her immense riches: every particular with regard to tribute and subsidies, and the administration of all the public revenues, were intrusted to his fidelity. Now, this abyss of cares and embarrassments did not deprive him of leisure to seek, in the prophecies of Isaiah, the salvation he expected, and the words of eternal life. Place yourselves in the most agitated stations, you will find examples of upright souls, who in them have wrought their sanctification. The court may become the asylum of virtue, as well as the cloister; places and employments may be the aids, as well as the rocks of piety; and when, in order to return to God, we delay till a change of station shall take place, it is a convincing proof that we do not as yet wish to change our heart. Besides, when we say that salvation ought to be your sole employment, we do not pretend that you should renounce all other pursuits; for you would then depart from the order of God: we only wish you to connect them with your salvation; that piety may sanctify your occupations; that faith may regulate them; that religion may animate them; that the fear of the Lord may moderate them: in a word, that salvation may be as the centre to which they all tend. For, to wait till you shall be in a more tranquil situation, and less involved in worldly perplexities, is not only an illusion which Satan employs to delay your repentance, but it is also an outrage upon the religion of Jesus Christ. You thereby justify the reproaches formerly made against it by the

enemies of the Christians; it would seem that you look upon it as incompatible with the duties of prince, courtier, public character, and father of a family: like them, you seem to believe, that the gospel proposes only maxims unfortunate and inimical to society; and that, were it believed and strictly observed, it would be necessary to quit all; to exclude ourselves from the world; to renounce all public concerns; to break all the ties of duty, of humanity, of authority, which unites us to the rest of mankind; and to live as if we were alone upon the earth: in place of which, it is the gospel alone which makes us fulfil all these duties as they ought to be fulfilled: it is the religion of Jesus Christ which can alone form pious princes, incorruptible magistrates, mild and gentle masters, and faithful subjects, and maintain, in a just harmony, that variety of stations and conditions, upon which depend the peace and tranquillity of the people, and the safety of empires.

But, in order to impress more sensibly upon you the illusion of this pretext, when you shall be free from embarrassment, and disengaged from those external cares which at present detach your thoughts from salvation, will your heart be free from passions? Will those iniquitous and invisible bonds which now stop you, be broken asunder? Will you be restored to yourselves? Will you be more humble, more patient, more moderate, more virtuous, more penitent? Alas! it is not external agitations which check you; it is the disorder within; it is the tumultuous ardour of the passions. It is not from the cares of fortune, and the embarrassments of events and business, says a holy father, that confusion and trouble proceed; it is from the irregular desires of the soul: a heart in which God reigns, is tranquil every where. Your cares for the world are only incompatible with salvation because the affections which attach you to it are criminal. It is not your stations, but your inclinations, which become rocks of destruction to you. Now, from these inclinations you will never be able to free yourselves with the same facility as from your cares and embarrassments; they will afterwards be even more lively, more unconquerable than ever: besides this fund of weakness which they draw from your corruption, they will have that force and strength acquired by habit through time and years. You think, that, in attaining rest, every thing will be accomplished; and you will feel, that your passions, more lively in proportion as they no longer find external resources to employ them, will turn all their violence against yourselves; and you will then be surprised to find, in your own hearts, the same obstacles which at present you believe to be only in what surrounds you. This leprosy, if I may venture to speak in this manner, is not attached to your clothes, to your places, to the walls of your palaces, so that, by quitting them, you may rid yourselves of it; it has gained root

in your flesh. It is not by renouncing your cares, therefore, that you must labour toward curing yourselves; it is by purifying yourselves that you must sanctify your cares. Every thing is pure to those who are pure, otherwise your wound will follow you, even into the leisure of your solitude; like that king of Judea mentioned in the book of Kings, who in vain abdicated his throne, delivered up all the insignia, as well as the cares of royalty, into the hands of his son, and withdrew himself into the heart of his palace: he carried with him the leprosy with which the Lord had struck him, and beheld that shameful disease pursue him even into his retreat. External cares find neither their innocency nor their malignity but in our own hearts; and it is ourselves alone who render the occupations of the world dangerous, as it is ourselves alone who render those of heaven insipid and disgusting.

And behold, my brethren, the last reason why we show so little fervour and animation in the affair of our eternal salvation,—is because we fulfil the duties necessary to accomplish it without pleasure, and, as it were, against our will. The slightest obligations of piety appear hard to us; whatever we do for heaven tires us, exhausts us, displeases us: prayer confines our mind too much; retirement wearies us; holy reading, from the first, fatigues the attention; the intercourse of the upright is languid, and has nothing sprightly or amusing in it; in a word, we find something, I know not what, of melancholy in virtue, which occasions us to fulfil its obligations only as hateful debts, which we always discharge with a bad grace, and never till we see ourselves forced to it.

But, in the first place, my brethren, you are unjust in attributing to virtue what springs from your own corruption; it is not piety which is disagreeable, it is your heart which is disordered; it is not the cup of the Lord which is to be accused of bitterness, says a holy father, it is your own taste which is vitiated. Every thing is bitter to a diseased palate: correct your dispositions, and the yoke will appear light to you; restore to your heart that taste of which sin has deprived it, and you will experience how pleasing the Lord is: hate the world, and you will comprehend how much virtue is amiable. In a word, Jesus Christ once become the object of your love, you will then feel the truth of every thing I say.

Do the upright experience those disgusts for pious works which you feel? Interrogate them: demand if they consider your condition as the happiest. They will answer, that, in their opinion, you appear worthy of compassion; that they are feelingly touched for your errors; to see you suffering every thing for a world which either despises you, wearies you, or cannot render you happy; to see you frequently running after pleasures more insipid to you than even the virtue from which you fly: they will tell you, that they would not change their pretended melancholy for all the felicities

of the earth. Prayer consoles them; retirement supports them; holy reading animates them; works of piety shed a holy unction through their soul; and their happiest days are those which they pass with the Lord. It is the heart which decides our pleasures. While you continue to love the world, you will find virtue insupportable.

In the second place, if you wish to know why the yoke of Jesus Christ is so hard, and so burdensome to you, it is because you carry it too seldom: you give only a few rapid moments to the care of your salvation; certain days which you consecrate to piety; certain religious works of which you sometimes acquit yourselves; and, in accomplishing their immediate discharge, you experience only the disgusts attending the first efforts; you do not leave to grace the time necessary to lighten the weight; and you anticipate the comforts and the consolations which it never fails to shed upon the sequel. Those mysterious animals which the Philistines made choice of to carry the ark of the Lord beyond their frontiers, emblematic of unbelieving souls little accustomed to bear the yoke of Jesus Christ, bellowed, says the Scripture, and seemed to groan under the grandeur of that sacred weight: in place of which, the children of Levi, a natural image of the upright, accustomed to that holy ministry, made the air resound with songs of mirth and thanksgivings, while carrying it with majesty, even over the burning sands of the desert. The law is not a burden to the upright soul, accustomed to observe it. It is the worldly soul alone, little familiarized to the holy rules, who groans under a weight so pleasing. When Jesus Christ declares that his yoke is light and easy, he commands us, at the same time, to bear it every day. The unction is attached to the habit and usage of it: the arms of Saul were heavy to David, only because he was not accustomed to them. We must familiarize ourselves with virtue, in order to be acquainted with its holy attractions. The pleasures of sinners are only superficially agreeable; the first moments alone are pleasant; descend deeper, and you no longer find but gall and bitterness; and the deeper you go, the more will you find the void, the weariness, and the satiety that are inseparable from sin. Virtue, on the contrary, is a hidden manna: in order to taste all its sweetness, it is necessary to dig for it; but the more you advance, the more do its consolations abound; in proportion as the passions are calmed, the path becomes easy; and the more will you applaud yourselves for having broken asunder chains which weighed you down, and which you no longer bore but with reluctance and secret sorrow.

Thus, while you confine yourselves to simple essays in virtue, you will taste only the repugnances and the bitterness of it; and, as you will not possess the fidelity of the upright, you can have no right, consequently, to expect their consolations.

In a word, you perform the duties of piety without inclination,

not only because you do them too seldom, but because you only, as I may say, half perform them. You pray, but it is without recollection; you abstain, perhaps, from injuring your enemy, but it is without loving him as your brother; you approach the holy mysteries, but without bringing there that fervour which alone can enable you to find in them those ineffable comforts which they communicate to the religious soul; you sometimes separate yourselves from the world, but you carry not with you into retirement the silence of the senses and of the passions, without which it is only a melancholy fatigue. In a word, you only half carry the yoke. Now, Jesus Christ is not divided. That Simon of Cyrene, who bore only a part of the cross, was overcome by it, and the soldiers were under the necessity of using violence to force him to continue this melancholy office to the Saviour of the world. The fulness alone of the law is consolatory; in proportion as you retrench from it, it becomes heavy and irksome; the more you wish to soften it, the more it weighs you down. On the contrary, by sometimes adding extraneous rigours, you feel the load diminished, as if you had applied additional softness. Whence comes this? It is that the imperfect observance of the law takes its source from a heart which the passions still share. Now, according to the word of Jesus Christ, a heart divided, and which nourishes two loves, must be a kingdom and a theatre full of trouble and desolation.

Would you wish a natural image of it, drawn from the holy Scriptures? Rebecca, on the point of her delivery of Jacob and Esau, suffered the most cruel anguish: the two children struggled within her; and, as if worn out by her tortures, she intreated of the Lord either death or deliverance. Be not surprised, said a voice from heaven to her, if your sufferings are extreme, and that it costs you so much to become a mother; the reason is, you carry two nations in your womb. Such is your history, my dear hearers; you are surprised that it costs you so much to accomplish a pious work; to bring forth Jesus Christ, the new man in your heart. Alas! the reason is, that you still preserve there two loves which are irreconcilable, Jacob and Esau, the love of the world and the love of Jesus Christ; it is because you carry within you two nations, as I may say, who make continual war against each other. If the love of Jesus Christ alone possessed your heart, all there would be calm and peaceable; but you still nourish iniquitous passions in it; you still love the world, the pleasures and distinctions of fortune; you cannot endure those who eclipse you; your heart is full of jealousies, of animosities, of frivolous desires, of criminal attachments; and from thence it comes that your sacrifices, like those of Cain, being always imperfect, like his, are always gloomy and disagreeable.

Serve, then, the Lord with all your heart, and you will serve

him with joy. Give yourself up to him without reserve, without retaining the smallest right over your passions. Observe the righteousnesses of the law, in all their fulness, and they will shed holy pleasures through your heart: for, thus saith the prophet, "The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart." Think not that the tears of penitence are always bitter and gloomy. The mourning is only external; when sincere, they have a thousand secret recompenses. The upright soul resembles the sacred bush; nothing strikes our view but prickles and thorns, but you see not the glory of the Lord which dwells within it; you see only fastings and bodily sufferings, but you perceive not the holy unction which soothes and softens them; you see silence, retirement, flight from the world and its pleasures, but you behold not the invisible Comforter, who replaces, with so much usury, the society of men, now become insupportable, since they have begun to taste that of God; you see a life apparently gloomy and tiresome, but you are incapable of seeing the peace and the joy of that innocence which reigns within. It is there that the Father of mercies, and the God of all consolation, so liberally sheds his favours; and that the soul, unable sometimes to support their fulness and excess, is obliged to intreat the Lord to suspend the torrent of his kindness, and to measure the abundance of his gifts by the weakness of his creature.

Come yourself, my dear hearer, and make a happy experience of it; come, and put the fidelity of your God to the trial; it is here he wishes to be tried; come, and prove whether or not we render false testimonies to his mercies; if we attract the sinner by false hopes, and if his gifts are not still more abundant than our promises. You have long tried the world; you have found it destitute of fidelity; it flattered you with hopes of accomplishing every thing; pleasures, honours, imaginary happiness; it has deceived you; you are unhappy in it; you have never been able to attain a situation answerable to your wishes or expectations; come, and see if your God will be more faithful to you; if only bitterness and disgusts are to be found in his service; if he promises more than he bestows; if he is an ungrateful, changeable, or capricious master; if his yoke is a cruel servitude, or a sweet liberty; if the duties which he exacts from us are the punishment of his slaves, or the consolation of his children; and if he deceives those who serve him. My God! how little wouldst thou be worthy of our hearts, wert thou not more amiable, more faithful, and more worthy of being served, than this miserable world!

But, in order to serve him as he wishes to be served, we must esteem the glory and the happiness of his service; we must prefer this happiness to all others, and labour in it with sincerity, without reserve, and with a ripe and watchful circumspection: for if it is a common fault to want fervour in the business of our

eternal salvation, and to become disgusted with it, it is likewise a much more general one to fail of prudence, and to mistake our path toward it.

PART II.—An enterprise, where the dangers are daily, and mistakes common; where, amongst so many different routes which appear safe, there is, however, only one true and unerring, and the success of which must, nevertheless, decide our eternal destiny;—an enterprise of this nature surely requires uncommon exertions; and never had we occasion, in the conduct of any other, for so much circumspection and prudence. Now, that such is the enterprise of salvation, it would be needless to waste time in proving here, and equally so for you to doubt. The only object of importance, then, to establish, is, the rules and the marks of this prudence which is to guide us in so dangerous and so essential an affair.

The first rule is, not to determine ourselves by chance amongst that multiplicity of ways which mankind pursue; carefully to examine all, independent of usages and customs which may authorize them; in the affair of our salvation, to give nothing to opinion or example. The second is, when we have finally determined to leave nothing to the uncertainty of events, and always to prefer safety to danger.

Such are the common rules of prudence adopted by the children of the age, in the pursuit of their pretensions and their temporal expectations. Eternal salvation is the only affair in which they are neglected. In the first place, no person examines if his ways are sure: nor does he ever require any other pledge of his safety than the crowd which he sees marching before him. Secondly, in the doubts which spring up during our proceedings, the party the most dangerous to salvation, having always self-love in its favour, is always preferred: two important and common errors in the affair of eternal salvation, which it is necessary to combat here. The first rule is, not to determine by chance, and in the affair of eternity to give nothing to opinion or example. Indeed, the upright is every where represented to us in the holy writings, as a judicious and prudent man, who calculates, who compares, who examines, who discriminates, who tries whatever may be the most proper, who does not lightly believe every fancy, who carries before him the torch of the law, that his steps may be enlightened, and that he may not be in danger of mistaking his way. The sinner, on the contrary, is there held out as a foolish man, who marches by chance, and who, in the most dangerous passes, advances forward with confidence, as if he was travelling in the straightest and most certain path.

Now, my brethren, such is the situation of almost all men in the affair of salvation. In every other matter, prudent, attentive, diffident, active to discover any errors concealed under the common prejudices,—it is in salvation alone that nothing can

equal our credulity and imprudence. Yes, my brethren, we tell you every day, that the life of the world, which is to say, that life of amusement, of inutility, of vanity, of show, of effeminacy, exempt even from great crimes,—that this life, I say, is not a Christian one, and consequently is a life of reprobation and infidelity: it is the doctrine of that religion in which you was born; and since your infancy you have been nourished in these holy truths. The world, on the contrary, affirms this to be the only life which persons of a certain rank can lead; that not to conform themselves to it, would betray a barbarity of manners, in which there would be more singularity and meanness than reason or virtue.

I even consent that it may still be considered as dubious, whether the world or we have reason on our side, and that this grand dispute may not yet be decided; nevertheless, as a horrible alternative depends upon it, and that any mistake here is the worst of all evils, it appears that prudence requires us to clear it up at least, before we take the final step. It is surely natural to hesitate between two contending parties, particularly where our salvation is the subject of dispute. Now, I ask you, entering into the world, and adopting its manners, its maxims, and its customs, as you have adopted them, have you begun by examining whether it had reason on its side, and if we were wrong and false deceivers? The world wishes you to aspire to the favours of fortune, and to neglect neither cares, exertions, meannesses, nor artifices, to procure them: you follow these plans; but have you examined if the gospel does not contradict and forbid them? The world boasts of luxury, of magnificence, of the delicacies of the table; and, in matters of expense, it deems nothing excessive but what may tend to derange the circumstances. Have you informed yourselves, whether the law of God does not prescribe a more holy use of the riches which we hold only from him? The world authorizes continual pleasures, gaming, theatres, and treats with ridicule whoever dares venture even to doubt their innocence. Have you found this decision in the sorrowful and crucifying maxims of Jesus Christ?

The world approves of certain suspicious and odious ways of increasing the patrimony of our fathers, and places no other bounds to our desires than those of the laws, which punish violence and manifest injustice. Can you assure us, that the rules of the conscience do not observe more narrowly, and, with regard to these matters, do not enter into discussions which the world is totally unacquainted with? The world has declared, that a gentle, effeminate, and idle life, is an innocent life; and that virtue is not so rigid and austere as we wish to make it. Before giving credit to this, merely upon its assertion, have you consulted whether the doctrine brought us by Jesus Christ from heaven, subscribed to the novelty and to the danger of these maxims?

What, my brethren! in the affair of your eternity, without examination or attention, you adopt common prejudices, merely because they are established? You blindly follow those who march before you, without examining where the path leads to which they keep? You even deign not to inquire at yourselves whether or not you are deceived? You are satisfied in knowing that you are not the only persons mistaken? What! in the business which must decide your eternal destiny, you do not even make use of your reason? You demand no other pledge of your safety than the general error? You have no doubt or suspicion? You think it unnecessary to inform yourselves? You have no mistrust? All is good, and, in your opinion, as it ought to be? You who are so nice, so difficult, so mistrustful, so full of precaution when your worldly interests are in question, in this grand affair alone you conduct yourselves by instinct, by fancy, by foreign impressions? You decide upon nothing, but indolently allow yourselves to be dragged away by the multitude, and the torrent of example? You who, in every other matter, would blush to think like the crowd; you who pique yourselves upon superiority of genius, and upon leaving to the common people, and to weak minds, all vulgar prejudices; you who carry to a ridiculous extreme, perhaps, your mode of thinking on every other point, upon salvation alone you think with the crowd, and it appears that reason is denied to you on this grand interest alone. What, my brethren! when you are asked, in the steps which you take to insure success to your worldly expectations, the reasons which have induced you to prefer one party to another, you advance such solid and prudent motives; you justify your choice by prospects so certain and decisive; you appear to have so maturely considered them before adopting their execution; and when we demand of you whence it comes, that in the affair of your eternal salvation you prefer the abuses, the customs, the maxims of the world, to the examples of the saints, who certainly did not live like you, and to the rules of the gospel, which condemn all those who live as you do; you have nothing to answer but that you are not singular, and that you must live like the rest of the world? Great God! to what purpose are great abilities in the conduct of projects which will perish with us! We have reasons and arguments in support of vanity, and we are children with regard to the truth. We pique ourselves on our wisdom in the affairs of the world; and, alas! in the business of our eternal salvation, we think it no disgrace to be ignorant and foolish.

You will tell us, perhaps, that you are neither wiser, nor more able than all the others who live like you; that you cannot enter into discussions which are beyond your reach; that, were we to be believed, it would be necessary to cavil at and dispute every thing; and that piety does not consist in refining to such an extreme. But I ask you,—Is so much subtlety required

to know that the world is a deceitful guide; that its maxims are rejected in the school of Jesus Christ; and that its customs can never subvert the law of God? Is not this the most simple and the most common rule of the gospel, and the first truth in the plan of salvation? To know our duty, it requires only to walk in simplicity of heart. Subtleties are only necessary in order to dissemble with ourselves, and to connect, if possible, the passions with the holy rules; there it is that the human mind has occasion for all its industry, for the task is difficult. Such is exactly your case; you who pretend, that to recall customs to the law is a ridiculous refinement. To know our duty, it only requires a conference with ourselves. While Saul continued faithful, he had no occasion to consult the sorceress with regard to what he should do; the law of God sufficiently instructed him. It was only after his guilt, that, in order to calm the inquietudes of a troubled conscience, and to connect his criminal weaknesses with the law of God, he bethought himself of seeking, in the answers of a deceitful oracle, some authority favourable to his passions. Love the truth, and you will soon acquire a knowledge of it. A clear conscience is the best of all instructors.

Not that I wish to blame those sincere researches which an honest and timid soul makes to enlighten and instruct itself; I wish only to say, that the majority of doubts with regard to our duties, in those hearts delivered up like you to the world, springs from a ruling principle of cupidity, which, on the one side, would wish not to interfere with its infamous passions; and, on the other, have the authority of the law to protect it from the remorse which attend a manifest transgression. For, besides, if you seek the Lord in sincerity, and your lights are insufficient, there are still prophets in Israel; consult, in proper time, those who preserve the form of the law, and of the holy doctrine, and who teach the way of God in truth. Do not propose your doubts with those colourings and softening which always fix the decision in your favour; do not apply in order to be deceived, but to be instructed; seek not favourable, but sure and enlightened guides; do not content yourselves even with the testimony of men; consult the Lord frequently, and through different channels. The voice of Heaven is uniform, because the voice of truth, of which it is the interpreter, is the same. If the testimonies do not accord, prefer always what places you farthest from danger; always mistrust the opinion which pleases, and which already had the suffrage of your self-love. It rarely happens that the decisions of our inclinations are found the same with those of the holy rules; nevertheless, it is that which decides on all our preferences in the business of salvation.—Second step of our imprudence in the affair of our eternal salvation.—In effect, there is scarcely a doubt with regard to our duties, which conceals from us the precise obligation of the law on every step.

We know the paths by which Jesus Christ and the saints have passed ; they are still pointed out to us every day ; we are invited, by the success which they have had, to walk in their steps. In this manner, say they to us, with the apostles, did those men of God who have preceded us, overcome the world, and obtain the performance of the promises. We see, that, by imitating them, we may hope for all, and, in the way in which we walk, that every thing is to be dreaded. Ought we to hesitate on this alternative ? Nevertheless, in every thing we resist our own lights ; every where we prefer danger to safety ; our whole life is, indeed, one continued danger ; in all our actions we float, not between the more or less perfect, but between guilt and simple errors. Every time we act, the question is not to know whether we are doing the greatest good, but if we are committing only a slight fault, worthy of indulgence. All our duties are limited to the inquiry at ourselves, if possessing such principles ; if, to a certain degree, delivering ourselves up to resentment ; if employing a certain degree of duplicity ; if not denying ourselves a certain gratification, be a crime, or a venial fault ; you always hang between these two destinies ; and your conscience can never render you the testimony, that on any occasion you made choice of the part in which there was no danger.

Thus, you know, that a life of pleasure, of gaming, of show, of amusement, when even nothing gross or criminal is mingled with it, is a part very doubtful for eternity ; no saint, at least, has left you such an example. You are sensible, that more guarded and more Christian manners would leave you nothing similar to dread : nevertheless, you love an accommodating doubt better than an irksome safety ; you know that grace has moments which never return ; that nothing is more uncertain than the return of holy impulses, once rejected ; that salvation deferred, almost always fails ; and that to begin to-day is prudently assuring ourselves of success : you know it ; yet you prefer the uncertain hope of a grace to come, to the present salvation which offers itself to you. Now, my brethren, I only demand of you two reflections, and I shall finish. In the first place, when, even in this path which you tread, the balance were equal, that is to say, when it were equally suspicious whether you are to be saved or lost, did the smallest portion of faith remain to you, you would be plunged in the most cruel alarms ; it ought to appear horrible to you that your eternal salvation was become a problem, upon which you knew not what to decide, and upon which, with equal appearances of truth, you might determine for the happiness or the misery of your everlasting lot, in the same manner as upon those indifferent questions which God has yielded up to the controversies of men. You ought to undertake every thing, and to employ every exertion, to place appearances, at least, in your favour,

and to find out a situation where prejudices would be on your side : and here, where every thing concludes against you,—where the law is unfavourable,—where you have nothing in your favour but some fallacious appearances of reason, upon which you would not hazard the smallest of your temporal interests,—and with manners, which to this period have saved none, and in which you only strengthen and comfort yourselves by the example of those who perish with you,—you are tranquil in this path; you admit of and acknowledge the wisdom of those who have chosen a more certain one: you say that they are praiseworthy; that they are happy who can assume such a command over themselves; that it is much safer to live as they do; you say this, and you think it needless to imitate or follow their example! Madman! cries the apostle, what delusion is it which blinds thee? and wherefore dost thou not obey that truth which thou knowest? Ah! my brethren, in a choice which interests our glory, our advancement, our temporal interests, are we capable of such imprudence? Of all the various ways which present themselves to ambition, do we leave those where every appearance seems favourable to our success, and make choice of such as lead to nothing; where fortune is tardy and doubtful; and which have hitherto been only productive of misfortune? Of salvation alone, therefore, we make a kind of speculation, if I may venture to speak in this manner; that is to say, an undertaking without arrangement, without precaution, which we abandon to the uncertainty of events, and of which the success can alone be expected from chance, and not from our exertions. In a word, as my last reflection, allow me to ask, Why you search for, and allege to us so many specious reasons, as a justification to yourselves of the manners in which you live? Either you wish to be saved, or you are determined to be lost. Do you wish to be saved? Choose, then, the most proper means of attaining what you aspire to. Quit those doubtful paths, by which none have hitherto been conducted to it: confine yourselves to that which Jesus Christ has pointed out to us, and which alone can safely lead us to it. Do not apply yourselves to lessen in your own sight the dangers of your situation, and to view them in the most favourable light, in order to dread them less; rather magnify the danger to your mind: we cannot dread too much what we cannot shun too much; and salvation is the only concern where precaution can never be excessive, because a mistake in it is without remedy. See if those who once followed the same deceitful paths in which you tread, and who employed the same reasons that you make use of for their justification, have confined themselves to them from the moment that grace had operated in their hearts serious and sincere desires of salvation: they regarded the dangers in which you live as incompatible with their design: they sought more solid and certain paths; they made the holy

safety of retirement succeed to the inutility and the dangers of society; the habit of prayer to the dissipation of gaming and amusements; the guard of the senses to the indecency of dress, and the danger of public spectacles; Christian mortification to the softness of an effeminate and sensual life; the gospel to the world: they considered that it would be absurd to wish their salvation through the same means by which others are lost. But, if you are determined to perish, alas! why will you still preserve measures with religion? Why will you always seek to place some specious reasons on your side, to conciliate your manners with the gospel, and to preserve, as I may say, appearances still with Jesus Christ? Why are you only half-sinners, and still leave to your grossest passions the useless check of the law? Cast off the remains of that yoke which is irksome to you; and which, in lessening your pleasures, lessens not your punishment. Why do you accomplish your perdition with so much constraint? In place of those scruples, which permit you only doubtful gains, and deny you still certain low, and manifestly wicked profits, but which place you in the number of those reprobates who shall never possess the kingdom of God; overleap these bounds, and no longer place any limits to your guilt, but those of your cupidity: in place of those loose and worldly manners, which will equally prove your ruin, refuse nothing to your passions, and, like the beasts of the earth, yield to the gratification of every desire. Yes, sinners, perish with all the fruits of iniquity, seeing you will equally reap tears and eternal punishment.

But, no, my dear hearer, we only give you these counsels of despair, in order to inspire you with a just horror at them: it is a tender artifice of zeal, which only assumes the appearance of exhorting you to destruction, that you may not consent yourselves. Alas! follow rather those remains of light, which still point out the truth to you at a distance. It is not without reason that the Lord has hitherto preserved within you these seeds of salvation, and has not permitted all, even to the principles, to be blotted out; it is a claim which he still preserves to your heart: take care only, that you found not upon this, the vain hope of a future conversion: we are not permitted to hope till we have begun to labour. Begin, then, the grand work of your eternal salvation, for which alone the Almighty has placed you upon the earth; and on which you have never as yet bestowed even a thought. Esteem so important a care; prefer it to all others; find your only pleasures in applying to it; examine the surest and most proper means to succeed, and fix upon them, whatever they cost, from the moment you have found them out.

Such is the prudence of the gospel, so often recommended by Jesus Christ; beyond that, all is vanity and error. You may possess a superior mind, capable of every exertion, and rare and shining talents; if you err with regard to your eternal salvation,

you are a child. Solomon, so esteemed in the East for his wisdom, is a madman, whose folly we can now with difficulty comprehend. All worldly reason is but a mockery, a dazzling of the senses, if it mistakes the decisive point of eternity. There is nothing important in life but this single object; all the rest is a dream, in which any mistake is of little consequence. Trust not yourselves, therefore, to the multitude, which is the party of those who err; take not as guides men who can never be your sureties; leave nothing to chance, or to the uncertainty of events; it is the height of folly where eternity is concerned: remember that there is an infinity of paths, which appear right to men, yet, nevertheless, conduct to death; that almost all who perish do it in the belief that they are in the way of salvation; and that all reprobates, at the last day, when they shall hear their sentence pronounced, will be surprised, says the gospel, at their condemnation; because they all expected the inheritance of the just. It is thus, that, after having waited for it in this life, according to the rules of faith, you will for ever enjoy it in heaven. Now to God, &c.

SERMON II.

ON THE SMALL NUMBER OF THE SAVED.

“And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.”—LUKE iv. 27.

EVERY day, my brethren, you continue to demand of us, if the road to heaven is really so difficult, and the number of the saved is indeed so small, as we say! To a question so often proposed, and still oftener resolved, our Saviour answers you at present, that there were many widows in Israel afflicted with famine; but the widow of Sarepta was alone found worthy the succour of the prophet Elias; that the number of lepers was great in Israel in the time of the prophet Eliseus; and that Naaman was the only one cured by the man of God.

Were I here, my brethren, for the purpose of alarming, rather than instructing you, I needed only to recapitulate what in the holy writings we find dreadful with regard to this great truth; and running over the history of the just, from age to age, to show you, that, in all times, the number of the saved has been very small.

The family of Noah alone saved from the general flood; Abraham chosen from amongst men to be the sole depository of the covenant with God; Joshua and Caleb the only two of six hundred thousand Hebrews who saw the Land of Promise; Job the only upright man in the land of Uz,—Lot, in Sodom. To representations so alarming would have succeeded the sayings of the prophets. In Isaiah you would see the elect as rare as the grapes which are found after the vintage, and have escaped the search of the gatherer; as rare as the blades which remain by chance in the field, and have escaped the scythe of the mower. The Evangelist would still have added new traits to the terrors of these images. I might have spoken to you of two roads,—of which one is narrow, rugged, and the path of a very small number; the other broad, open, and strewed with flowers, and almost the general path of men: that every where, in the holy writings, the multitude is always spoken of as forming the party of the reprobate; while the saved, compared with the rest of mankind, form only a small flock, scarcely perceptible to the sight. I would have left you in fears with regard to your salvation; always cruel to those who have not renounced faith and every hope of being amongst the saved. But what would it serve to limit the fruits of this instruction to the single point of proving how few persons are saved? Alas! I would make the danger known, without instructing you how to avoid it; I would show you, with the prophet, the sword of the wrath of God suspended over your heads, without assisting you to escape the threatened blow; I would alarm the conscience, without instructing the sinner.

My intention is therefore to-day, in our morals and manner of life, to search for the cause of this number being so small. As every one flatters himself he will not be excluded, it is of importance to examine if his confidence be well founded. I wish not, in marking to you the causes which render salvation so rare, to make you generally conclude, that few will be saved; but to bring you to ask of yourselves, if, living as you live, you can hope to be so. Who am I? What is it I do for heaven; and what can be my hopes in eternity? I propose no other order, in a matter of such importance. What are the causes which render salvation so rare? I mean to point out three principal ones, which is the only arrangement of this discourse. Art and far-sought reasonings would here be ill-timed. O attend, therefore, be whom you may! No subject can be more worthy your attention, since it goes to inform you what may be the hopes of your eternal destiny.

PART I.—Few are saved; because in that number we can only comprehend two descriptions of persons;—either those who have been so happy as to preserve their innocence pure and undefiled; or those who, after having lost, have regained it by penitence:—first cause. There are only these two ways of sal-

vation; and heaven is only open to the innocent or the penitent. Now, of which party are you? Are you innocent? Are you penitent?

Nothing unclean shall enter the kingdom of God. We must consequently carry there, either an innocence unsullied, or an innocence regained. Now, to die innocent, is a grace to which few souls can aspire; and to live penitent, is a mercy, which the relaxed state of our morals renders equally rare. Who indeed will pretend to salvation, by the claim of innocence? Where are the pure souls in whom sin has never dwelt; and who have preserved to the end the sacred treasure of grace confided to them by baptism, and which our Saviour will re-demand at the awful day of punishment?

In those happy days, when the whole church was still but an assembly of saints, it was very uncommon to find an instance of a believer, who, after having received the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and acknowledged Jesus Christ in the sacrament, which regenerates us, fell back to his former irregularities of life. Ananias and Sapphira were the only prevaricators in the church of Jerusalem; that of Corinth had only one incestuous sinner. Church-penitence was then a remedy almost unknown; and scarcely was there found among these true Israelites one single leper, whom they were obliged to drive from the holy altar, and separate from communion with his brethren. But, since that time, the number of the upright diminishes, in proportion as that of believers increases. It would appear, that the world, pretending now to have become almost generally Christian, has brought with it into the church its corruptions and its maxims. Alas! we all go astray, almost from the breast of our mothers! The first use which we make of our heart is a crime; our first desires are passions; and our reason only expands and increases on the wrecks of our innocence. The earth, says a prophet, is infected by the corruption of those who inhabit it: all have violated the laws, changed the ordinances, and broken the alliance which should have endured for ever: all commit sin; and scarcely is there one to be found who does the work of the Lord. Injustice, calumny, lying, treachery, adultery, and the blackest crimes have deluged the earth. The brother lays snares for his brother; the father is divided from his children; the husband from his wife: there is no tie which a vile interest does not dissolve. Good faith and probity are no longer virtues but among the simple people; animosities are endless; reconciliations feints; and never is a former enemy regarded as a brother: they tear, they devour each other. Assemblies are no longer but for the purpose of public and general censure. The purest virtue is no longer a protection from the malignity of tongues. Gaming is become either a trade, a fraud, or a fury. Repasts, those innocent ties of society, degenerate into excesses, of which we dare not speak. Our age witnesses horrors, with which our

forefathers were unacquainted. Behold, then, already one path of salvation shut to the generality of men. All have erred. Be whom you may, who listen to me at present, the time has been, when sin reigned over you. Age may perhaps have calmed your passions; but what was your youth? Long and habitual infirmities may perhaps have disgusted you with the world; but what use did you formerly make of the vigour of health? A sudden inspiration of grace may have turned your heart; but do you not most fervently entreat, that every moment prior to that inspiration may be effaced from the remembrance of the Lord?

But with what an I taking up my time? We are all sinners, O my God! and thou knowest our hearts. What we know of our errors, is perhaps in thy sight the most pardonable; and we all allow, that by innocence we have no claim to salvation. There remains, therefore, only one resource, which is penitence. After our shipwreck, say the saints, it is the happy plank which alone can conduct us into port; there is no other mean of salvation for us. Be whom you may, prince or subject, great or low, penitence alone can save you. Now, permit me to ask,—Where are the penitent? You will find more, says a holy father, who have never fallen, than who, after their fall, have raised themselves by true repentance. This is a terrible saying; but do not let us carry things too far: the truth is sufficiently dreadful, without adding new terrors to it by vain declamation.

Let us only examine if the majority of us have a right, through penitence, to salvation. What is a penitent? According to Tertullian, a penitent is a believer, who feels every moment the unhappiness which he formerly had, to forget and lose his God; who has his guilt incessantly before his eyes; who finds every where the traces and remembrance of it.

A penitent is a man, intrusted by God with judgment against himself; who refuses himself the most innocent pleasures, because he had formerly indulged in the most criminal; who puts up with the most necessary ones with pain; who now regards his body as an enemy, whom it is necessary to conquer,—as an unclean vessel which must be purified,—as an unfaithful debtor, of whom it is proper to exact to the last farthing. A penitent regards himself as a criminal condemned to death, because he no longer is worthy of life. In the loss of riches or health, he sees only a privation of favours that he had formerly abused; in the humiliations which happen to him, but the pains of his guilt; in the agonies with which he is racked, but the commencement of those punishments he has justly merited: such is a penitent. But I again ask you,—Where amongst us are penitents of this description? Now, look around you. I do not tell you to judge your brethren, but to examine what are the manners and morals of those who surround you; nor do I speak of those open and avowed sinners, who have thrown off even the appearance of virtue; I speak only of those who,

like yourselves, live like the generality, and whose actions present nothing to the public view particularly shameful or depraved. They are sinners, and they admit of it: you are not innocent, and you confess it yourselves. Now, are they penitent; or are you? Age, avocations, more serious employments, may perhaps have checked the sallies of youth: even the bitterness which the Almighty has made attendant on our passions; the deceits, the treacheries of the world; an injured fortune, with ruined constitution, may have cooled the ardour, and confined the irregular desires of your heart: crimes may have disgusted you even with crimes; for passions gradually extinguish themselves. Time, and the natural inconstancy of the heart, will bring these about; yet nevertheless, though detached from sin by incapability, you are no nearer your God. According to the world, you are become more prudent, more regular, more what it calls men of probity; more exact in fulfilling your public or private duties; but you are not penitent. You have ceased from your disorders, but you have not expiated them: you are not converted; this great stroke, this grand change of the heart, which regenerates man, has not yet been felt by you. Nevertheless, this situation, so truly dangerous, does not alarm you: sins, which have never been washed away by sincere repentance, and consequently never obliterated from the book of life, appear in your eyes as no longer existing; and you will tranquilly leave this world in a state of impenitence, so much the more dangerous, as you will die without being sensible of your danger. What I say here, is not merely a rash expression, or an emotion of zeal; nothing is more real, or more exactly true: it is the situation of almost all men, even the wisest and most esteemed by the world.

The morality of the younger stages in life is always lax, if not licentious. Age, disgust, and establishments for life, fix the heart, and withdraw it from debauchery: but where are those who are converted? Where are those who expiate their crimes by tears of sorrow and true repentance? Where are those who, having begun as sinners, end as penitents? Show me, in your manner of living, the smallest trace of penitence. Are your graspings at wealth and power, your anxieties to attain the favour of the great, (and by these means an increase of employments and influence,)—are these proofs of it? Would you wish to reckon even your crimes as virtues?—that the sufferings of your ambition, pride, and avarice, should discharge you from an obligation which they themselves have imposed? You are penitent to the world, but are you so to Jesus Christ? The infirmities with which God afflicts you; the enemies he raises up against you; the disgraces and losses with which he tries you; do you receive them all as you ought, with humble submission to his will, and, far from finding in them occasions of penitence, do you not turn them into the objects of new crimes?

It is the duty of an innocent soul to receive with submission the chastisements of the Almighty; to discharge, with courage, the painful duties of the station allotted to him, and to be faithful to the laws of the gospel; but do sinners owe nothing beyond this? And yet they pretend to salvation; but upon what claim? To say that you are innocent before God, your own conscience will bear testimony against you. To endeavour to persuade yourselves that you are penitent, you dare not; and you would condemn yourselves through your own mouths. Upon what, then, dost thou depend, O, man! who thus livest so tranquil?

And what renders it still more dreadful is, that, acting in this manner, you only follow the torrent: your morals are the morals of almost all men. You may, perhaps, be acquainted with some still more guilty (for I suppose you to have still remaining some sentiments of religion, and regard for your salvation); but do you know any real penitents? I am afraid we must search the deserts and solitudes for them. You can scarcely particularize, among persons of rank and usage of the world, a small number whose morals and mode of life, more austere and more guarded than the generality, attract the attention, and very likely the censure of the public: all the rest walk in the same path. I see clearly that every one comforts himself by the example of his neighbour: that, in that point, children succeed to the false security of their fathers; that none live innocent; that none die penitent: I see it, and I cry, O God! if thou have not deceived us; if all thou hast told us with regard to the road to eternal life, shall be fulfilled to a point; if the number of those who must perish shall not influence THEE to abate from the severity of thy laws, what will become of that immense multitude of creatures which every hour disappears from the face of the earth? Where are our friends, our relations, who have gone before us, and what is their lot in the eternal regions of death? What shall we ourselves be one day? When formerly a prophet complained to the Lord, that all Israel had forsaken his protection, he replied, that seven thousand still remained who had not bowed the knee to Baal: behold the number of pure and faithful souls which a whole kingdom then contained! But couldst thou still, O my God! comfort the anguish of thy servants to-day by the same assurance? I know that thine eye discerns still some upright amongst us; that the priesthood has still its Phineases; the magistracy its Samuels; the sword its Joshuas; the court its Daniels, its Esthers, and its Davids: for the world only exists for thy chosen, and all would perish were the number accomplished. But those happy remains of the children of Israel who shall inherit salvation, what are they, compared to the grains of sand in the sea; I mean, to that number of sinners who combat for their own destruction? You come after this, my brethren, to inquire if it be

true, that few shall be saved? Thou hast said it, O my God! and consequently it is a truth which shall endure for ever.

But, even admitting that the Almighty had not spoken thus, I would wish, in the second place, to review, for an instant, what passes among men:—the laws by which they are governed; the maxims by which the multitude is regulated: this is the second cause of the paucity of the saved; and, properly speaking, is only a developement of the first,—the force of habit and customs.

PART II.—Few people are saved, because the maxims most universally received in all countries, and upon which depend, in general, the morals of the multitude, are incompatible with salvation. The rules laid down, approved, and authorized by the world, with regard to the application of wealth, the love of glory, Christian moderation, and the duties of offices and conditions, are diametrically opposite to those of the evangelists, and consequently can lead only to death. I shall not, at present, enter into a detail too extended for a discourse, and too little serious, perhaps, for Christians.

I need not tell you, that this is an established custom in the world, to allow the liberty of proportioning expenses to rank and wealth; and, provided it is a patrimony we inherit from our ancestors, we may distinguish ourselves by the use of it, without restraint to our luxury, or without regard, in our profusion, to any thing but our pride and caprice.

But Christian moderation has its rules. We are not the absolute masters of our riches; nor are we entitled to abuse what the Almighty has bestowed upon us for better purposes. Above all, while thousands of unfortunate wretches languish in poverty, whatever we make use of beyond the wants and necessary expenses of our station, is an inhumanity to, and a theft from, the poor. These are refinements of devotion, say they; and, in matters of expense and profusion, nothing is excessive or blameable, according to the world, but what may tend to derange the fortune. I need not tell you, that it is an approved custom, to decide our lots, and to regulate our choice of professions or situations in life, by the order of our birth, or the interests of fortune. But, O my God! does the ministry of thy gospel derive its source from the worldly considerations of a carnal birth? We cannot establish all, says the world, and it would be melancholy to see persons of rank and birth in avocations unworthy of their dignity. If born to a name distinguished in the world, you must get forward by dint of intrigue, meanness, and expense. Make fortune your idol. That ambition, however much condemned by the laws of the gospel, is only a sentiment worthy your name and birth.

You are of a sex and rank which introduce you to the gaities of the world: you cannot but do as others do; you must fre-

quent all the public places, where those of your age and rank assemble; enter into the same pleasures; pass your days in the same frivolities; and expose yourself to the same dangers: these are the received maxims, and you are not made to reform them. Such is the doctrine of the world.

Now, permit me to ask you here, Who confirms you in these ways? By what rule are they justified to your mind? Who authorizes you in this dissipation, which is neither agreeable to the title you have received by baptism, nor perhaps to those you hold from your ancestors? Who authorizes those public pleasures, which you only think innocent, because your soul, already too familiarized with sin, feels no longer the dangerous impressions or tendency of them? Who authorizes you to lead an effeminate and sensual life, without virtue, sufferance, or any religious exercise?—to live like a stranger in the midst of your own family, disdaining to inform yourself with regard to the morals of those dependent upon you?—through an affected state, to be ignorant whether they believe in the same God; whether they fulfil the duties of the religion you profess? Who authorizes you in maxims so little Christian? Is it the gospel of Jesus Christ? Is it the doctrine of the apostles and saints? For surely some rule is necessary to assure us that we are in safety. What is yours? Custom: that is the only reply you can make. We see none around us, but what conduct themselves in the same way, and by the same rule. Entering into the world, we find the manners already established: our fathers lived thus, and from them we copy our customs: the wisest conform to them: an individual cannot be wiser than the whole world, and must not pretend to make himself singular, by acting contrary to the general voice. Such, my brethren, are your only comforters against all the terrors of religion. None act up to the law. The public example is the only guarantee of our morals. We never reflect, that, as the Holy Spirit says, the laws of the people are vain: that our Saviour has left us rules, in which neither times, ages, nor customs, can ever authorize the smallest change: that the heavens and the earth shall pass away; that customs and manners shall change; but that the divine laws will everlastingly be the same.

We content ourselves with looking around us. We do not reflect, that what at present we call custom, would, in former times, before the morals of Christians became degenerated, have been regarded as monstrous singularities; and, if corruption has gained since that period, these vices, though they have lost their singularity, have not lost their guilt. We do not reflect, that we shall be judged by the gospel, and not by custom; by the examples of the holy, and not by men's opinions;—that the habits, which are only established among believers by the relaxation of faith, are abuses we are to lament, not examples we are to follow;—that, in changing the manners, they have not changed our duties;—

that the common and general example which authorizes them, only proves that virtue is rare, but not that profligacy is permitted; —in a word, that piety and a real Christian life are too unpalatable to our depraved nature ever to be practised by the majority of men. Come now, and say, that you only do as others do. It is exactly by that you condemn yourselves. What! the most terrible certainty of your condemnation shall become the only motive for your confidence! Which, according to the Scriptures, is the road that conducts to death? Is it not that which the majority pursues? Which is the party of the reprobate? Is it not the multitude? You do nothing but what others do. But thus, in the time of Noah, perished all who were buried under the waters of the deluge: all who, in the time of Nebuchadnezzar, prostrated themselves before the golden calf: all who, in the time of Elijah, bowed the knee to Baal: all who, in the time of Eleazer, abandoned the law of their fathers. You only do what others do; but that is exactly what the Scriptures forbid: Do not, say they, conform yourselves to this corrupted age. Now, the corrupted age means not the small number of the just, whom you endeavour not to imitate; it means the multitude whom you follow. You only do what others do: you will consequently experience the same lot. Now, "Misery to thee," (cried formerly St. Augustine,) "fatal torrent of human customs; wilt thou never suspend thy course? To the end wilt thou drag in the children of Adam to thine immense and terrible abyss?"

In place of saying to ourselves, "What are my hopes? In the church of Jesus Christ there are two roads; one broad and open, by which almost the whole world passes, and which leads to death; the other narrow, where few indeed enter, and which conducts to life eternal; in which of these am I? Are my morals the usual ones of persons of my rank, age, and situation in life? Am I with the great number? Then I am not in the right path. I am losing myself. The great number in every station is not the party saved." Far from reasoning in this manner, we say to ourselves, "I am not in a worse state than others. Those of my rank and age live as I do: why should I not live like them?" Why, my dear hearers? For that very reason: the general mode of living cannot be that of a Christian life. In all ages, the holy have been remarkable and singular men. Their manners were always different from those of the world; and they have only been saints, because their lives had no similarity to those of the rest of mankind. In the time of Esdras, in spite of the defence against it, the custom prevailed of intermarrying with stranger women: this abuse became general: the priests and the people no longer made any scruple of it. But what did this holy restorer of the law: did he follow the example of his brethren? Did he believe, that guilt, in becoming general, became more legitimate? No: he recalled the people to a sense of the abuse. He took the

book of the law in his hand, and explained it to the affrighted people,—corrected the custom by the truth. Follow, from age to age, the history of the just; and see if Lot conformed himself to the habits of Sodom, or if nothing distinguished him from the other inhabitants; if Abraham lived like the rest of his age; if Job resembled the other princes of his nation; if Esther conducted herself, in the court of Abasuerus, like the other women of that prince; if many widows in Israel resembled Judith; if, among the children of the captivity, it is not said of Tobias alone that he copied not the conduct of his brethren, and that he even fled from the danger of their commerce and society. See, if in those happy ages, when Christians were all saints, they did not shine like stars in the midst of the corrupted nations; and if they served not as a spectacle to angels and men, by the singularity of their lives and manners: if the Pagans did not reproach them for their retirement, and shunning of all public theatres, places, and pleasures: if they did not complain that the Christians affected to distinguish themselves in every thing from their fellow-citizens; to form a separate people in the midst of the people; to have their particular laws and customs; and if a man from their side embraced the party of the Christians, they did not consider him as for ever lost to their pleasures, assemblies, and customs: in a word, see, if in all ages the saints whose lives and actions have been transmitted down to us, have resembled the rest of mankind.

You will perhaps tell us, that all these are singularities and exceptions, rather than rules which the world is obliged to follow. They are exceptions, it is true: but the reason is, that the general rule is to throw away salvation; that a religious and pious soul in the midst of the world, is always a singularity approaching to a miracle. The whole world, you say, is not obliged to follow these examples; but is not piety the general duty of all? To be saved, must we not be holy? Must heaven, with difficulty and sufferance, be gained by some, while with ease by others? Have you any other gospel to follow; other duties to fulfil; other promises to hope for, than those of the Holy Bible? Ah! since there was another way more easy to arrive at salvation, wherefore, ye pious Christians, who at this moment enjoy in heaven, that kingdom, gained with toil, and at the expense of your blood, did ye leave us examples so dangerous and useless?

Wherefore have ye opened for us a road, rugged, disagreeable, and calculated to repress our ardour, seeing there was another you could have pointed out, more easy, and more likely to attract us, by facilitating our progress? Great God! how little does mankind consult reason in the point of eternal salvation!

Will you console yourselves, after this, with the multitude, as if the greatness of the number could render the guilt unpunished, and the Almighty durst not condemn all those who live like you?

But what are all creatures in the sight of God? Did the multitude of the guilty prevent him from destroying all flesh at the deluge? from making fire from heaven descend upon the five iniquitous cities? from burying, in the waters of the Red Sea, Pharaoh and all his army? from striking with death all who murmured in the desert? Ah! the kings of the earth may have regard to the number of the guilty, because the punishment becomes impossible, or at least dangerous, when the fault is become general. But God, who wipes the impious, says Job, from off the face of the earth, as one wipes the dust from off a garment; God, in whose sight all people and nations are as if they were not, numbers not the guilty: he has regard only to the crimes; and all that the weak and miserable sinner can expect from his unhappy accomplices, is to have them as companions in his misery. So few are saved, because the maxims most universally adopted are maxims of sin: so few are saved, because the maxims and duties most universally unknown, or rejected, are those most indispensable to salvation. Last reflection, which is indeed nothing more than the proof and the explanation of the former ones.

What are the engagements of the holy vocation to which we have all been called? The solemn promises of baptism. What have we promised at baptism? To renounce the world, the devil, and the flesh: these are our vows: this is the situation of the Christian: these are the essential conditions of our covenant with God, by which eternal life has been promised to us. These truths appear familiar, and destined for the common people; but it is a mistake. Nothing can be more sublime; and, alas! nothing is more generally unknown. It is at the courts of kings, and to the princes of the earth, that without ceasing we ought to announce them. Alas! they are well instructed in all the affairs of the world, while the first principles of Christian morality are frequently more unknown to them than to humble and simple hearts. At your baptism, you have then renounced the world. It is a promise you have made to God, before the holy altar; the church has been the guarantee and depository of it; and you have only been admitted into the number of believers, and marked with the indefeasible seal of salvation, upon the faith that you have sworn to the Lord, to love neither the world, nor what the world loves. Had you then answered, what you now repeat every day, that you find not the world so black and pernicious as we say; that, after all, it may innocently be loved; and that we only decry it so much, because we do not know it; and since you are to live in the world, you wish to live like those who are in it: had you answered thus, the church would not have received you into its bosom; would not have connected you with the hope of Christians, nor joined you in communion with those who have overcome the world. She would have advised you to go and live with those infidels

who know not our Saviour. For this reason it was, that, in former ages, those of the Catechumen, who could not prevail upon themselves to renounce the world and its pleasures, put off their baptism till death; and durst not approach the holy altar, to contract, by the sacrament, which regenerates us, engagements of which they knew the importance and sanctity; and to fulfil which they felt themselves still unqualified. You are therefore required, by the most sacred of all vows, to hate the world; that is to say, not to conform yourselves to it. If you love it, if you follow its pleasures and customs, you are not only, as St. John says, the enemy of God, but you likewise renounce the faith given in baptism; you abjure the gospel of Jesus Christ; you are an apostate from religion, and trample under foot the most sacred and irrevocable vows that man can make. Now, what is this world which you ought to hate? I have only to answer, that it is the one you love. You will never mistake it by this mark. This world is a society of sinners, whose desires, fears, hopes, cares, projects, joys, and chagrins, no longer turn but upon the successes or misfortunes of this life. This world is an assemblage of people who look upon the earth as their country; the time to come as an exilement; the promises of faith as a dream; and death as the greatest of all misfortunes. This world is a temporal kingdom, where our Saviour is unknown; where those acquainted with his name, glorify him not as their Lord, hate his maxims, despise his followers, and neglect or insult him in his sacraments and worship. In a word, to give a proper idea at once of this world, it is the great number: behold the world which you ought to shun, hate, and combat against by your example!

Now, is this your situation in regard to the world? Are its pleasures a fatigue to you; do its excesses afflict you; do you regret the length of your pilgrimage here? Are not its laws your laws; its maxims your maxims? What it condemns, do you not condemn? Do you not approve what it approves? And should it happen, that you alone were left upon the earth, may we not say, that the corrupt world would be revived in you; and that you would leave an exact model of it to your posterity? When I say you, I mean, and I address myself to almost all men.

Where are those who sincerely renounce the pleasures, habits, maxims, and hopes of this world? We find many who complain of it, and accusè it of injustice, ingratitude, and caprice, who speak warmly of its abuses and errors; but in decrying, they continue to love, to follow it; they cannot bring themselves to do without it; in complaining of its injustice, they are only piqued at it, they are not undeceived; they feel its hard treatment, but they are unacquainted with its dangers; they censure, but where are those who hate it? And now, my brethren, you may judge if many can have a claim to salvation.

In the second place, you have renounced the flesh at your baptism; that is to say, you are engaged not to live according to the sensual appetites; to regard even indolence and effeminacy as crimes; not to flatter the corrupt desires of the flesh; but to chastise, crush, and crucify it. This is not an acquired perfection; it is a vow; it is the first of all duties; the character of a true Christian, and inseparable from faith. In a word, you have anathematized Satan and all his works. And what are his works? That which composes almost the thread and end of your life; pomp, pleasure, luxury, and dissipation; lying, of which he is the father; pride, of which he is the model; jealousy and contention, of which he is the artisan. But I ask you, where are those who have not withdrawn the anathema they had pronounced against Satan? Now, consequently, (to mention it as we go along,) behold many of the questions answered.

You continually demand of us, if theatres, and other public places of amusement, be innocent recreations for Christians? In return, I have only one question to ask you: Are they the works of Satan or of Jesus Christ? for there can be no medium in religion. I mean not to say, but that many recreations and amusements may be termed indifferent. But the most indifferent pleasures which religion allows, and which the weakness of our nature renders even necessary, belong, in one sense, to Jesus Christ, by the facility with which they ought to enable us to apply ourselves to more holy and more serious duties. Every thing we do, every thing we rejoice or weep at, ought to be of such a nature as to have a connexion with Jesus Christ, and to be done for his glory. Now, upon this principle, the most incontestible, and most universally allowed in Christian morality, you have only to decide whether you can connect the glory of Jesus Christ with the pleasures of a theatre. Can our Saviour have any part in such a species of recreation? And before you enter them, can you, with confidence, declare to him, that, in so doing, you only propose his glory, and to enjoy the satisfaction of pleasing him? What! The theatres, such as they are at present, still more criminal by the public licentiousness of those unfortunate creatures who appear on them, than by the impure and passionate scenes they represent,—the theatres are works of Jesus Christ? Jesus Christ would animate a mouth, from whence are to proceed sounds lascivious, and calculated to corrupt the heart? But these blasphemies strike me with horror. Jesus Christ would preside in assemblies of sin, where every thing we hear weakens his doctrines; where the poison enters into the soul by all the senses; where every art is employed to inspire, awaken, and justify the passions he condemns? Now, says Tertullian, if they are not the works of Jesus Christ, they must be the works of Satan. Every Christian, therefore, ought to abstain from them. When he partakes of them, he violates the

vows of baptism. However innocent he may flatter himself to be, in bringing from these places an untainted heart, it is sullied by being there; since by his presence alone he has participated in the works of Satan, which he had renounced at baptism, and violated the most sacred promises he had made to Jesus Christ and to his church.

These, my brethren, as I have already told you, are not merely advices and pious arts; they are the most essential of our obligations. But, alas! who fulfils them? Who even knows them? Ah! my brethren, did you know how far the title you bear, of Christian, engages you; could you comprehend the sanctity of your state; the hatred of the world, of yourself, and of every thing which is not of God, that it ordains you; that life according to the gospel, that continual watching, that guard over the passions; in a word, that conformity with Jesus Christ crucified, which it exacts of you; could you comprehend it, could you remember, that as you ought to love God with all your heart, and all your strength, a single desire that has not connexion with him defiles you, you would appear a monster in your own sight. How! would you say to yourself, duties so holy, and morals so profane! A vigilance so continual, and a life so careless and dissipated! A love of God so pure, so complete, so universal, and a heart the continual prey of a thousand impulses, either foreign or criminal! If thus it is, who, O my God! will be entitled to salvation?

Few indeed, I am afraid, my dear hearers; at least it will not be you, (unless a change takes place,) nor those who resemble you; it will not be the multitude. Who shall be saved? Those who work out their salvation with fear and trembling; who live in the world without indulging in its vices. Who shall be saved? That Christian woman, who, shut up in the circle of her domestic duties, rears up her children in faith and in piety; divides her heart only between her Saviour and her husband; is adorned with delicacy and modesty: sits not down in the assemblies of vanity; makes not a law of the ridiculous customs of the world, but regulates those customs by the law of God; and makes virtue appear more amiable by her rank and example. Who shall be saved? That believer, who, in the relaxation of modern times, imitates the manners of the first Christians; whose hands are clean, and his heart pure; watchful, "who hath not lift up his soul to vanity;" but who, in the midst of the dangers of the great world, continually applies himself to purify it; just, who swears not deceitfully against his neighbour, nor is indebted to fraudulent ways for the innocent aggrandisement of his fortune; generous, who with benefits repays the enemy who sought his ruin; sincere, who sacrifices not the truth to a vile interest, and knows not the part of rendering himself agreeable, by betraying his conscience; charitable, who makes his house and interest the refuge of

his fellow-creatures, and himself the consolation of the afflicted; regards his wealth as the property of the poor; humble in affliction, Christian under injuries, and penitent even in prosperity. Who will merit salvation? You, my dear hearer, if you will follow these examples; for such are the souls to be saved. Now these assuredly do not form the greatest number. While you continue, therefore, to live like the multitude, it is a striking proof that you disregard your salvation.

These, my brethren, are truths which should make us tremble; nor are they those vague ones which are told to all men, and which none apply to themselves. Perhaps there is not in this assembly an individual, who may not say of himself, "I live like the great number; like those of my rank, age, and situation; I am lost, should I die in this path." Now, can any thing be more capable of alarming a soul, in whom some remains of care for his salvation still exist? It is the multitude, nevertheless, who tremble not. There is only a small number of just, which operates apart its salvation, with fear and trembling; all the rest are tranquil. After having lived with the multitude, they flatter themselves they shall be particularized at death; every one augurs favourably for himself, and chimerically thinks he shall be an exception.

On this account it is, my brethren, that I confine myself to you who at present are assembled here: I include not the rest of men; but consider you as alone existing on the earth. The idea which occupies and frightens me, is this,—I figure to myself the present, as your last hour, and the end of the world; that the heavens are going to open above your heads; our Saviour in all his glory, to appear in the midst of this temple; and that you are only assembled here to wait his coming, like trembling criminals, on whom the sentence is to be pronounced, either of life eternal, or of everlasting death; for it is vain to flatter yourselves that you shall die more innocent than you are at this hour. All those desires of change with which you are amused, will continue to amuse you till death arrives; the experience of all ages proves it; the only difference you have to expect, will most likely be only a larger balance against you than what you would have to answer for at present; and from what would be your destiny, were you to be judged this moment, you may almost decide upon what will take place at your departure from life. Now, I ask you, (and, connecting my own lot with yours, I ask it with dread,) were Jesus Christ to appear in this temple, in the midst of this assembly, to judge us, to make the dreadful separation between the goats and sheep, do you believe that the greatest number of us would be placed at his right hand? Do you believe that the number would at least be equal? Do you believe there would even be found ten upright and faithful servants of the Lord, when formerly five cities could not furnish so many? I ask you. You know not;

and I know it not. Thou alone, O my God! knowest who belong to thee.

But if we know not who belong to him, at least we know that sinners do not. Now, who are the just and faithful assembled here at present? Titles and dignities avail nothing; you are stripped of all these in the presence of your Saviour. Who are they? Many sinners who wish not to be converted; many more who wish, but always put it off; many others, who are only converted in appearance, and again fall back to their former courses: in a word, a great number, who flatter themselves they have no occasion for conversion. This is the party of the reprobate. Ah! my brethren, cut off from this assembly these four classes of sinners, for they will be cut off at the great day. And now appear, ye just: where are ye? O God! where are thy chosen? And what a portion remains to thy share!

My brethren, our ruin is almost certain; yet we think not of it. When, even in this terrible separation which will one day take place, there should be only one sinner in this assembly on the side of the reprobate, and that a voice from heaven should assure us of it, without particularizing him, who of us would not tremble, lest he should be the unfortunate and devoted wretch? Who of us would not immediately apply to his conscience, to examine if its crimes merited not this punishment? Who of us, seized with dread, would not demand of our Saviour, as the apostles formerly did, and say, "Lord, is it I?" And should a small respite be allowed to our prayers, who of us would not use every effort, by tears, supplications, and sincere repentance, to avert the misfortune? Are we in our senses, my dear hearers? Perhaps, among all who listen to me, ten just would not be found, perhaps fewer. What do I know, O my God? I dare not with a fixed eye regard the depths of thy judgments and justice. More than one, perhaps, would not be found amongst us all. And this danger affects you not, my dear hearer? You persuade yourself, that in this great number who shall perish, you will be the happy individual; you, who have less reason, perhaps, than any other to believe it; you, upon whom alone the sentence of death should fall, were only one of all who hear me to suffer. Great God! how little are the terrors of thy law known to the world! In all ages, the just have shuddered with dread, in reflecting on the severity and extent of thy judgments upon the destinies of men. Alas! what do they prepare for the children of Adam!

But what are we to conclude from these grand truths? That all must despair of salvation? God forbid! The impious alone, to quiet his own feelings in his debaucheries, endeavours to persuade himself that all men shall perish as well as he.

This idea ought not to be the fruit of the present discourse. It is meant to undeceive you with regard to the general error, that any one may do whatever others do; to convince you, that, in

order to merit salvation, you must distinguish yourself from the rest; in the midst of the world, lead a life to the glory of God, and resemble not the multitude.

When the Jews were led in captivity from Judea to Babylon, a little before they quitted their own country, the prophet Jeremiah, whom the Lord had forbid to leave Jerusalem, spoke thus to them: "Children of Israel, when you shall arrive at Babylon, you will behold the inhabitants of that country, who carry upon their shoulders gods of silver and gold. All the people will prostrate themselves, and adore them. But you, far from allowing yourselves, by these examples, to be led to impiety, say to yourselves in secret, It is thou, O Lord! whom we ought to adore."

Let me now finish, by addressing to you the same words.

At your departure from this temple, you go to enter into another Babylon; you go to see idols of gold and silver, before which all men prostrate themselves; you go to regain the vain objects of human passions, wealth, glory, and pleasure, which are the gods of this world, and which almost all men adore; you will see those abuses which all the world permits, those errors which custom authorizes, and those debaucheries which an infamous fashion has almost constituted as laws. Then, my dear hearer, if you wish to be of the small number of true Israelites, say, in the secrecy of your heart, It is thou alone, O my God! whom we ought to adore. I wish not to have connexion with a people which know thee not; I will have no other law than thy holy law; the gods which this foolish multitude adores, are not gods: they are the work of the hands of men; they will perish with them: thou alone, O my God! art immortal; and thou alone deservest to be adored. The customs of Babylon have no connexion with the holy laws of Jerusalem. I will continue to worship thee with that small number of the children of Abraham, which still, in the midst of an infidel nation, composes thy people; with them I will turn all my desires toward the holy Zion. The singularity of my manners will be regarded as a weakness; but blessed weakness, O my God! which will give me strength to resist the torrent of customs, and the seduction of example. Thou wilt be my God in the midst of Babylon, as thou wilt one day be in Jerusalem.

Ah! the time of the captivity will at last expire; thou wilt call to thy remembrance Abraham and David; thou wilt deliver thy people; thou wilt transport us to the holy city; then wilt thou alone reign over Israel, and over the nations which at present know thee not. All being destroyed; all the empires and sceptres of the earth; all the monuments of human pride annihilated, and thou alone remaining eternal, we then shall know that thou art the Lord of hosts, and the only God to be adored.

Behold the fruit which you ought to reap from this discourse; live apart; think, without ceasing, that the great number work their

own destruction; regard as nothing all customs of the earth, unless authorized by the law of God; and remember, that holy men have, in all ages, been always looked upon as singular.

It is thus, that, after distinguishing yourselves from the sinful on earth, you will be gloriously separated from them in eternity.

Now, to God the Father, &c.

SERMON III.

THE DISGUSTS ACCOMPANYING VIRTUE.

“Then the Jews took up stones again, to stone him.”—JOHN x. 31.

BEHOLD then, my brethren, the marks of gratitude which Jesus Christ receives from men; behold the consolations which Heaven prepares for him in the painful exercise of his ministry. There he is treated as a Samaritan, and as one possessed by the devil: here they take up stones to stone him. It is thus that the Son of God has passed all the time of his mortal life, continually exposed to the most obstinate contradiction, finding only hearts insensible to his kindnesses, and rebellious to the truths which he announced to them: yet never did he allow the smallest sign of impatience, or the least complaint to escape him.

And we, my brethren, we, his members and his disciples, alas! the smallest disgusts, the smallest contradictions we experience in the practice of virtue, revolt our delicacy. From the moment we cease to relish those attractions, that sensibility which softens every thing to be found painful in duty, there is nothing but complaint and murmurs: troubled, discouraged, we are tempted almost to abandon God, and to return to the world, as a more agreeable and commodious master. In a word, we would wish to find nothing in the service of God but pleasure and consolation.

But our divine Master, in calling us to his service, has he not declared, in express terms, that the kingdom of heaven is only to be gained by conquest; and that none but those who do violence upon themselves can force it? And what do these words signify, unless that, entering into the service of God, we are not to promise ourselves that we shall always find in it a certain sweetness, a certain relish, which deprives it of all pain, and causes it to be loved? On the contrary, it is almost certain, that in it we shall experience disgusts and contradic-

tions which will exercise our patience, and put our fidelity to frequent trials; that we shall often feel the weight of the yoke, without feeling the unction of grace which renders it light and easy, because piety essentially opposes the gratification of our former tastes and original inclinations, for which we always preserve some unhappy remains of tenderness, and which we cannot mortify, without making the heart suffer; that, besides, we shall have to undergo the eternal caprices of an inconstant and volatile heart, so difficult to fix, that, without reason or foundation, it is disgusted in a moment with what it formerly loved most. Behold, my brethren, what we ought to have expected when we embraced the cause of virtue. Here, it is the time of combat and trials; peace and felicity are only for heaven; but, notwithstanding this, I say that it is unjust to form, from the disagreeable circumstances which may accompany virtue in this life, a pretext either to abandon God when we have begun to serve him, or to be afraid to serve him when we have begun to know him.

Behold my reasons: in the first place, because disgusts are inevitable in this life; secondly, because those of piety are not so bitter as we imagine them to be; thirdly, because they are less so than those of the world; fourthly, because, were they equally so, they yet possess resources which those of the world have not. Let us investigate those edifying truths, and implore the assistance of divine grace toward their proper explanation.

REFLECTION I.—I say, in the first place, because disgusts are inevitable in this life. Alas! we complain that the service of God disgusts us; but such is the condition of this miserable life. Man, born fully to enjoy God, cannot be happy here below, where he can never but imperfectly possess him. Disgusts are a necessary consequence of the inquietude of a heart which is out of its place, and is unable to find it on the earth; which seeks to fix itself, but cannot with all the created beings which surround it; which, disgusted with every thing else, attaches itself to God; but being unable to possess him as fully as it is capable of doing, feels always that something is wanting to its happiness; agitates itself, in order to attain it, but can never completely reach it here; finds in virtue almost the same void and the same disgusts it had found in sin, because, to whatever degree of grace it may be exalted, there still remains much to accomplish before it can arrive at that fulness of righteousness and love which will possess our whole heart—will fill all our desires—extinguish all our passions—occupy all our thoughts—and which we can never find but in heaven.

Were it possible to be happy in this world, we should undoubtedly be so in serving God, because grace calms our passions, moderates our desires, consoles our sufferings, and gives us a foretaste

of that perfect happiness we expect, and which we shall not enjoy but in a blessed immortality. Of all the situations in which man can find himself in this life, that of righteousness undoubtedly brings him nearest to felicity; but as it always leaves him in the path which conducts to it, it leaves him likewise still uneasy, and, in one sense, miserable.

We are therefore unjust to complain of the disgusts which accompany virtue. Did the world make its followers happy, we should then have reason to be dissatisfied at not being so in the service of God. We might then accuse him of using his servants ill; of depriving them of a happiness which is due to them alone; that, far from attracting, he rejects them; and that the world is preferable to him, as a more consoling and faithful master. But examine all stations; interrogate all sinners; consult in rotation the partisans of all the different pleasures which the world promises and the different passions which it inspires; the envious, the ambitious, the voluptuous, the indolent, the revengeful,—none are happy, each complains, no one is in his place, every condition has its inconveniences, and sorrows are attached to every station in life. The world is the habitation of the discontented; and the disgusts which accompany virtue, are much more a consequence of the condition of this mortal life, than any imperfection in virtue itself.

Besides, the Almighty has his reasons for leaving the most upright souls below in a state, in some respects, always violent and disagreeable to nature: by that, he wishes to disgust us with this miserable life; to make us long for our deliverance, and for that immortal country where nothing shall more be wanting to our happiness.

I feel within me (says the apostle) a fatal law in opposition to the law of God; the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now, if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O, wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?—Behold the most natural effect which the disgusts attached to virtue ought to inspire in a Christian heart: hatred of ourselves; contempt of the present life; a desire for eternal riches; an eager anxiety to go and enjoy God, and to be delivered from all the miseries inseparable from this mortal life.

Besides, were virtue always to be accompanied with sensible consolations; did it continually form for man a happy and tranquil state in this world, it would become a temporal recompense; in devoting ourselves to God, we should no longer seek the good of faith, but the consolations of self-love; we would

seek ourselves, while pretending to seek God; we would propose to ourselves in virtue, that conscious tranquillity, in which it places the heart, by delivering it from those violent and restless passions which tear it continually, rather than the observance of the rules and the duties which the law of God imposes on us. The Lord would then have only mercenary and interested worshippers, who would come, not to carry his yoke, but to repose themselves under the shadow of his voice; workmen, who would offer themselves, not so much to labour in his vineyard, and support the fatigues of the day, and the oppression of the heat, as in order to taste in tranquillity the fruits; servants, who, far from improving their talent for the benefit of their master, would turn it to their own utility, and employ it only for their own advantage.

The upright live by faith: now faith hopes, but enjoys not in this world; all is yet to come for Christians; their country, their riches, their pleasures, their inheritance, their kingdom; the present is not for them. Here, it is the time of tribulation and affliction; here, it is a place of exile, and a foreign country, where tears and sighs become the only consolation of the faithful. Surely, then, it is unreasonable to expect delights in a place where every thing recalls the remembrance of our miseries; where every thing presents new dangers to us; where we live surrounded by rocks; where we are a prey to a thousand enemies; where every step endangers our destruction; where all our days are marked by some new infidelity; where, delivered up to ourselves, and without the assistance of Heaven, we do nothing but evil; where we spread the corruption of our heart over the small portion, even of good, which grace enables us to accomplish;—it is unreasonable, I say, to seek felicity and human consolations in a residence so melancholy and disagreeable to the children of God. The days of our mourning and sadness are in this world; those of peace and joy will come afterward. If, by abandoning God, we could acquire real happiness, our inconstancy would seem at least to have an excuse; but, as I have already said, the world has its disgusts as well as virtue; by changing our master, we only change our punishment; in diversifying our passions, we only diversify our sorrows. The world has more smiling aspects, I confess, than virtue; but every where the reality is only trouble and vexation of spirit; and since cares are inevitable in this life, and we must encounter disgusts, either on the part of the world or of virtue, can we hesitate for a moment? Is it not preferable to suffer meritoriously than to suffer in vain, and be able to place our sufferings only amongst the number of our crimes? First truth:—Disgusts are inevitable in this life.

REFLECTION II.—But I say, in the second place, that those of piety are not so bitter as we represent them to ourselves.

For, my brethren, although we agree that the kingdom of God suffers violence; that Jesus Christ is come, in order to make separations and retrenchments which cost much to our nature; that the period of the present life is the time of the birth of the new man, and always followed by pain and sorrows; and that, in order to reconcile us to God, we must begin by waging a cruel war against ourselves; yet it does not follow, that the lot of a soul who serves the Lord, is to be pitied, and that the disgusts which accompany virtue are so bitter as the world represents. Virtue has only the prejudices of the senses and of the passions against it; it has nothing melancholy but the first glance; and its bitterness is not such as to render it a condition which we ought to fly from as insupportable and wretched.

For, in the first place, we are sheltered in it from the disgusts of the world and the passions; and were virtue to possess only the single advantage of placing us safe from the tempests of the passions; from frenzies, jealousies, suspicions, and bitterness of heart; from the void of a worldly life; when, by turning to God, we should gain only our freedom from the yoke of the world; our being placed above the reach of its hopes, of its revolutions, troubles, and eternal changes; the becoming masters of our own hearts, and being dependent on none but ourselves; our having none but God to account with; our no longer fatiguing ourselves in vain, by running after phantoms, which continually elude our grasp;—alas! the lot of a just soul would always be worthy of envy; whatever might be the bitter circumstances accompanying virtue, they would still be a thousand times more supportable than the pleasures of the world; and to mourn with the people of God, would be infinitely preferable to participating in the insipid and childish pleasures of the children of the age.

Secondly. If virtue does not protect us from the afflictions and disgraces inevitable upon this earth, it at least softens their asperity: it makes our heart submissive to God; it makes us kiss the hand which is raised up against us; it discovers, in the blows with which the Lord afflicts us, either a cure for our passions, or the just punishment of our crimes. And were virtue to have only the privilege of diminishing our griefs, by diminishing our attachments; of rendering us less feeling to our losses, by gradually detaching us from all the objects which we may one day lose; of preparing our soul for affliction, by keeping it continually submissive to God; were virtue to possess this consolation alone, alas! ought we to lament and complain of any bitterness which attends it? What more can be desired in this miserable life, where almost all our days are distinguished by new afflictions and adversities; where every thing escapes our grasp; where our relations, friends, and protectors are every moment snatched from us, and continually falling around us; where our fortune has no settlement, but changes its appearance every day; alas! what more

can be desired than a situation which consoles us on these events; supports us in these storms; calms us in these agitations; and which, in the eternal changes which take place here below, leaves us at least always the same?

Thirdly. Those reluctances and disgusts which revolt us so strongly against virtue, in reality consist only in repressing the passions which render us unhappy, and are the source of all our pains. They are remedies a little grievous to be sure, but they serve to cure evils which are infinitely more so. It is a constraint which fatigues us, but which, in fatiguing, delivers us from a slavery which weighed us down; it is a bitterness which mortifies the passions, but which, in mortifying, weakens and calms them; it is a sword which pierces the heart to the quick, but which makes the corrupted and defiled matter to flow from it; insomuch, that, in the very moment of the wound's greatest agony, we experience the comfort and certainty of a cure. These are maxims which revolt our nature and inclinations; but which, in revolting, recall them to order and rule. Thus, the bitterness and the thorns of virtue have always at least a present utility, which recompenses their harshness: in disgusting, they purify us; in probing, they cure us; in paining, they calm us. These are not like the disgusts of the world, of which nothing remains to us but the bitterness of those fatigues, of those constraints which our passions impose on us; and whose only fruit is, that of augmenting our miseries, by fortifying our iniquitous passions: these are not the worldly violences which lead to nothing, are of no value, and frequently serve only to render us hateful to those whom we would wish to please; which remove to a greater distance from us the favours we wish to merit by them; which always leave us our hatreds, our desires, our uneasinesses, and our pains: these are violences which advance the work of our sanctification, which by degrees destroy within us the work of sin; which perfect, which adorn us; which add every day a new splendour to our soul, a new solidity to our virtues, a new force to our faith, a new facility to our approaches toward salvation, a new firmness to our good desires, and which bear along with them the fruit that rewards and consoles us.

I do not add, that the source of our disgusts is in ourselves rather than in virtue; that it is our passions which give birth to our repugnances; that virtue has nothing in itself but what is amiable; that were our hearts not depraved through love to the flesh, we would find nothing sweet and consoling but the pleasures of innocence; that we are born for virtue and righteousness; that these ought to be our first inclinations, as they are our first distinction; and if we find different dispositions within us, at least we have not virtue, but only ourselves to blame. I could add, that perhaps it is the peculiar character of our heart, which spreads

for us so much bitterness through the detail of a Christian life; that, being born perhaps with more lively passions, and a heart more sensible to the world and to pleasure, virtue appears more melancholy and insupportable to us; that, not finding in the service of God the same attraction which we have found in that of the world, our heart, accustomed to lively and animated pleasures, is no longer capable of reconciling itself to the expected dreariness of a Christian life; that the endless dissipation in which we have lived, renders the uniformity of duties more irksome to us; the agitation of parties and pleasures, retirement more disgusting; our total submission to the passions, prayer more painful; the frivolous maxims with which our minds are occupied, the truths of faith more insipid and more unknown; that our mind, being filled with only vain things, with fabulous reading, if nothing worse, with chimerical adventures, and theatrical phantoms, is no longer capable of relishing any thing solid; that, never having accustomed ourselves to any thing serious, it is rare that the seriousness of piety does not disgust us, and that we find not God to our taste, if I dare speak in this manner, we who have never relished any thing but the world and its vain hopes. This being the case, what happiness when we bring back to virtue a heart yet uncorrupted by the world! What happiness to enter into the service of God, with happy inclinations and some remains of our original innocence!—when we begin early to know the Lord; when we return to him in that first season of our life, when the world has not yet made such profound and desperate impressions; when the passions, still in their growth, bend easily toward good, and make virtue, as it were, a natural inclination to us! What happiness when we have been able to put an early check upon our heart; when we have accustomed it to bear the yoke of the Lord; and when we have arrested, almost in their infancy, passions which render us miserable in our guilt, and which likewise occasion all the bitterness of our virtues! How many uneasinesses, how many pangs does it prevent! How many consolations does it prepare! How many comforts spread through the rest of life! and what a difference for the ease and tranquillity of our future years, between days whose primitive ones have been pure, and those which, infected in their source, have felt flow from thence a fatal bitterness, which has blasted all their joys, and spread itself through all the remainder of their career! It is ourselves alone, says a holy father, who render virtue disagreeable; and we are wrong to complain of an evil, in which we have such a share ourselves, or to attribute faults to virtue, which are our own handy-work.

But granting these reflections to have even less solidity; were it even true, that we are not the first and original cause of our disgusts at virtue; it is at least incontestable, that the longer we defer our return to God, the more invincible do we render

that distaste which separates us from him; that the more we shrink and draw back, the more do we fortify that repugnance within us to virtue; that if the Christian life offers at present only melancholy and tedious duties, they will appear more insupportable in proportion as we grow old in the ways of the world, and in the taste for its iniquitous pleasures. Could the delay of our conversion sweeten the bitter and painful portion of virtue, by holding out a little longer against grace; could we obtain a more favourable composition, as I may say, and, as an article of it, stipulate, that piety should afterward be presented to us with more charms and graces, and with conditions more agreeable and flattering;—alas! whatever risks we may run by deferring it, the hopes of softening our pains and sufferings might serve in some measure to excuse our delays. But delay only prepares new sorrows for us; the more we accustom our heart to the world, the more do we render it unfit for virtue. It is no longer, says the prophet, but a polluted vase, to which the passions we have allowed to settle in it have communicated a taste and smell of death, which generally last the remainder of life. Thus, my brethren, when, after a long course of crimes and deeply-rooted passions, we must return to God, what obstacles do not these frightful dispositions present! What insensibility toward good do we not find within ourselves! Those hearts which the world has always engrossed, and who afterward wish to consecrate to God the remains of a life entirely mundane; what a buckler of brass, says the prophet, do they not oppose to grace! What hardness of heart to the holy consolations of virtue! They may find it just, but it is impossible, they say, to find it amiable: they may return to God, but they enjoy him no more: they may nourish themselves with the truth, but it is no more for them but the bread of tribulation and bitterness: they may seek the kingdom of God, and the treasure of the gospel, but it is like unfortunate slaves, condemned to search for gold in the bowels of the earth, and waste their strength against the opposing rocks: they may draw for water from the wells of Jacob, but they can only reap the toil; they can never partake of those comforts and consolations which bear peace and refreshment to the soul: they wish to draw near to God, yet every thing separates them from him; they wish to fly from the world, yet, wherever they go, there they carry it with them in their heart: they seek the society of virtuous people, yet in their company they find a weariness, and a melancholy stiffness, which disgust them with piety itself: they apply themselves to holy books, and, alas! it is only a tiresome and fatiguing decency which supports their patience. It appears, that in virtue they act a borrowed character, so little does it become them, and so much does their part constrain and tire them; and although, in reality, they seek salvation, yet there appears a something so foreign and constrained

in their efforts, that we believe they only assume the semblance of it; and that, feeling themselves not born to virtue, they wish at least to give themselves the appearance of it.

Disgusts and wearinesses should not, therefore, drive us from virtue; since, in proportion as we retire from it, they become every day more violent and insupportable. But candidly, my brethren, is it for us to reproach God that we weary in his service? Ah! did our slaves and domestics make us the same reproach; had they to lament the weariness they experience in our service, they would certainly be entitled to complain of it. Our eternal humours, from which they suffer so much; our fancies and caprices, to which they must accommodate themselves; our hours and moments, to which they must subject themselves; our pleasures and tastes, to which they must sacrifice their rest and liberty; our indolence, which alone costs them so much, makes them endure so much weariness, pass so many melancholy moments, without our even deigning to observe it; they undoubtedly would be entitled to complain of their cruel situation and sufferings.

Nevertheless, should they venture to say, that they weary in our service; that they reap not the smallest satisfaction from it; that they feel no inclination for us, and that every service they perform is disgusting to a degree scarcely supportable;—alas! we would regard them as fools: we would find them too happy in having to support our humours and caprices; we would think them sufficiently honoured, by being permitted to be near us, and fully recompensed for all their fatigues. Ah, my brethren! and God, does he not sufficiently recompense those who serve him, that they should support any little disgusts or wearinesses which may be found in his service? Are we not still too happy, by his acceptance of our services, in spite of the repugnances which render them cold and languid? Does he not sufficiently load us with blessings, to be entitled to exact our sufferance of a few slight sorrows for his sake? Does he not promise us still more, sufficiently precious to sweeten the trifling disgusts attached to the fulfilment of his ordinances? Must not he find it strange, that vile creatures, who hold all from him, who exist only through him, and who expect all from him, should complain of dislike to his service? That worms of the earth, whose only boast is the honour of belonging to him, dare complain of feeling no inclination for him, and that it is both melancholy and wearisome to serve or to be faithful to him? Is he, then, a master like us; fanciful, intolerant, indolent, entirely occupied with himself, and who seeks only to render himself happy, at the expense of the peace and comfort of those who serve him? Unjust that we are! We dare offer reproaches to the Almighty, which we would regard as outrages upon ourselves, from the mouths of our slaves!

Second truth :—The disgusts which accompany virtue are not so bitter as we represent them to ourselves.

REFLECTION III.—But even were they so, I have said, in the third place, that they would still be infinitely less than those of the world. And it is here, my brethren, that the testimony of the world itself, and the self-experience of worldly souls, answer every purpose of a proof. For if you continue in the ways of the world and of the passions, what is your whole life but a continual weariness, where, by diversifying your pleasures, you only diversify your disgusts and uneasinesses? What is it but an eternal void where you are a burden to yourself? What is it but a pompous circulation of duties, attentions, ceremonies, amusements, and trifles, which, incessantly revolving, possess one single advantage, that of unpleasantly filling up moments which hang heavy upon you, and which you know not otherwise to employ? What is your life but a flux and reflux of desires, hatreds, chagrins, jealousies, and hopes, which poison all your pleasures, and are the cause that, surrounded by every thing which ought to insure your happiness, you cannot succeed in being contented with yourselves?

What comparison is there between the frenzies of the passions the chagrin of a striking neglect, the sensibility of a bad office, and the slight sorrows of virtue? What comparison between the unlimited subjections to ambition; the fatigues and toils of pretensions and expectancies; the pains to insure success; the exertions and submissions necessary to please; the cares, uneasinesses, and agitations, in order to exalt ourselves; and the slight violences which assure to us the kingdom of heaven? What comparison between the frightful remorse of the conscience, that internal worm, which incessantly gnaws us; that sadness of guilt, which undermines and brings us low indeed; that weight of iniquity, which overwhelms us; that internal sword which pierces us to the quick; which we know not how to draw forth, and carry with us wherever we go; and the amiable sorrow of that penitence which secures salvation? My God! can we complain of thee, after knowing the world? Can thy yoke appear grievous, after quitting that of the passions? And the thorns of thy cross, are they not flowers, when compared to those which the ways of iniquity and the world have sown?

Thus every day we hear the worshippers of the world decry the world they serve; complain with the utmost dissatisfaction of their lot; utter the keenest invectives against its injustice and abuses; censure, condemn, and despise it: but find me, if you can, any truly pious souls, who send forth invectives against virtue; who condemn or despise it; and who detest their lot of being embarked in a voyage so full of chagrin and bitterness. The world itself continually envies the destiny of the virtuous, and acknowledges that none are happy but the upright; but find me a truly

pious soul, who envies the destiny of the world; who publishes that none are happy but its partisans; who admires the wisdom of their choice, and regards his own condition as the most miserable and the most foolish:—what shall I say? We have frequently seen sinners, who, through despair and disgust at the world, have fled to opposite extremes; lose rest, health, reason, and life; fall into states of horror, and the blackest melancholy, and no longer regard life but as the greatest torment. But where are the righteous, whom the disgusts which accompany virtue have thrown into such dreadful extremities? They sometimes complain of their sorrows; but they still prefer them to the pleasures of the passions: virtue, it is true, may sometimes appear melancholy and displeasing to them; but, with all her sadness, they love her much more than guilt: they would wish a few more sensible supports and consolations from the Father of Mercies, but they detest those of the world: they suffer, but the same hand which proves, supports them, and they are not tempted beyond their strength: they feel what you call the weight of the yoke of Jesus Christ; but, in recalling the load of iniquity, under which they had so long groaned, they find their present lot happy, and the comparison calms and comforts them.

In effect, my brethren, in the first place, the violences which we do to ourselves, are much more agreeable than those which come from without, and happen in spite of us. Now, the violences of virtue are at least voluntary: these are crosses which we choose from reason, and impose upon ourselves from duty: they are often bitter, but we are consoled by the reflection of having chosen them. But the disgusts of the world are forced crosses, which come without our being consulted: it is a hateful yoke, which is imposed on us against our will: we wish it not; we detest it; yet, nevertheless, we must drink all the bitterness of the cup. In virtue, we only suffer, because it is our inclination to suffer: in the world, we suffer so much the more, in proportion as we wish it less, and as our inclinations are inimical to our sufferings.

Secondly. The disgusts accompanying virtue are a burden only to indolence and laziness; these are repugnances, bitter only to the senses: but the disgusts of the world, ah! they pierce to the quick; they mortify all the passions; they humble pride, pull down vanity, light up envy, mortify ambition, and none of our feelings escape the influence of their sadness and bitterness.

Thirdly. Those of virtue are sensible only in their first operation: the first efforts cost us much; the sequel softens and tranquillizes them. The passions, which are generally the occasion of any disgust at virtue, have this in particular, that the more we repress them, the more tractable they become; the violences we do to them, gradually calm the heart, and leave us less to suffer

from those to come: but the disgusts of the world are always new; as they always find in us the same passions, they always leave us the same bitternesses; those which have gone before only render those that follow more insupportable.

In a word, the disgusts of the world inflame our passions, and consequently increase our sufferings; those of virtue repress them, and by these means gradually establish peace and tranquillity in our soul.

Fourthly. The disgusts of the world happen to those who most faithfully serve it: it does not treat them better, because they are more devoted to its party, and more zealous for its abuses; on the contrary, the hearts most ardent to the world, are almost always those who experience the largest share of its mortifications; because they feel more sensibly its neglect and injustice: their ardour for it is the source of all their uneasinesses. But with God, we have only our coldness to dread; for the disgusts which may accompany virtue, in general, have only relaxation and idleness for principle; the more our ardour for the Lord increases, the more do our disgusts diminish; the more our zeal inflames, the more do our repugnances weaken; the more we serve him with fidelity, the more charms and consolations do we find in his service. It is by relaxing, that we render our duties disagreeable; it is by lessening our fervour, that we add a new weight to our yoke; and if, in spite of our fidelity, the disgusts continue, they are then trials, and not punishments: it is not that consolations are refused, it is a new occasion of merit which is prepared for us: it is not an irritated God, who shuts his heart to us, it is a merciful God, who purifies our own; it is not a discontented master, who suspends his favours, it is a jealous Lord, who wishes to prove our love: our homages are not rejected, our submissions and services are only anticipated; it is not meant to repulse, but to assure to us the price of our sufferings, by rejecting every thing which might still mingle the man with God, ourselves with grace, human supports with the gifts of Heaven, and the riches of faith with the consolations of self-love. Behold, my brethren, the last truth with which I shall terminate this discourse:—Not only the disgusts accompanying virtue, are not so bitter as those of the world, but they likewise possess resources which those of the world have not.

REFLECTION IV.—I say resources: alas! my brethren, we find none but in virtue. The world wounds the heart, but it furnishes no remedies; it has its chagrins, but nothing to comfort them; it is full of disgusts and bitterness, but we find no resources in it. But in virtue there is no sorrow which has not its consolation; and if in it we find repugnances and disgusts, we find likewise a thousand resources which soothe them.

In the first place, peace of mind, and the testimony of the con-

science. What luxury, to be at peace with ourselves; no longer to carry within us that importunate and corroding worm which pursued us every where; no longer to be racked by eternal remorse, which poisoned every comfort of life: in a word, to be delivered from iniquity! The senses may still suffer from the sorrows of virtue, but the heart at least is tranquil.

Secondly. The certainty that our sufferings are not lost; that our sorrows become a new merit for us; that our repugnances, in preparing for us new sacrifices, secure an additional claim to the promises of faith; that were virtue to cost us less, it would likewise bear an inferior price in the sight of God; and that he only renders the road so difficult, in order to render our crown more brilliant and glorious.

Thirdly. Submission to the orders of God, who has his reasons for refusing to us the visible consolations of virtue; whose wisdom consults our interest more than our passions; and who has preferred bringing us to himself by a less agreeable road, because it is a more secure one.

Fourthly. The favours with which he accompanies our sorrows; which sustain our faith at the same time that our violences lower self-love; which fortify our heart in truth, at the same time that our senses are disgusted with it; which make our mind prompt and fervent, although the flesh is weak and feeble, insomuch, that he renders our virtue so much the more solid as to us it seems melancholy and painful.

Fifthly. The external succours of piety, which are so many new resources in our faintings and thirst: the holy mysteries, where Jesus Christ, himself the comforter of faithful souls, comes to console our heart; the truths of the divine writings, which promise nothing in this world to the upright but tribulation and tears,—calm our fears, by informing us that our pleasures are to come; and that the sufferings which discourage us, far from making us distrust our virtue, ought to render our hope more animated and certain: in a word, the history of the saints, who have undergone the same disgusts and trials; consequently, we have so much the less reason to complain, as characters so infinitely more pious than we, have experienced the same lot; that such has almost always been the conduct of God towards his servants; and that, if anything in this life can prove his love toward us, it is that of his leading us by the same path that he did the saints, and treating us in this world in the same manner as he did the upright.

Sixthly. The tranquillity of the life and the uniformity of the duties which have succeeded to the frenzies of the passions and the tumult of a worldly life, which have provided for us much more happy and peaceful days than those we had ever passed in the midst of dissipation, and which, though they still leave us something to suffer, yet occasion us to enjoy a more tranquil and supportable lot.

Lastly. Faith, which brings eternity nearer to us; which discovers to us the insignificancy of worldly affairs; that we approach the happy term; that the present life is but a rapid instant; and consequently, that our sufferings cannot endure long, but that this fleeting moment of tribulation assures to us a glorious and immortal futurity, which will endure as long as God himself. What resources for a faithful heart! What disproportion between the sufferings of virtue and those of guilt! It is in order to make us feel the difference that God often permits the world to possess us for a time; that in youth we deliver ourselves up to the sway of the passions, on purpose, that, when he afterward recalls us to himself, we may know by experience how much more easy is his yoke than that of the world. I will permit, says he in the Scriptures, that my people serve the nations of the earth for some time; that they allow themselves to be seduced by their profane superstitions, in order that they may know the difference between my service and the service of the kings of the earth; and that they may feel how much more easy is my yoke than the servitude of men.

Happy the souls, who, in order to be undeceived, have had no occasion for this experience, and who have not so dearly bought the knowledge of this world's vanity, and the melancholy lot of iniquitous passions. Alas! since at last we must be undeceived, and must abandon and despise it; since the day will come, when we shall find it frivolous, disgusting, and insupportable; when, of all its foolish joys, there shall no longer remain to us but the cruel remorse of having yielded to them; the confusion of having followed them; the obstacles to good which they will have left in our heart; why not anticipate and prevent such melancholy regrets? Why not do to-day what we ourselves allow must one day be done? Why wait till the world has made such deep wounds in our heart, to run afterward to remedies, which cannot re-establish us without greater pain, and costing us doubly dear? We complain of some slight disgusts which accompany virtue; but, alas! the first believers, who, to the maxims of the gospel, sacrificed their riches, reputation, and life; who run to the scaffolds to confess Jesus Christ; who passed their days in chains, in prisons, in shame and in sufferance, and to whom it cost so much to serve Jesus Christ; did they complain of the bitterness of his service? Did they reproach him with rendering unhappy those who served him? Ah! they glorified themselves in their tribulation; they preferred shame and disgrace with Jesus Christ, to all the vain pleasures of Egypt; they reckoned as nothing, wheels, fires, and every instrument of torture, in the hopes of a blessed immortality, which would amply recompense their present sufferings: in the midst of torments they chaunted hymns; and regarded as a gain, the loss of all, for the interest of their Master. What a life, in the eyes of the flesh, is that of these unfortunate men, proscribed, persecuted, driven from

their country, having only dens and caverns for their habitation, regarded every where as the horror of the universe; become execrable to their friends, their fellow-citizens, and their relations! They esteemed themselves happy in belonging to Jesus Christ. In their opinion, they could not too dearly purchase the glory of being his disciples, and the consolation of pretending to his promises. And we, my brethren, in the midst of too many of the conveniences of life; surrounded by too much abundance, prosperity, and worldly glory; finding, perhaps for our misfortune, in the applauses of the world, which cannot prevent itself from esteeming worth, the recompense of virtue; in the midst of our relations, our children, and our friends,—we complain that it costs us too much to serve Jesus Christ; we murmur against the slight bitterness we experience in virtue; we almost persuade ourselves that God requires too much of his creatures. Ah! when the comparison shall one day be made between these little disgusts which we exaggerate so much, and the crosses, the wheels, the fires, and all the tortures of the martyrs; the austerities of the anchorites; the fasts, the tears, and sufferings of so many holy penitents; alas! we shall then blush to find ourselves almost single before Jesus Christ; we, who have suffered nothing for him; to whom his kingdom has cost nothing; and who, individually bearing before his tribunal more iniquities than a number of saints together, cannot, however, in assembling all our works of piety, compare them united to a single instance of their exertions.

Let us cease, therefore, to complain of God, since he has so many reasons to complain of us. Let us serve him, as he wishes to be served by us. If he softens our yoke, let us bless his goodness, which prepares these consolations for our weakness; if he makes us feel the whole extent of its weight, let us still esteem ourselves happy that he deigns, at that price, to accept of our works and homage. With equal gratitude, let us receive from his hand consolation or affliction, since every thing which proceeds from him alike conducts us to him. Let us learn to be, as the apostle, in want or abundance, provided we belong to Jesus Christ: the essential part is not to serve him with pleasure, it is to serve him with fidelity. In reality, my brethren, in spite of all the disgusts or repugnances which may accompany virtue, there is no real or true pleasure but in serving God; there is no solid consolation to be reaped but by attaching ourselves to him. No, said the sage, it is still better to feed upon the bread of wormwood and gall, with the fear of the Lord, than to live in the midst of pleasure and profane joys, under the lash of his wrath and indignation. Alas! of what pleasure can we be capable, when we are the enemies of God? What pleasure can we taste, when we bear in our heart only the anguish and bitterness of guilt? No, says the sage once more, the fear of God can alone charm our weariness, soften our moments

of melancholy, soothe our endless anguishes, and enable us to find a certain degree of sweetness even in the evils incident to our nature. It is that which renders retirement sweet, and enables us to enjoy repose, far from the world and its amusements: it is that which makes days pass quickly, and occupies in peace and tranquillity every moment; and though apparently it allows us more leisure than a worldly life, yet it leaves a much smaller portion to weariness.

Great God! what honour does not the world unintentionally pay to thy service! What an affecting eulogium on the destiny of the upright is the lot of sinners! How well, my God, thou knowest to extort glory and praise from even thy enemies! and how little excuse thou leavest to those souls who depart from thy paths, since, in order to draw them to virtue, thou makest a resource to them even of their crimes, and employest their wants to recall them to thy eternal mercies.

Now to God, &c.

SERMON IV.

THE UNCERTAINTY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS IN A STATE OF LUKEWARMNESS.

“And he arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon’s house: and Simon’s wife’s mother was taken with a great fever; and they besought him for her.”—
LUKE iv. 38.

NOTHING more naturally represents the situation of a languid and lukewarm soul, than the state of infirmity in which the gospel here describes Peter’s mother-in-law to have been. It may be said, that coldness and indolence in the ways of God, though otherwise accompanied with a life free from enormities, is a kind of secret and dangerous fever, which gradually undermines the powers of the soul, changes all its good dispositions, weakens its faculties, insensibly corrupts its inward parts, alters its propensities, spreads a universal bitterness through all its duties, disgusts it with every thing proper, with all holy and necessary nourishment; and finishes at last by a total extinction and an inevitable death.

This languor of the soul, in the path of salvation, is so much the more dangerous as it is less observed.

Our exemption from open irregularity gives us confidence. The external regularity of conduct, which attracts from men those praises due only to virtue, flatters us; and the secret comparison we make of our morals with the excesses of those avowed sinners whom the world and their passions govern, unites to blind us. We regard our situation as a state, less perfect indeed, but always certain of salvation; seeing our conscience can only reproach us with indolence and negligence in the discharge of our duties; too lenient a correction of our appetites; self-love, and some slight infidelities, which do not bring death to the soul. Nevertheless, since the holy writings represent the adulterous and the lukewarm soul as equally rejected by God; and as they pronounce the same anathema against those who despise the works of the Lord, and those who perform them with negligence, this state of coldness and languor in the ways of God must necessarily be very suspicious with regard to salvation, both from the present dispositions which it gives to the soul, and from those to which, sooner or later, it never fails to lead it.

I say, in the first place, from the present dispositions it gives to the soul; namely, a fund of indolence, self-love, disgust at virtue, infidelity, and deliberate disregard to every thing they believe not absolutely essential in their duties; dispositions that form a state very doubtful of salvation.

Secondly. From those to which, sooner or later, lukewarmness conducts us; namely, forgetfulness of God, and an open and shameful departure from every thing sacred.

From these I wish to establish two capital truths in this matter, which expose the danger of a lukewarm and infidel life; and which, from their importance, will furnish us with subject for two Discourses. The first, that it is very doubtful, whether, in this habitual state of coldness and languor, the lukewarm soul (as it believes) preserves the righteousness and sanctifying grace upon which it grounds its security.

The second, that were it even less doubtful, whether it had preserved or lost, before God, the sanctifying grace, at any rate it is certain of being unable long to preserve it.

The uncertainty of righteousness in a state of lukewarmness. This first truth will be the subject of the present Discourse.

The certainty of a departure from righteousness in that state, is the second truth, upon which, in the following one, I shall endeavour to instruct you.

PART I.—“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us,” says the apostle. The purest virtue below is never free, therefore, from blemish. Man, full of

darkness and passions, since the entrance of sin into the world, cannot always be so attentive to regularity but that he must sometimes be deceived and err; nor so impressed with invisible good but he will allow himself to be sometimes caught by worldly and ostensible riches; because their impressions on the mind are lively and quick, and they always find in our hearts dispositions too favourable to their dangerous seductions.

The fidelity which the law of God exacts from just souls, excludes not, therefore, a thousand imperfections, inseparable from our nature, and from which the most guarded and watchful piety cannot defend itself; but of these there are two descriptions. The first, which happen through our weakness, are less infidelities than surprises, where the weight of corruption preponderates over the inclination or choice; and which the Lord, says St. Augustine, permits to remain in the most faithful souls, in order to nourish their humility, excite their lamentations, reanimate their desires, their disgusts at their present exilement, and their longings for its termination. The second class are those which please us; which we justify to ourselves; which it appears impossible for us to renounce; which we look upon as necessary sweeteners of virtue; in which we see nothing criminal, because we perceive not the guilt; which form a part of the deliberate and general system of our morals and conduct, and constitute that state of indolence and coldness in the ways of God, which is the cause of condemnation to so many, born otherwise, perhaps, with principles of virtue, detestation of iniquity, a fund of religion and fear of God, and happy dispositions for salvation.

Now, I say, that this state of relaxation and infidelity; this tranquil and continued negligence of every thing which perhaps appears not essential in our duties; this effeminate indulgence of all our desires, so long as they offer not actual guilt to our sight; in a word, this life altogether according to our animal nature, our humours, temperaments, and self-love, so common with those who make a public profession of piety, so safe in appearance, so glorious even in the eyes of men, and to which the general error attaches the names of virtue and regularity;—I say, that this is a state extremely doubtful to attain salvation; that it derives its source from an irregular heart, where the Holy Spirit no longer reigns; and that all the rules of faith induce us to think, that a soul of this description is already, without being sensible of it, fallen from righteousness and grace: in the first place, because the desire of perfection essential to Christian piety is extinguished in his heart. Secondly, because the rules of faith, almost always very uncertain in the distinction of guilt from venial errors, with regard to other sinners, are infinitely more so with respect to the unfaithful and lukewarm heart. Thirdly, because, of all the external marks of a living and habitual charity, there is not in it the

smallest appearance of one. Let us investigate these truths; for they are indeed worthy of our attention.

Every Christian soul is obliged to bend every effort toward the perfection of his state. I say obliged, for, although the degree of perfection be not comprised in the precept, to endeavour at, to labour for perfection, is nevertheless a commandment, and a duty essential to every believer. Be ye perfect, says our Saviour, because the heavenly Father whom ye serve is perfect. I can perceive but one essential point, said St. Paul, namely, to forget whatever I have done to this period (and what, my brethren, was he to forget? His endless labours, continual sufferings, and apostolic courses: so many nations converted to faith; so many illustrious churches founded; so many revelations and prodigies?)—and, incessantly advancing, to direct my views to the attainment of what I have yet to perform. The desire of perfection, the continued efforts to attain it, the holy iniquities in consequence of the innumerable obstacles which check our progress, do not therefore comprise only a simple advice, and a practice reserved for the cloister and the desert alone,—they form the essential state of a Christian, and the life according to faith on this earth.

For the life according to faith, which the just man leads, is only an uninterrupted desire that the kingdom of God may be accomplished in our hearts; a holy eagerness to form a perfect resemblance in us to Jesus Christ, and to increase even to the plentitude of the new man; a continual lamentation, excited by the internal sensibility of our own miseries, and by the load of corruption which oppresses the soul, and makes it to bear so many marks still of the worldly man; a daily struggle between the law of the Spirit, which continually wishes to raise us above our sensual appetites, and the dominion of the flesh, which incessantly draws us back toward ourselves: such is the state of faith, and of Christian piety. Whoever you be, great or of humble rank, prince or subject, courtier or recluse, behold the perfection to which you are called; behold the ground-work and the spirit of your vocation. The austerities of an anchorite, the silence and solitude of the desert, the poverty of the cloister, are not demanded of you;—but you are required to labour incessantly toward the repression of those internal desires which oppose themselves to the law of God; to mortify those rebellious inclinations which so unwillingly submit to order and duty; in a word, to advance, as much as possible, your perfect conformity with Jesus Christ. Behold the degree of perfection to which Christian grace calls you, and the essential duty of a just soul.

Now, from the moment you give way to every inclination, provided it extends not to the absolute infraction of the precept, from

the moment you confine yourselves to the essentials of the law; that you establish a kind of system of coldness and negligence; that you say to yourselves, "We are unable to support a more exact or more exemplary life;"—from that moment you renounce the desire of perfection. You no longer propose to yourselves an unceasing advancement toward that point of piety and holiness to which the Almighty calls you, and toward which his grace never ceases to impel you in secret; you no longer grieve over those miseries and weaknesses so inimical to your progress; you no longer wish the kingdom of God to be established in your hearts; you abandon, therefore, from that moment, the great work of righteousness, at which you are commanded to labour; you neglect the care of your soul; you enter not into the designs of grace: on the contrary, you check its holy impressions; you are no longer Christian: that is to say, that this disposition alone, this formal intention of limiting yourselves to the essentials, and of regarding all the rest as laudable excesses, and works of supererogation, is a state of sin and death, since it is an avowed contempt of that great commandment which requires us to be perfect, that is to say, to labour toward becoming so.

Nevertheless, when we come to instruct you with regard to Christian perfection, you look upon it as to be found only in cloisters and solitudes, and scarcely will you deign to give the smallest attention to our instructions. You deceive yourselves, my brethren. The individuals who adopt retirement, certainly employ austerities, fastings, and watchings, as means to succeed in that mortification of the passions to which we are all equally invited. They engage themselves to a perfection of means, which I confess our state will not admit of; but the perfection of the end to which these means conduct, namely, the command and regulation of the affections, proper contempt of the world, detachment from ourselves, submission of the senses and the flesh to the Spirit, and renovation of the heart, are the perfection of all states, the engagement of all Christians, and the covenant of our baptism. To renounce this perfection, therefore, by limiting ourselves from choice, or in consequence of our rank in the world, to an effeminate, sensual, and worldly life, exempt only from striking enormities, is to renounce the Christian calling, and change the grace of faith, which has made us members of Jesus Christ, into a shameful and unworthy indolence:—first reason.

But, were this state even not so dubious for salvation, with respect to the desire of that perfection essential to a Christian life, and which is extinguished in a lukewarm and unfaithful soul, it would become so by the imbecility which it occasions, and in which it places itself, of distinguishing in its conduct the infidelities which may extend to guilt, from those which may be termed simple errors. For though it is true that all sins are not sins which bring death, as St. John observes, and that Christian

morality acknowledges errors, which only grieve the Holy Spirit within us, and others which extinguish it altogether in the soul; nevertheless, the rules which it furnishes to distinguish these, can neither be always certain nor general at the moment they are applied; some circumstances relative to ourselves continually change their nature. I speak not here of those manifest and absolute transgressions of the precepts marked in the law, which leave no hesitation respecting the enormity of the offence. I speak of a thousand doubtful and daily transgressions; of hatred, jealousy, evil-speaking, sensuality, vanity, idleness, duplicity, negligence in the practice of our duties, and ambition; in all which it is extremely difficult to define how far the precept may be violated: now, I say, that it is by the disposition alone of the heart that the measure and guilt of these faults can be decided; that the rules there, are always uncertain and changeable; and that frequently what is only weakness or surprise in the just, is guilt and corruption not only in the sinner, but likewise in the lukewarm and unfaithful soul. This is proved by the following examples taken from the holy writings.

Saul, in disobedience to the order of the Lord, spared the king of the Amalekites and the most precious spoils of that infidel prince. The crime does not appear considerable; but, as it proceeded from a fund of pride, of relaxation in the ways of God, and a vain complaisance in his victory, this action is the commencement of his reprobation, and the Spirit of God withdraws itself from him. Joshua, on the contrary, too credulous, spares the Gibeonites, whom the Lord had commanded him to exterminate; he went not before the ark to consult him, previous to his alliance with these impostors. But this infidelity being an act of precipitancy and surprise, rather than a disobedience, and proceeding from a heart still faithful, religious, and submissive to God, it appears slight in his eyes, and the pardon almost immediately follows the crime. Now, if this principle be incontrovertible, upon what do you depend when you regard your daily and habitual infidelities as slight? Are you acquainted with all the corruption of your heart, from which they proceed? God knows it, who is the searcher and judge; and his eyes are very different from those of men. But if it be permitted to judge before the time, say, if this fund of indolence and infidelity which is in you; of voluntary perseverance in a state displeasing to God; of deliberate contempt for all the duties which you consider as not essential; of attention and care, as I may say, to labour only for the Lord when he opens before you the gates of punishment and destruction;—say, if all these can constitute in his sight a state worthy of a Christian heart; and if faults, which proceed from so corrupted a principle, can in reality be slight, or worthy of indulgence?

Paul, my brethren, that miraculous man, to whom the secrets of heaven had been revealed; Paul, who no longer lived for him-

self, but in whom Jesus Christ alone lived; Paul, who earnestly longed every moment for the dissolution of his earthly body, that he might be clothed with immortality; this apostle, always ready to sacrifice his life for his Master, and a willing victim to faith; this elected instrument of our Lord and Saviour, whose conscience could reproach him with nothing, knew not, however, whether he merited the love or hatred of his Lord; whether he still possessed in his heart, or had forfeited, the invisible treasure of charity; and in these melancholy doubts, the testimony of his conscience was insufficient to calm his dread and uncertainty. David, that king so penitent, whose delights were centered in the constant meditation of the law of God, and whom the Holy Spirit calls a king after God's own heart;—David trembles, however, lest the iniquity of his crimes be not sufficiently known to him; lest the corruption of his heart conceals not from him their enormity. He figures to himself unknown gulfs in his conscience, which cause him to shed torrents of tears; to prostrate himself before the Majesty and Holiness of his God, and supplicate his assistance toward his purification from secret infidelities, by making him sensible of them. And you, who watch not, nor search your hearts; you who, devoted to lukewarm and sensual habits, with deliberate coolness allow yourselves every day a thousand infidelities, upon the iniquity of which you are utterly ignorant what judgment the Almighty may form: you, who every moment experience these suspicious ebullitions of passion, where, in spite of all your self-indulgence, you find it so difficult to prove that the will has not accompanied the gratification, and that you have not overstepped that critical and dangerous line which distinguishes actual guilt from involuntary error: you, in whom almost every action is suspicious; who every moment may be demanding at your own heart, "Have I not gone too far?" who, in your own conscience, feel movements and regrets which you will never quiet: you who, in spite of so many just subjects of dread, believe the state of your conscience to be perfectly known to you; that the decisions of your own self-love, with regard to your infidelities, are the decisions of the Almighty; and that the Lord, whom you serve with so much coldness and negligence, does not yield you up to your own blindness, and punish your crimes, by making you mistake them: you can possibly believe that you still preserve your righteousness, and the grace of sanctification, and can quiet yourselves upon your visible and habitual guilt, by a pretended invisible exercise of righteousness, of which you can produce neither mark nor proof?

O man! how little art thou acquainted with the illusions of the human heart, and the terrible judgments of God upon those souls which resemble thee! Thou sayest to thyself, I am rich, I am

loaded with the good things of this world ; (with this our Saviour formerly reproached a cold and unbelieving soul ;) and thou perceivest not, continued he, (for blindness and presumption are the distinguishing character of coldness,) that in my sight, thou art poor, miserable, blind, and lost to every thing. It is the destiny, therefore, of a lukewarm and unfaithful soul, to live in error and illusion ; to believe himself just and acceptable to God, while, alas ! before him, he is lost, without knowing it, to both grace and righteousness.

And one reflection, which I beg you to make here, is, that the confidence of such souls is so much the more illusive and ill-founded, as there exists not a soul less capable of judging of his own heart than the lukewarm and unfaithful one. For the avowed sinner cannot conceal his crimes from himself ; and he is sensible that he must assuredly be dead to the Lord. The just man, although ignorant whether he merits the love or hatred of his Master, enjoys, nevertheless, a conscience free from reproach. But the cold and unfaithful soul is involved in a state of continual and inexplicable mystery to itself ; for this lukewarmness in the ways of God, enfeebling in us the lights of faith, and strengthening our passions, increases our darkness. Every infidelity is like an additional cloud, overspreading the mind and heart, which darkens to our sight the truths of salvation. In this manner the heart is gradually enveloped, the conscience becomes embarrassed, the lights of the mind are weakened ; you are no longer that spiritual Christian, capable of a proper judgment. Insensibly you adopt maxims in secret, which, as you think, diminish your guilt ; the blindness increases in the same proportion as the lukewarmness.

The more you admit of this relaxation, in a more altered light do your duties and rules appear. What formerly appeared essential, no longer appears but a vain scruple. The omissions, which, in the period of fervour for duty and religion, would have excited in you the warmest compunctions, are now no longer regarded even as faults. The principles, the judgment, the light of the mind, are all changed.

Now, in this situation, who has told you, that, in the judgment which you form on the nature of your infidelities and your daily departure from virtue, you do not deceive yourselves ? Who has told you, that the errors which you think so slight are in reality so ; and that the distant boundaries which you prescribe to guilt, and within which every thing to you appears venial, are really the limits of the law ? Alas ! the most enlightened guides know not how to distinguish clearly in a cold and unbelieving conscience. These are what I may call the evils of that languor in which we know nothing ; where the wisest of us can say nothing with certainty ; and of which the secret cause is always an enigma. You are sensible yourselves, that, in this state of relaxation, you experience in your hearts certain doubts

and embarrassments which you can never sufficiently clear up; that in your consciences there always remains something secret and inexplicable, which you never wish to search into, or above half expose. These are not exaggerations, it is the real state and bottom of your soul, which you feel a reserve to lay open. You are sensible, that, even when prostrating yourselves before the Almighty, the confession of your guilt never entirely corresponds with the most intimate dispositions of your heart; that it never paints your internal situation such as in reality it is; and, in a word, that there always exists in your heart something more criminal than what in any statement of it you can bring yourselves to avow. And, indeed, how can you be certain, that in those continual self-gratifications; in that effeminacy of manners which composes your life; in that attention to every thing which may flatter the senses, or remove disquiet from you; to sacrifice to indolence and laziness, all which appears not essential in your duties; how can you be certain, I say, that your self-love is not arrived at that fatal point which serves to give it dominion over your heart, and for ever banish from it Christian charity? Who is able to inform you, in those frequent and voluntary infidelities, where, comforted by their pretended insignificancy, you oppose the internal grace which endeavours to turn you from them; you continually act contrary to your own reason and judgment; whether this internal contempt of the voice of God, this formal and daily abuse of your own lights and grace from God, be not an outrage upon the Divine goodness; a criminal contempt of his gifts; a wickedness in your deviations from virtue which leaves no excuse; and a deliberate preference to your passions and yourselves over Jesus Christ, which can alone proceed from a heart where the love of all order and righteousness is extinguished? Who can tell you, if, in these recollections where your listless mind has a thousand times dwelt upon objects or events dangerous to modesty, your indolence in combating them has not been criminal; and if the efforts which you afterward made, were not an artifice of self-love, in order to disguise their criminality, and quiet you on the indulgence you had already yielded to your crimes? Who would dare to determine, if, in these secret antipathies and animosities, which you give yourselves but little trouble to restrain, (and that always more for the sake of appearances than through piety,) you have never exceeded that slippery line beyond which dwell hatred and death to the soul? If, in that excess of sensibility, which in general accompanies all your afflictions, infirmities, losses, and disgraces, those which you call feelings attached and inevitable to nature, are not irregularities of the heart, and a revolt against the decrees of Providence? If, in all those attentions and eagernesses with which we see you occupied, to manage either the interests of your worldly affairs, or the preservation of a vain beauty, there

is not either as much forwardness as may amount to the crime of illegal ambition, or complaisance for yourself, and desire of pleasing, as may sully your heart with the guilt of sensuality? Great God! thou hast well discerned, as thy servant Job formerly remarked, the fatal limits which separate life from death, and light from darkness, in the heart. These are the gulfs and abysses over which mankind, little instructed in them, must tremble; and of which Thou reservest the manifestation till the terrible day of thy vengeance shall arrive.—Second reason, drawn from the uncertainty of the rules, which leaves the state of a lukewarm soul very suspicious, and even renders it incapable of knowing itself.

But a final reason, which to me appears still more decisive, and more dreadful to the lukewarm soul, is, there not being an appearance from which we can presume that it still preserves the sanctifying grace; on the contrary, every thing induces us to suppose it forfeited; that is to say, that, of all the symptoms of a habitual and living charity, there is not a vestige of one in it.

For, my brethren, the first character of charity is to fill us with that spirit of adoption in children, which leads us to love God as our heavenly Father, to love his law, and the justice of his commandments, and to dread the forfeiture of his love more than all the evils with which he threatens us.

Now, the attention alone with which a lukewarm soul examines whether an offence be venial, or extends farther; of disputing with God every article he may refuse him, without actual guilt; of studying the law, only for the purpose of knowing to what degree it may be violated; of unceasingly preferring the interests of his own cupidity to those of grace; and always justifying those things which flatter the passions, in opposition to the rules which check or forbid them;—this attention, I say, can only proceed from a heart destitute of faith and charity; from a heart in which the Spirit of God, that Spirit of love and kindness, apparently no longer reigns. For no children but the prodigal are capable of quibbling in this manner with their father and protector; of exercising to the utmost length of severity any claims they may have, and of seizing all they may think themselves entitled to.

Now, in order to give this reflection all its weight,—that disposition, which deliberately allows itself every infidelity which will not, it believes, be followed by eternal punishment, is the disposition of a slave and hireling; that is to say, that, could they promise themselves the same impunity and indulgence from the Almighty, for the transgression of the essential points of the law, they would violate them with the same indifference as they violate the least; for, were cruel and avowed revenge, calumny of the blackest nature, and criminal attachments, to be attended in futurity with no worse consequences than slight and momentary resentments, accidental and careless evil-speaking, or too much

self-love, they would feel no more horror in the commission of the former than the last-mentioned crimes; that is to say, that when faithful to the commandments, it is not from a love of righteousness, but the dread of that punishment which would attend their infraction; it is not to order and to the law that they submit themselves, it is to their chastisement; it is not the Lord they have in view, it is themselves; for, while his glory alone is interested, and no serious consequences may be expected to follow our infidelities, from their apparent slightness, we are not afraid of displeasing him; we even justify to ourselves in secret these kinds of transgressions, by saying, that, notwithstanding they offend, and are displeasing to the Lord, yet they bring not death nor eternal punishment to the soul. We are not affected by what regards only him, his glory goes for nothing in the distinction we make between actions allowed or forbidden; our interest alone regulates our fidelity, and nothing can warm our coldness but the dread of everlasting punishment. We are even delighted at the impunity of those trivial transgressions; of being able to gratify our inclinations, without any greater misfortune attending, than the displeasure of the Almighty. We love this wretched liberty, which seems to leave us the right of being unpunished, though unfaithful. We are the apologists of it; we carry it even farther than in reality it goes; we wish all to be venial; gaming, dress, sensual pleasures, passion, animosities, public spectacles;—what shall I say? We would wish this freedom to be universal; that nothing which gratifies our appetites should be punished; that the Almighty were neither just, nor the avenger of iniquity; and that we might yield ourselves up to the gratification of every passion, and violate the sanctity of his law, without any dread of the severity of his justice. Provided a lukewarm soul will descend to an examination of itself, it will feel, that this is truly the principle of its heart, and its real disposition.

Now, I ask you, is this the situation of a soul in which the sanctifying charity and grace is still preserved; that is to say, a soul which loves its Maker more than the world, more than all created beings, more than all pleasures or riches, more than itself;—of a soul which can feel no joy but in his possession; which dreads only his loss, and knows no misfortune but that of his displeasure? Does the charity you flatter yourselves still to preserve, seek, in this manner, its proper interest? Does it regard as nothing, the displeasure of him it loves, provided its infidelities remain unpunished? Does it think of disputing, like you every day, to what degree it may safely offend him, in order to take its measures accordingly, and then allow itself every transgression to which impunity is attached? Does it see nothing amiable in its God, or capable of attaching the heart, but his chastisements? Were he not even an Almighty

and an avenging God, would it be less affected by his infinite mercies, his truth, holiness, wisdom, fatherly tenderness, and protection? Ah! lukewarm and infidel soul! thou lovest him no longer: thou lovest, thou livest only for thyself. The small remains of fidelity, which still keep thee from sin, are nothing but a fund of sloth, timidity, and self-love. Thou wishest to live in peace with thyself: thou darest the embarrassments of a passion, and the remorse of a sullied conscience; iniquity is become a fatigue, and that alone displeases thee with it. Thou lovest thine own ease; and that is thy sole religion. Indolence is the only barrier which stops thee, and all thy virtue is limited to thyself. Assuredly, thou wouldst wish to know whether this infidelity be a venial transgression, or if it extends farther. Thou acknowledgest, that it displeases God, (for that point admits of no doubt,) yet is that not sufficient to turn thee from it? Thou wouldst wish to know, whether it so far displeases him as to provoke his everlasting wrath? Ah! thou seest very well, that this investigation tends to nothing by thyself; that thy disposition leads thee to think guilt nothing, as an offence and a displeasure to God,—a powerful reason, however, why it should be detestable to thee; that thou no longer servest the Lord in truth and in charity; that thy pretended virtue is only a natural timidity, which dares not expose itself to the terrible threatenings of the law; that thou art nothing but a vile and wretched slave, to restrain whom, it is necessary to keep scourges continually in thy sight; that thou resemblest that unfaithful servant, who secreted his talent, because he knew that his master was severe, and, but for that reason, would have wasted it in dissipation; and that, in the preparation of the heart, to which alone the Almighty looketh, thou hatest his law: thou lovest every thing it forbids; thou art no longer in charity; thou art a child of death and perdition.

The second character of charity is to be timorous, and to magnify to ourselves our smallest deviations; not that charity deceives or conceals from us the truth, but, disengaging the soul from the senses, it purifies our view of faith, and renders it more quick-sighted in spiritual affairs; and besides, whatever is in the smallest degree displeasing to the only object of our love, appears serious and considerable to the soul which loves. Thus charity is always humble, timid, and distrustful of itself; unceasingly agitated by its pious perplexities, which leave it in suspense respecting its real state; always alarmed by those delicacies of grace, which make it tremble at every action; which make a kind of martyrdom of love, from the uncertainty in which they leave it; and by which, however, it is purified. These are not the vain and puerile scruples which we blame in weak minds. They are those pious fears of charity and of grace inseparable from every faithful and religious soul. It works its salvation with fear and trembling; and even frequently

regards as crimes actions which are often virtues in the sight of God; and which, at most, can only be regarded as simple weaknesses.

These are the holy perplexities of charity, which derive their source even from the lights of faith. This path has, in all ages, been the path of the just.

Yet, nevertheless, it is that pretended charity, of which, in the midst of a vicious life, and of all your infidelities, you believe yourselves still possessed, that makes them appear slight to you: it is that charity itself, which you suppose not to have lost, that comforts and encourages you; that diminishes your faults in your own sight, and fixes you in a state of peace and security: in a word, that not only banishes from your heart all those pious alarms inseparable from real piety, but makes you regard them as weaknesses, and even the excesses of piety. Now tell me, I beg of you, is not that an inconsistency? Does charity contradict itself in that manner? Or can you place much dependence on a love which so nearly resembles hatred?

The last character of charity is to be active and diligent in the ways of God. We find how much the apostle dwells on its activity and fecundity in the heart of a Christian. It operates wherever it is; it cannot, say the saints, be idle: it is a celestial fire, which no power can hinder from showing itself, and from acting: it may sometimes indeed be overwhelmed, and greatly weakened, by the multitude of our weaknesses, but, while not entirely extinguished, there always proceed from it, as I may say, some sparks of sighs, wishes, lamentations, efforts, and deeds. The Holy Sacrament reanimates it; prayer arouses it; pious reading, affliction, disgrace, bodily infirmity, all rekindle it, when not utterly extinguished. It is mentioned in the second book of the Maccabees, that the sacred fire, which the Jews had concealed during their captivity, was found at their return apparently extinct. But as the surface alone was obscured, and the sacred fire still internally preserved all its virtue, scarcely was it exposed to the rays of the sun, when they saw it instantaneously rekindle, and present to their sight a brightness altogether new, and an activity altogether astonishing.

Behold, my brethren, a faithful representation of the coldness of a truly just soul; and which likewise would be your case, had the multitude of your infidelities done no more than cover and relax, as I may say, without extinguishing, the sacred fire of charity within you:—behold, I say, what ought to be your situation, when you approach the Holy Sacrament, or listen to the word of God. When Jesus Christ, the Sun of righteousness, darts upon you some rays of his grace and light, and inspires you with holy desires, your heart ought then to be seen rekindled, and your fervour renewed; you ought then to appear all fire and animation

in the practice of your duty, and astonish even the most confident witnesses of your former life by the renovation of your morals and zeal.

Alas! nothing, however, reanimates you. Even the Holy Sacrament leaves you all your coldness. The words of the gospel, which you listen to, fall upon your heart like corn upon a sterile land, where it immediately dies. The sentiments of salvation which grace operates within you, are never followed with any effect in the melioration of your morals. You continually drag on in the same indolence and languor. You depart from the holy altar equally cold, equally insensible, as you approached it. We see not in you those renewals of zeal, piety, and fervour, so common in just souls, and of which the motives are to be found in their deviations from duty. What you were yesterday, you are to-day; the same infidelities, the same weaknesses, you advance not a single step in the road to salvation; all the fire of heaven could scarcely rekindle in the bottom of your heart this pretended charity upon which you depend so much. Ah! my dear hearer, how much I dread that it is extinct, and that you are dead in the sight of the Lord! I wish not to anticipate the secret judgments of God upon the consciences; but I must tell you, that your state is very far from being safe; I even tell you, that, if we are to judge by the rules of faith, you are in disgrace with, and hated of the Lord; I tell you likewise, that a coldness so durable and constant cannot subsist with a principle of heavenly and eternal life, which always, from time to time at least, betrays external movements and signs, raises, animates itself, and takes wing, as if to disengage itself from the shackles which weigh it down; and that a charity so mute, so indolent, and so constantly insensible, exists no more.

But the great danger of this state, my brethren, is, that a lukewarm soul is so without scruple; it feels that it might carry its fervour and fidelity to a much greater length, but it looks upon that zeal, and that exactitude, as a perfection and a grace reserved only for certain souls, and not as a general duty. In this manner they fix themselves in that degree of coldness into which they are fallen. They have not made, nor scarcely attempted, the smallest progress in virtue, since the first ardours of conversion. It would appear, that, having exhausted all their fervour against the criminal passions with which they had at first to combat, they imagine that nothing now remains but to enjoy in peace the fruits of their victory. A thousand damages which still remain from their first shipwreck, they think no more of repairing. So far from endeavouring to repress a thousand weaknesses and corrupted inclinations left them by their first irregularities, they love and cherish them. The Holy Sacrament no longer reanimates or invigorates their faith; it only amuses it. Conversion is no longer the end they propose, they believe it already done: and, alas! their con-

fessions, even to the Almighty, are more for the purpose of amusing and lulling their consciences, than the effects of piety and real contrition.

We impose greatly upon ourselves, my brethren, with regard to our consciences reproaching us with nothing criminal; for we see not, that it is even that tranquillity which constitutes the danger, and perhaps the guilt likewise of it. We believe ourselves in security in our state, because it perhaps offers to our sight more innocence and regularity than that of disorderly souls; and indeed, we wish not to conceive how a life purely natural should not be a life of grace and of faith; or that a state of habitual idleness and sensual gratification, should be a state of sin and death in a Christian life.

Thus, my dear hearer, you whom this discourse regards, re-animate yourself without ceasing in the spirit of your vocation; according to the advice of the apostle, raise yourself every day by prayer, by mortification of the senses, by vigilance over your passions, and by a continual retrospection to, and investigation of, your own heart,—that first grace, which operates to draw you from the errors and wanderings of the world, and fits you to enter into the paths of God. Depend upon it, that piety has nothing sure or consoling but fidelity; that, in relaxing from it, you only augment your troubles, because you multiply your bonds; that, in retrenching from your duty, zeal, fervour, and exactitude, you likewise retrench all its sweets and pleasures; that, in depriving your state of fidelity, you deprive it of security; and that, in limiting yourself simply to shun iniquity, you lose the most precious fruits of virtue.

And after all, since you have already sacrificed the essential, why will you still attach yourselves to the frivolous parts? After having accomplished the most laborious and painful exertions toward salvation, must you perish for not finishing the slightest and most easy? When Naaman, little convinced, because the prophet, for the cure of his leprosy, had only ordered him to bathe in the waters of the Jordan, retired full of contempt for the man of God, and believing it impossible that his recovery could be accomplished by so simple a remedy, the people who accompanied him made him sensible of his error, by saying to him, “But, master, had the prophet bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? How much rather, then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?”

And now, my brethren, attend to what I have to say, while I finish this Discourse. You have abandoned the world, and the idols which you formerly worshipped in it; you are come from afar into the paths of God; you have had so many passions to overcome, and obstacles to surmount, so many things to sacrifice, and difficult exertions to make, there remains only one step more to accomplish, which is a faithful and constant vigilance over your-

selves. If a sacrifice of the criminal passions were not already made, and you were required to do it, you would not, I believe, hesitate a moment; cost what it might, you would make it: and, in the mean while, when simple purifications are only demanded of you; nay, when you are required, as I may say, almost the same things which you do, but only to be practised with more fervour, fidelity, faith, and vigilance, are you excusable in declining them? Why will you render useless all your former efforts, by the refusal of a thing so easy? Why should you have renounced the world, and all its criminal pleasures, only to find in piety the same rock, which by flying from sin you thought to have escaped? And would it not be lamentable, if, after having sacrificed to God the principal parts, you should lose yourselves, by wishing still to dispute with him a thousand little sacrifices, much less painful to the heart and to nature?

Finish, then, in us, O my God! that which thy grace has already begun: triumph over our languors and our weaknesses, since thou hast already triumphed over our crimes: give us a heart fervent and faithful, since thou hast already deprived us of a criminal and corrupted one: inspire us with that willing submission which the just possess, since thou hast extinguished in us that pride and obstinacy which occasion so many sinners. Leave not, O my God! thy work unfinished; and, since thou hast already made us enter into the holy career of salvation, render us worthy of the holy crown promised to those who shall have legally fought for it.

Now to God, &c. Amen.

SERMON V.

THE CERTAINTY OF THE LOSS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS IN A
STATE OF LUKEWARMNESS.

“And he rose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon’s house: and Simon’s wife’s mother was taken with a great fever; and they besought him for her.”—
LUKE iv. 38.

SINCE Simon thought the presence of our Saviour necessary for the cure of his mother-in-law, it would appear, my brethren, that the evil was pressing, and threatened an approaching death. The usual remedies must have been found ineffectual, and nothing but a miracle could operate her cure, and draw her from the gates

of death: nevertheless, the Scriptures mention her being attacked by only a common fever. On every other occasion, we never find that they had recourse to our Saviour, but to raise people from the grave, to cure paralytics, restore sight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf, from their birth: in a word, to cure diseases incurable by any other than the sovereign Master of life and death. In this instance he is called upon to restore health to a person attacked by a simple fever.

Whence comes it that the Almighty power is employed on so slight an occasion? It is, that this fever, being a natural image of lukewarmness in the ways of God, the Holy Spirit has wished to make us understand by it, that this disease, apparently so slight, and of which they dread not the danger,—this lukewarmness, so common in piety, is a disease which inevitably destroys the soul, and that a miracle is necessary to rescue it from death.

Yes, my brethren, of all the maxims of Christian morality, there is none upon which experience allows us less to deceive ourselves, than the one which assures us, that contempt for the smallest points of our duty insensibly leads us to a transgression of the most essential; and that negligence in the ways of God, is never far from a total loss of righteousness. He who despises the smaller objects of religion, says the Holy Spirit, will gradually fall: he who despises them, that is to say, who deliberately violates them; who lays down, as it were, a plan of this conduct: for if, through weakness or surprise, you fail in them sometimes, it is the common destiny of the just, and this discourse would no longer regard you; but to despise them in the sense already mentioned, which can happen only with lukewarm and unfaithful souls, is a path which must terminate in the loss of righteousness;—in the first place, because the special grace necessary toward perseverance in virtue is no longer granted;—secondly, because the passions are strengthened which lead us on to vice;—thirdly, because all the external succours of piety become useless.

Let us investigate these three reflections. They contain important instructions in the detail of a Christian life: useful, not only to those who make a public profession of piety, but likewise to those who make all virtue to consist in that regularity of conduct and propriety of behaviour which even the world requires.

PART I.—It is a truth of salvation, says a holy father, that the innocence of even the most upright has occasion for the continual assistance of grace. Man, delivered up to sin by the wickedness of his nature, no longer finds in himself but principles of error and sources of corruption: righteousness and truth, originally born with us, are now become as strangers; all our inclinations, revolted against God and his law in spite of ourselves, drag us on toward illicit objects; insomuch, that, to return to the law, and

submit our heart to order, it is necessary to resist, without ceasing, the impressions of the senses; to break our warmest inclinations, and to harden ourselves continually against ourselves. There is no duty but what now costs us something; no precept in the law but combats some of our passions; no step in the paths of God against which our heart does not revolt.

To this load of corruption, which renders duty so difficult and irksome, and iniquity so natural, add the snares which surround us, the examples which entice us, the objects which effeminate us, the occasions which surprise us, the compliances which weaken us, the afflictions which discourage us, the properties which corrupt us, the situations which blind us, and the contradictions which we experience; every thing around us is indeed only one continued temptation. I speak not of the miseries which are natural to us, or the particular opposition to order and righteousness, which our past morals, and our first passions, have left in our hearts; that love for the world and its pleasures; that dislike to virtue and its maxims; that empire of the senses, fortified by a voluptuous life; that invincible indolence, to which every thing is a burden, and to which whatever is a burden becomes almost impossible; that pride, which knows neither how to bend nor break; that inconstancy of heart, incapable of end or uniformity, which presently tires of itself; which cannot submit to rule, because that is always the same; which wishes, and wishes not; passes in a moment from the lowest state of dejection to a vain and childish joy, and leaves scarcely the interval of a moment between the sincerest resolution and the infidelity which violates it.

Now, in a situation so miserable, what, O my God, can the most just accomplish, delivered up to his own weakness and all the snares which surround him; bearing in his heart the source of all his errors, and in his mind the principles of every illusion? The grace of Jesus Christ, therefore, can alone deliver him from so many miseries; enlighten him in the midst of so much darkness; support him under so many difficulties; restrain him from following the dictates of so many rapid desires, and strengthen him against so many attacks. If left a moment to himself, he inevitably stumbles, and is lost. If an Almighty hand ceases an instant to retain him, he is carried down by the stream. Our consistency in virtue is, therefore, a continual grace and miracle. All our steps in the ways of God are new motions of the Holy Spirit; that is to say, of that invisible guide which impels and leads us on. All our pious actions are gifts of Divine mercy; since every proper use of our liberty comes from him, and he crowns his gifts in recompensing our merits. All the moments of our Christian life are like a new creation, therefore, in faith, and in piety; that is to say, (this spiritual creation does not suppose a non-existence in the just, but a principle of grace, and a liberty which co-operates with

it,) that as, in the order of nature, we should again return to our nonentity, if the Creator ceased for an instant to preserve the being he has given us; in the life of grace, we should again fall into sin and death, did the Redeemer cease a single moment to continue, by new succours, the gift of righteousness and holiness, with which he had embellished our soul. Such is the weakness of man, and such is his continual dependence on the grace of Jesus Christ. The fidelity of the just soul is therefore the fruit of continual aids of grace; but it is likewise the principle. It is grace alone which can accomplish the fidelity of the just; and it is the fidelity alone of the just which merits the preservation and increase of grace in the heart.

For, my brethren, the ways of God toward us being full of equity and wisdom, there must necessarily be some order in the distribution of his gifts and grace. The Lord must communicate himself more abundantly to the soul which faithfully prepares its heart for his ways; he must bestow more continual marks of his protection and mercy on the upright heart which gives him constant proof of love and fidelity; and the servant who improves his talent, must necessarily be recompensed in proportion to the profit he has known how to reap from it. It is just, on the contrary, that a lukewarm and unfaithful heart, who serves his God with negligence and disgust, should find the Almighty cold and disgusted toward him. The misery inseparable from coldness is therefore the privation of the grace of protection. If you become cold, the Almighty becomes so toward you; if you limit yourself, with regard to him, to those essential duties which you cannot refuse him without guilt, he confines himself, with regard to you, to those general succours which will not support you far. He retires from you in proportion as you retire from him; and the measure of fidelity with which you serve him, is the measure of protection you may expect to receive.

Nothing can be more equitable than this conduct; for you enter into judgment with your God. You neglect every opportunity where you might give him proofs of your fidelity: you dispute every thing with him, of which you think you could avoid the payment: you carefully watch lest you do any thing for him beyond what duty requires. It appears you say to him, what he formerly said to the unfaithful servant, Take that thine is, and go thy way. You reckon with God, as I may say. All your attention is engaged in prescribing limits to the right he has over your heart; and all his attention likewise, if I may be permitted to speak in this manner, is to put bounds to his mercies to your soul, and to pay your indifference with the same. Love is the price of love alone; and if you do not sufficiently feel all the terror and extent of this truth, allow me to explain to you its consequences.

The first is, that this state of lukewarmness and infidelity re-

moving the soul from the grace of protection, leaves him, as I may say, empty of God, and in the hands, as it were, of his own weakness. He may, undoubtedly, with the common succours left him, still preserve the fidelity he owes to God. He has always enough to support him in well-doing; but his lukewarmness deprives him of the ability to apply them to any purpose; that is to say, that he is still aided by those succours which may enable him to go on, but no longer by those with which he may infallibly persevere: there is no peril, therefore, in this situation, but makes a dangerous impression upon him, and leads him to the brink of ruin.

I grant, that a happy natural disposition, some remains of modesty, and fear of God, a conscience still afraid of guilt, and a reputation to preserve, may for some time defend him against himself; but as these resources, drawn mostly from nature, cannot extend far; as the sensual objects, in the midst of which he lives, make every day new wounds in his heart, and grace, less abundant, repairs not the loss,—alas! his strength exhausts every moment, faith relaxes, and truth is obscured; the more he advances, the worse he becomes. Such souls feel perfectly, that they no longer retire from the world and its dangers, equally innocent as formerly; that they carry their weaknesses and compliance much farther; that they encroach upon limits which they formerly respected; that loose conversations find them more indulgent, evil-speaking more favourable, pleasure less guarded, and the world more anxious for it; that they bring into it a heart already half-gained; that they are sensible of their losses, but feel nothing to repair them:—in a word, that God is almost withdrawn from them, and there is no longer any barrier but their own weakness, between guilt and them. Behold the situation in which you are, and from that judge of the one in which you will soon be.

I know that this state of relaxation and infidelity troubles and disturbs you; that you say every day, that nothing can bestow greater happiness than a detachment from every thing worldly; and that you envy the destiny of those Christians who give themselves up to God without reserve, and no longer keep any terms with the world. But you are deceived: it is not the faith or the fervour of these faithful Christians you envy; you only covet their lot, that happiness and peace which they enjoy in the service of their Master, and which you are incapable of partaking; you only envy them that insensibility and happy indifference to which they have attained for the world and every thing it esteems, your love for which occasions all your troubles, remorse, and secret anguish: but you envy them not the sacrifices they were under the necessity of making, to arrive at their present state of peace and tranquillity; you envy them not the trials they have undergone, in order to merit the precious gift of a

lively and fervent faith; you envy the happiness of their state, but you would not wish it to cost you the illusion and sensuality of your own.

The second consequence I draw from the refusal of the grace of protection to the lukewarm Christian, is, that the yoke of our Saviour, to him, becomes burdensome, hard, and insupportable. For, my brethren, by the irregularity of our nature, having lost all taste for righteousness and truth, which, in a state of innocence, formed the happiness of man, we no longer have any feeling or desire but for objects which gratify the senses and passions. The duties of the law of God, which recall us from the senses to the spirit, and make us sacrifice the present impressions of pleasure to the hope of future promises,—these duties, I say, presently fatigue our weakness, because they are continual efforts we make against ourselves. It requires the unction of grace, therefore, to soften the yoke; it is necessary that grace spread secret consolations over its bitterness, and change the sadness of duty into a holy and sensible joy. Now, the lukewarm soul, deprived of this unction, feels only the weight of the yoke, without the consolations which soften it. In this manner, all the duties of piety and religion become insipid to you; works of salvation become wearisome; your conscience, restless and embarrassed by your relaxations and infidelities, of which you cannot justify the innocence, no longer allows you to enjoy either peace or happiness in the service of God. You feel all the weight of the duties to which some remains of faith, and love of ease, hinder you from being unfaithful; but you feel not the secret testimony of a clear conscience, which soothes and supports the fervent Christian. You shun, perhaps, certain occasions of pleasure, where innocence is sure of being shipwrecked; but you only experience, in the retreat which divides you from them, a wearisomeness, and a more lively desire for the same pleasures from which you have forced yourself to refrain. You pray, but prayer is no longer but a fatigue; you frequent the society of virtuous persons, but their company becomes so irksome as almost to disgust you with virtue itself. The slightest violence you do upon your inclinations for the sake of heaven, costs you such efforts, that the pleasures and amusements of the world must be applied to, to refresh and invigorate you after this fatigue; the smallest mortification exhausts your body, casts uneasiness and chagrin through your temper, and only consoles you by an immediate determination to abandon its practice. You live unhappy, and without consolation, because you deprive yourself of a world you love, and substitute in its place duties which you love not. Your whole life is but a melancholy fatigue, and a perpetual disgust with yourself. You resemble the Israelites in the desert, disgusted, on the one part, with the manna upon which the Lord had ordered them to subsist; and, on the other,

not daring to return to the food of the Egyptians, which they still loved, and which the dread alone of the Almighty's anger induced them to deny themselves. Now, this state of violence cannot endure; we soon tire of any remains of virtue which do not quiet the heart, comfort the reason, and even flatter our self-love; we soon throw off the remains of a yoke which weighs us down, and which we no longer carry through love, but for decency's sake. It is so melancholy to be nothing at all, as I may say,—neither just nor worldly, attached neither to the world nor to Jesus Christ, enjoying neither the pleasures of the senses, nor those of grace,—that it is impossible this wearisome situation of indifference and neutrality can be durable. The heart, and particularly those of a certain description, requires an avowed object to occupy and interest it: if not God, it will soon be the world. A heart, lively, eager, always in extremes, and such as the generality of men possess, cannot be fixed but by the feelings; and to be continually disgusted with virtue, shows a heart already prepared to yield to the attractions of vice.

I know, in the first place, that there are lazy and indolent souls, who seem to keep themselves in this state of equilibration and insensibility; who offer nothing decided, either for the world or virtue; who appear equally distant, by their dispositions, either from the ardours of a faithful piety, or the excesses of profane guilt; who, in the midst of the pleasures of the world, preserve a fund of retention and regularity which proves the existence of some remains of virtue, and, in the midst of their religious duties, a fund of carelessness and laxity which still breathes the air and maxims of the world. These are indolent and tranquil hearts, animated in nothing, in whom indolence almost supplies the place of virtue, and who, notwithstanding they never arrive at that degree of piety which the faithful accomplish, never proceed to those lengths in iniquity which criminal and abandoned souls do.

I know it, my brethren, but I likewise know, that this indolence of heart defends us only from crimes which would cost us trouble; makes us avoid only those pleasures which we would be obliged to purchase at the expense of our tranquillity, and which the love of ease alone prevents us from enjoying. It leaves us virtuous only in the eyes of men, who confound the indolence which dreads embarrassment with the piety which flies from vice; but it does not defend us against ourselves, against a thousand illicit desires, a thousand criminal compliances, a thousand passions, more secret and less painful because shut up in the heart; from jealousies, which devour us; ambition, which domineers over us; pride, which corrupts us; a desire of pleasure, which engrosses us; an excess of self-love, which is the principle of all our conduct, and infects all our actions: that is to say, that this indolence delivers up our heart to all its weaknesses, at

the same time that it serves as a check against the most striking and tumultuous passions, and that what appears only indolence in the eyes of men, is always before God a secret ignominy and corruption.

I know, in the second place, that this love of piety, and this unction which softens the practice of religious duties, is a gift frequently refused even to holy and faithful Christians. But there are three essential differences between the faithful soul, to whom the Lord denies the sensible consolations of piety, and the lukewarm and worldly one, whom the weight of the yoke oppresses, and who is capable of enjoying the things of God.

The first is, that a faithful Christian, in spite of his repugnances, preserving a firm and solid faith, finds his state, and the exemption from guilt in which he lives, since touched by God, a thousand times more happy than that in which he lived when delivered up to his passions; and, penetrated with horror at his former excesses, he would not change his lot, or re-engage himself in his former vices, for all the pleasures of the earth. In place of which, the lukewarm and unfaithful heart, disgusted with virtue, enviously regards the pleasures and vain happiness of the world; and his disgusts being only the consequence and sufferings of his weakness and the lukewarmness of his faith, to plunge into sin begins to appear as the only resource left him from the weariness and gloominess of piety.

The second difference is, that the faithful Christian, in the midst of his disgusts and hardships, at least bears a conscience which reproaches him not with guilt. He at least is supported by the testimony of his own heart, and by a certain degree of internal peace, which, though neither warm nor very sensible, fails not, however, to establish within us a calm which we never experienced in the paths of error. On the contrary, the lukewarm and unfaithful soul, allowing himself, against the testimony of his own conscience, a thousand daily transgressions, of which he knows not the wickedness, bears always an uneasy and suspicious conscience; and being no longer sustained by love for his duties, nor the peace and testimony of his conscience, this state of agitation and weariness soon terminates in the miserable peace of sin.

The last reason is, that the disgusts of the faithful Christian being only trials, to which, for his purification, God exposes him, he supplies, in a thousand ways, the sensible consolations of virtue which he refuses him; he replaces them by a more powerful protection, by a merciful attention to remove every danger which might seduce him, and by more abundant succours of grace; for the Almighty wishes neither to lose nor discourage him; he wishes only to prove him, and make him expiate, by the afflictions and hardships of virtue, the unjust pleasures of sin. But the disgusts of an infidel soul are not trials,—they are punishments: it is not a merciful God who suspends the consolations of grace, without sus-

pending grace itself; it is not a tender father, who supplies, by the solidity of his tenderness, and by effectual assistances, the apparent rigours he is under the necessity of using: it is a severe judge, who only begins to deprive the criminal of a thousand indulgences, because the sentence of death is prepared for him. The hardships of virtue find a thousand resources in virtue itself: those of lukewarmness can find them only in the deceitful pleasures of vice.

Such, my brethren, is the inevitable lot of lukewarmness in the ways of God,—the misery of losing righteousness. Will you tell us, after this, that you wish to practise only a degree of virtue which may continue; that these great exertions of zeal cannot be supported; that it is much better not to begin so high, and by these means to accomplish the end; and that they never go far who exhaust themselves at the beginning of their journey?

I know that every excess, even in piety, comes not from the Spirit of God, which is a Spirit of wisdom and discretion; that the zeal which overturns the order of our state and duties, is not the piety which comes from above, but an illusion born in ourselves; that indiscretion is a source of false virtues; and that we often give to vanity what we think is given to truth.

But I tell you from God, that, to persevere in his ways, we must give ourselves up to him without reserve; that, in order to support the fidelity due to the essential parts of our duty, we must unceasingly endeavour to weaken the passions which oppose it; and that keeping terms with these passions, under the pretext of not going too far, is to dig for ourselves a grave. I tell you, that it is only the faithful and fervent Christians, who, not contented with shunning sin, shun also every thing which can lead to it; that it is these alone who persevere, who sustain themselves, who honour piety by a supported, equal, and uniform conduct; and, on the contrary, it is lukewarm and relaxed souls, who have begun their penitence by limiting their piety, and accommodating it to the pleasures and maxims of the world; it is these souls who draw back, who belie themselves, and who dishonour piety, by their inconstancy and inequality of conduct, by a life sometimes blended with virtue and retirement, and at others devoted to the world and weaknesses. And I appeal to yourselves, my brethren, if, when you see in the world a person relax from his first fervour; gradually mingle himself in the pleasures and societies he had lately so scrupulously and severely denied himself; insensibly abate his love of retirement, his modesty, circumspection, prayers, and exactitude to fulfil his religious duties,—you say not to yourselves, that he is not far from returning to what he formerly was? Are not these relaxations regarded by you as a prelude to his ruin; and that virtue is nearly extinct, when once you see it weakened? Do you even require so much to arouse your censures and malicious presages against piety? Unjust that you are, you condemn

a cold and unfaithful virtue, while you condemn us for requiring of you a virtue faithful and fervent! You pretend, that, in order to continue, you must begin with moderation, while you prophesy that a total departure from virtue is not far distant, when once it begins to be followed with coolness and negligence!

From a relaxation alone, therefore, we are to dread a return to our former courses, and a departure from virtue. It is not by giving ourselves up without reserve to God, that we become disgusted with piety and are forsaken by him. The way to come gloriously off in battle, is not by sparing, but overcoming the enemy. There is no dread, therefore, of doing too much, lest we should be unable to support it; on the contrary, to merit the grace necessary to our support, we ought, from the first, to leave nothing undone. What illusion, my brethren! We dread zeal, as dangerous to perseverance; and it is zeal alone which can obtain it. We fix ourselves in a lukewarm and commodious life, as the only one which can subsist; and it is the only one which proves false. We shun fidelity, as the rock of piety; and piety without fidelity is never far from shipwreck.

It is thus that lukewarmness removes from the infidel soul the grace of protection; of which the absence depriving our faith of all its strength, and the yoke of Jesus Christ of all its consolations, leaves us in a state of imbecility, that, to be lost, innocence requires only to be attacked. But if the loss of righteousness is inevitable on the part of grace which is withdrawn, it is still more so on account of the passions which are fortified within us.

PART II.—What renders vigilance so necessary to Christian piety, is, that all the passions which oppose themselves in us to the law of God, only die, as I may say, with us. We undoubtedly are able to weaken them, by the assistance of grace, and a fervent and lively faith; but the roots always continue in the heart; we always carry within us the principles of the same errors our tears have effaced. Guilt may be extinguished in our hearts; but sin, as the apostle says, that is to say, the corrupted inclinations which have formed our guilt, inhabits and lives there still. And that fund of corruption which removed us so far from God, is still left us in our penitence, to serve as a continual exercise to virtue; to render us, by the continual occasions of combat it raises up for us, more worthy of an eternal crown; to humble our pride; to keep us in remembrance, that the duration of our present life is a time of war and danger; and, by a destiny inevitable to our nature, that there is only one step between relaxation and guilt.

It is true that the grace of Jesus Christ is given us to repress these corrupted inclinations which survive our conversion; but in a state of lukewarmness, as I have already said, grace offer-

ing us only common succours, and the grace of protection, of which we are become unworthy, being either more rare, or entirely suspended, it is evident that the passions must acquire new strength. But I say, that not only the passions are strengthened in a lukewarm and infidel life, because the grace of protection which checked them is more rare, but likewise by the state itself of relaxation and coldness : for that life being only a continued indulgence of all the passions ; a simple easiness in granting, to a certain degree, every thing which flatters the appetites ; a watchfulness, even of self-love, to remove whatever might repress or restrain them ; and a perpetual usage of all things capable of inflaming them ;—it is evident, that by these means they must daily acquire new force.

In a word, my brethren, we are not to imagine, that, in pushing our indulgence for our passions only to certain lengths permitted, we appease them, as I may say ; that we allow sufficient to satisfy them, and not enough to stain our soul, or carry trouble and remorse through our conscience ; or fancy that we can ever attain a certain degree of equilibration between virtue and sin, where, on the one side, our passions are satisfied by the indulgence allowed them ; and, on the other, our conscience is tranquil, by the absence of guilt which we shun. For such is the plan adopted by the lukewarm soul : favourable to his indolence, because he equally banishes every thing, either in virtue or in sin, which can disturb him. To the passions he refuses whatever might trouble his conscience ; and to virtue, whatever might be disagreeable to or mortify his self-love : but this state of equilibrium is a perfect chimera. The passions know no limits or bounds in guilt ; how, therefore, could they possibly be restrained to those of the lukewarm soul ? Even the utmost excess cannot restrain or fix them ; how, then, could simple indulgences do it ? The more you grant, the more you deprive yourself of the power to refuse them any thing. The true secret of appeasing, is not by favouring them to a certain degree ; it is by opposing them in every thing ; every indulgence only renders them more fierce and unmanageable ; it is a little water thrown upon a great fire, which, far from extinguishing, increases its fury. Every thing which flatters the passions, renders them more keen, and diminishes the probability of being able to conquer them.

Now, such is the state of a lukewarm and unfaithful soul. It allows itself every animosity which extends not to avowed revenge ; it justifies every pleasure, in which guilt is not palpable ; it delivers itself up without reserve to every worldly desire and gratification, by which no individual, it supposes, is injured ; every omission, which seems to turn on the arbitrary duties, or but slightly interest the essential ones, it makes no scruple of ; every action of self-love, which leads not directly to guilt, it regards as nothing ; all that nicety, with regard to rank and personal fame, which

is compatible with that moderation even the world requires, it regards as a merit. Now, what happens in consequence of this? Listen, and you shall know; and I beg you will attend to the following reflections.

In the first place: all the inclinations within us, which oppose themselves to order and duty, being continually strengthened, order and duty at last find in us insurmountable difficulties; inso-much, that, to accomplish them on any essential occasion, or when required by the law of God, is like remounting against the stream of a rapid flood, where the current drags us down in spite of every effort to the contrary; or like a furious and unmanageable horse which it is necessary to stop short on the brink of a precipice. Thus your insensibility and pride are nourished to such a degree of strength, that you abandon your heart to all their impressions. Thus your care and anxiety have so fortified in your heart the desire of worldly praise, that, on any important occasion, where it would be necessary to sacrifice the vanity of its suffrages to duty, and expose yourself, for the good of your soul, to its censure and derision, you will always prefer the interests of vanity to those of truth, and the opinions of men will be much more powerful than the fear of God. Thus those anxieties with regard to fortune and advancement have rendered ambition so completely sovereign of your heart, that, in any delicate conjuncture, where the destruction of a rival would be necessary toward your own elevation, you will never hesitate, but will sacrifice your conscience to your fortune, and be unjust toward your brother, lest you fail toward yourself. Thus, in a word, to avoid a long detail, those suspicious attachments, loose conversations, ridiculous compliances, and desires of pleasing, too much attended to, have filled you with dispositions so nearly allied to guilt and debauchery, that you are no longer capable of resistance against any of their attacks; the corruption, prepared by the whole train of your past actions, will be lighted up in an instant; your weakness will overcome your reflection; your heart will go against glory, duty, and yourself. We cannot long continue faithful, when we find in ourselves so many dispositions to be otherwise.

Thus you will yourself be surprised at your own weakness: you will ask at yourself, what are become of all those dispositions of modesty and virtue, which formerly inspired you with such horror at sin? You no longer will know yourself: but this state of guilt will gradually appear less frightful to you. The heart soon justifies to itself whatever pleases it: whatever is agreeable to us, does not long alarm us; and to the misery of a departure from virtue, you will add the misery of ignorance and security.

Such is the inevitable lot of a lukewarm and unfaithful life: passions which we have too much indulged. "Young lions," says a prophet, which "have been nourished without precaution, at

length grow up, and devour the careless hand which has even assisted to strengthen and render them formidable." The passions, arrived to a certain point, gain a complete ascendancy: in vain you then try to regain yourself. The time is past; you have fostered the profane fire in your heart, it must at last break out; you have nourished the venom within you, it must now spread and gain upon you, and the time is past for any application to medicine; you should have taken it in time. At the commencement the disease was not irremediable; you have allowed it to strengthen, you have irritated it by every thing which could inflame and render it incurable; it must now be conqueror, and you the victim of your own indiscretion and indulgence.

Do you not likewise say, my brethren, that you have the best intentions in the world; that you wish you could act much better than you do; and though you have the sincerest desires for salvation, yet a thousand conjunctures happen in life, where we forget all our good intentions, and must be saints to resist their impressions? This is exactly what we tell you; that in spite of all your pretended good intentions, if you do not fly, struggle, watch, pray, and continually take the command over yourself, a thousand occasions will occur where you will no longer be master of your own weakness. This is what we tell you, that nothing but a mortified and watchful life can place us beyond the reach of temptation and danger; that it is ridiculous to suppose we shall continue faithful in those moments when violently attacked, when we bear a heart weakened, wavering, and already on the verge of falling; that none but the house built upon a rock can resist the winds and the tempest; and, in a word, that we must be holy, and firmly established in virtue, to live free from guilt.

And when I say that we must be holy,—alas! my brethren, the most faithful and fervent Christians, with every inclination mortified as far as the frailty of our nature will permit; imaginations purified by prayer, and minds nourished in virtue and meditation on the law of God, frequently find themselves in such terrible situations that their hearts sink within them; their imaginations become troubled and deranged; they see themselves in those melancholy agitations where they float for a long time between victory and death; and, like a vessel struggling against the waves, in the midst of an enraged ocean, they can only look for safety from the Almighty commander of winds and tempests. And you, with a heart already half seduced, with inclinations at least bordering upon guilt, would wish your weakness to be proof against all attacks, and the most powerful temptations to find you always tranquil and inaccessible? You would wish, with your lukewarm, sensual, and worldly morals, that on these occasions your soul should be gifted with that strength and faith which even the most tender and watchful piety sometimes cannot give?

You would wish passions flattered, nourished, and strengthened, to remain tractable, quiet, and cold, in the presence of objects most capable of lighting them up? Those which, after years of austerities, and a life devoted to prayer and watching, awake sometimes in a moment, far even from danger, and, by melancholy examples, make the most upright feel that we never should be off our guard, and that the highest point of virtue is sometimes the instant which precedes a departure from and total loss of it. Such is our lot, my brethren, to be quick-sighted only toward the dangers which regard our fortune or our life, and not even to know those which threaten our salvation. But let us undeceive ourselves. To shun guilt, something more is required than the lukewarmness and indolence of virtue; and vigilance is the only mean left us by our Saviour to preserve our innocence.—First reflection.

A second reflection to be made on this truth is, that the passions, daily strengthening in a lukewarm and infidel life, not only duty finds in us insurmountable repugnancies, but guilt likewise, as I may say, polishes itself; and at last we feel no more repugnance to it than to the simplest fault. Indeed, by these daily infidelities inseparable from lukewarmness, the heart, as if by insensible steps, at last arrives at those dangerous limits, which, by a single line, separate life from death, guilt from innocence, and makes the final step almost without perceiving it; only a little way remaining for him to go, and having no occasion for any new exertion to accomplish it, he does not believe he has exceeded his former bounds. He had replenished himself with dispositions so nearly bordering on guilt, that he has brought forth iniquity without pain, repugnance, visible movement, or even perceiving it himself. Similar to a dying person, whom the languors of a long and painful malady have so attenuated, and so nearly approached to his end, that the departing sigh resembles those which have preceded it, costs him no greater effort than the others, and even leaves the spectators uncertain whether his last moment is come, or if he still breathes. And this is what renders the state of a lukewarm and infidel soul still more dangerous, that they are commonly dead to grace, without knowing it themselves; they become enemies to God, while they still live with him as with a friend; they are still in the commerce of holy things, when they have lost the grace which entitles us to approach them.

Thus, let those souls whom this Discourse regards, no longer deceive themselves, because they believe to have hitherto avoided a gross departure from virtue: their state before God is undoubtedly only more dangerous. Perhaps the most formidable danger of lukewarmness is, that, already dead in the sight of God, they live, in their opinion, without any visible or marked guilt; that they compose themselves tranquilly in death, depending on an

appearance of life which comforts them; that to the danger of their situation they add a false peace, which confirms them in this path of illusion and darkness; it is, in a word, that the Lord, by terrible and secret judgments, strikes them with blindness, and punishes the corruption of their heart by permitting them to be ignorant of it. A gross fall from virtue, if I may venture to say so, would to them be a mark of the goodness and mercy of God. They would then at least open their eyes; naked and manifest guilt would then carry trouble, vexation, and uneasiness through their conscience; the disease at last discovered, would perhaps induce them to have recourse to the remedy; in place of which, this life, apparently regular, composes and calms them, renders useless the example of fervent Christians, persuades them that this great fervour is unnecessary; that it is much more the effect of temperament than of grace; that it is an emotion of zeal, rather than of duty; and makes them listen to, as vain exaggerations, all that we say with regard to a lukewarm and infidel life.—Second reflection.

In a word, the last reflection to be made on this great truth, is, that such is the nature of our heart, always to remain much below what it at first proposed. A thousand times we have formed pious resolutions; we have projected to carry to a certain point the detail of our duties and conduct, but the execution has always much diminished from the ardour of our projects, and has rested at a degree much below the one to which we wished to raise ourselves. Thus, the lukewarm Christian, proposing to himself no higher point of virtue than to shun guilt, looking precisely to precept, that is to say, to that rigorous and precise point of the law, immediately below which is prevarication and death, he infallibly rests below, and never reaches that essential point which he had proposed to himself. It is, therefore, an incontestible maxim, that we must undertake much to execute little, and look very high to attain at least the middle. Now, this maxim, so sure with regard even to the most just, is much more so with respect to the lukewarm and infidel soul; for coldness more strongly binding all his ties, and augmenting the weight of his corruption and misery, it is principally him who ought to take his grand flight, in order to attain at least the lowest degree; and, in his counsels with himself, propose perfection, if he wishes to rest even at the observance of precept. Above all, it is to him we may truly say, that by settling in his mind only to shun guilt, loaded as he is with the weight of his coldness and infidelities, he will always alight at a place very distant from the one he expected to reach; and the line of guilt being immediately below this commodious and sensual virtue, the very same efforts he made, as he thought, to shun it, will only serve to conduct him to it. These are reasons, drawn entirely from the

weakness the strengthened passions leave to the lukewarm and infidel soul, and which inevitably lead it to ruin.

The only reason, however, you allege to us for persevering in this dangerous state, is, that you are weak, and totally unable to support a more retired, limited, mortified, and perfect manner of life. But surely, it is because you are weak, that is to say, full of disgust for virtue, of love for the world, and of subjection to your appetites, that a retired and mortified life becomes indispensable. It is because you are weak, that with more caution you ought to shun every danger; take a greater command over yourself; pray, watch, refuse yourself every improper gratification, and attain even to holy excesses of zeal and fervour, in order to accomplish a barrier against your weakness. You are weak? And, because you are weak, you think you are entitled to expose yourself more than another; to dread danger less; with more tranquillity and indifference to neglect the necessary remedies; to allow more to your appetites; to preserve a stronger attachment to the world, and every thing which can corrupt the heart? What illusion! You make your weakness, then, the title of your security? In the necessities you have to watch and pray, you find, then, the privilege of dispensing with them! And since, whence is it that the sick are authorized to allow themselves greater excesses, and make use of less precaution, than those who enjoy a perfect health? Privation has always been the way of the weak and infirm; and to allege your weakness as a right of dispensation from a more fervent and Christian life, is like enumerating your complaints, in order to persuade us that you have no occasion for medicine.—Second reason, drawn from the passions, which are strengthened in a state of lukewarmness, and which proves that this state always ends in a departure from virtue and the loss of righteousness.

To all these reasons I should add a third, drawn from the external succours of religion necessary to the support of piety; and which become useless to the lukewarm and infidel soul.

The holy sacrament not only becomes of no utility, but even dangerous to him; either by the coldness with which he approaches it, or by the vain confidence with which it inspires him: it is no longer a resource for him; it has lost its effect: like medicines too frequently made use of, it amuses his languor, but cannot cure him: it is like the food of the strong and healthy, which, so far from re-establishing, completes the ruin of the weak stomach: it is the breath of the Holy Spirit, which, unable to re-illuminate the still smoking spark, entirely extinguishes it; that is to say, that the grace of the holy sacrament, received in a lukewarm and infidel heart, no longer operating there an increase of life and strength, never fails, sooner or later, to operate the death and condemnation attached to the abuse of these divine remedies.

Prayer, that channel of grace; that nourishment to a faithful heart; that sweetener of piety; that refuge against all attacks of

the enemy; that cry of an affected soul, which renders the Lord so attentive to his necessities:—prayer, without which the Almighty no longer makes himself felt within us; without which we no longer know our father; we no longer render thanks to our benefactor, nor appease our judge; we expose no longer our wounds to our physician; we live without God in the world:—prayer, in a word, so necessary to the most established virtue, to the lukewarm soul is no longer but the wearisome occupation of a distracted mind; of a heart dry, and shared between a thousand foreign affections. He no longer experiences that love, those consolations, which are the fruit of a fervent and faithful life: he no longer, as if with a new light, sees the holy truths, which confirm the soul in its contempt for the world and love for the things of heaven; and which, after its departure hence, make it regard, with new disgust, every thing which foolish man admires: he leaves it, no longer filled with that lively faith which reckons as nothing all the obstacles and disgusts of virtue, and with a holy zeal devours all its sorrows: he no longer feels, after it, more love for his duty and horror at the world; more determination to fly from its dangers; more light to know its nothingness and misery, and strength to hate and struggle with himself; more terror for the judgments of God, and compunction for his own weaknesses: he leaves it only more fatigued than before with virtue; more filled with the phantoms of the world, which, in the moment when at the feet of the Almighty, have, it appears, agitated more briskly his imagination, blasted and stained by all those images; more happy, by being quit of a burdensome duty, where he has experienced nothing so agreeable as the pleasure of finding it over; more eager, by amusements and infidelities, to supply this moment of weariness and pain; in a word, more distant from God, whom he has irritated by the infidelity and irreverence of his prayer. Such, my brethren, is the fruit which he reaps from it. In a word, all the external duties of religion, which support and rouse piety, are no longer to the lukewarm Christian but dead and inanimate customs where his heart is not; where there is more of habit than of love or spirit of piety; and where the only disposition he brings is the weariness and languor of always doing the same thing.

Thus, my brethren, the grace of this soul, being continually attacked and weakened, either by the practices of the world, which it allows itself, or by those of piety, which it abuses; either by sensual objects, which nourish its corruption, or by those of religion, which increase its disgusts; either by the pleasures which enervate it, or by the duties which fatigue it; all uniting to make it bend toward ruin, and nothing supporting it;—alas! what fate can it promise itself? Can the lamp without oil long continue to give light? The tree which no longer draws nourishment from the earth, can it fail to wither and be devoted

to the fire? Now, such is the situation of the lukewarm Christian: entirely delivered up to himself, nothing supports him; surrounded by weariness and disgusts, nothing reanimates him; full of weakness and of languor, nothing protects him: every consolation of the just soul is to him an increase of languor; every thing³ which gives support to a faithful Christian, disgusts and overpowers him; whatever renders the yoke more easy to others, makes him more burdensome; and the succours of piety are no longer but his fatigues or his crimes. Now, in this state, O my God! almost abandoned by thy grace, tired of thy yoke, disgusted with himself, as well as with virtue, weakened by diseases and their remedies, staggering at every step, a breath overturns him; he himself leans toward his fall, without any additional or foreign impression; and, to see him fall, there is no necessity for his being attacked.

These are the reasons which prove the certainty of the loss of righteousness in a lukewarm and infidel life. But are so many proofs necessary, my dear hearer, when your own misfortunes have so sadly instructed you? Remember from whence you are fallen, as the Holy Spirit of God formerly said to a lukewarm and infidel soul. Remount to the source of the disorders under which you still bend. You will find it in the negligence and infidelity of which we speak. A birth of passion too feebly rejected, an occasion of danger too much frequented, practices of piety too frequently omitted or despised, convenience too sensually sought after, desires of pleasing too much listened to, dangerous writings too little avoided;—the source is almost imperceptible. The torrent of iniquity proceeding from it has completely inundated the capacity of your soul. It was only a spark which has lighted up this great conflagration; it was a morsel of leaven, which, in the end, has fermented and corrupted the whole mass. You never believed it possible that you could be what at present you are. Whatever was said to you on this subject, you heard as exaggerations of zeal and spirituality. You would then have come forward of your own accord, in order to clear yourself of certain steps, for which you now feel not the smallest remorse. Remember from whence you are fallen; consider the depth of the abyss into which you are plunged: it is relaxation and slight infidelities which by degrees have conducted you to it. Once more, remember it, and see if that can be denominated a sure or durable state, which has brought you to the precipice.

Such is the usual artifice of Satan. He never at first proposes guilt; that would frighten away his prey, and remove it beyond the reach of his surprises. Too well he knows the road for entering the heart; he knows that he must gradually confirm the timid conscience against the horror of guilt, and propose nothing at first but honest purposes and certain limits in pleasure. It is not boldly, like the lion, he at first attacks; it is warily like the serpent:

he does not lead you straight to the gulf; he conducts you there by winding paths. No, my brethren, crimes are never the first essays of the heart. David was imprudent and slothful, before he became an adulterer; Solomon had allowed himself to be seduced and enervated by the delights and magnificence of royalty, before he publicly appeared in the midst of lewd women; Judas had given up his heart to money, before he put a price upon his Master; Peter was presumptuous, before he renounced the truth. Vice has its progress as well as virtue. As the day, says the prophet, instructs the day, thus the night gives melancholy lessons to the night; and there is not much difference between a state which suspends all the grace of protection, fortifies all the passions, renders useless all the succours of piety, and a state where it is entirely extinct.

What, then, my dear hearer, can confirm or comfort you in this life of negligence and infidelity? Is it that exemption from guilt you have hitherto preserved? But I have shown you, that it is either guilt itself, or that it will not fail soon to lead you to it. Is it the love of ease? But in that you enjoy neither the pleasures of the world nor the consolations of virtue. Is it the assurance that the Almighty requires no more of you? But how can the lukewarm and unfaithful soul satisfy or please him, when from his mouth he rejects him? Is it the irregularity in which the generality of men live, and who carry it to an excess which you avoid? But their fate is perhaps less to be mourned, and less desperate than your own: they at least know their malady, while you regard your own as a state of perfect health. Is it the dread of being unable to support a more mortified, watchful, and Christian life? But since you have hitherto been able to support some remains of virtue and innocence, without the comfort and consolations of grace, and in spite of the wearinesses and disgusts which your lukewarmness has spread through all your duties, what will it be when the Spirit of God shall soften your yoke, and when a more fervent and faithful life shall have restored to you all the grace and consolation of which your lukewarmness has deprived you? Piety is never sad or insupportable but when it is cold and unfaithful.

Rise, then, says a prophet, wicked and slothful soul; break the fatal charm which lulls and chains thee to thine indolence. The Lord, whom thou believest to serve, because thou dost not openly affront him, is not the God of the wicked, but of the faithful; he is not the rewarder of idleness and sloth, but of tears, watchings, and combats: he establisheth not in his abode, and in his everlasting city, the useless, but the vigilant and laborious servant; and his kingdom, says the apostle, is not of flesh and blood, that is to say, of an unworthy effeminacy and a life devoted to the appetites, but the strength and virtue of God; namely, a continued vigilance, a generous sacrifice of all our inclinations, a constant contempt of all things which pass away, and a tender

and ardent desire for those invisible blessings which fade not nor ever pass away: which may God, in his infinite mercy, grant to all assembled here. Amen.

SERMON VI.

ON EVIL-SPEAKING.

“ But Jesus did not commit himself unto them; because he knew all men.”

JOHN ii. 24.

THESE were the same Pharisees, who a little before had been decrying to the people the actions of Jesus Christ, and, endeavouring to poison the purity and sanctity of his words, now make a show of believing in him, and classing themselves among his disciples. And such is the character of the evil-speaker; under the mask of esteem, and the flattering expressions of friendship, to conceal the keen invectives of slander.

Now, although this be, perhaps, the only vice which no circumstance can palliate, it is the one we are most ingenious in concealing from ourselves, and to which piety and the world at present show the greatest indulgence. Not that the character of a slanderer is not equally odious to men, as, according to the expression of the Holy Spirit, it is abominable in the sight of God; but in that number they comprise only particular defamers, of blacker and more avowed malignity, who deal their blows indiscriminately, and without art; and who, with sufficient malice to censure, are destitute of the wit necessary to please. Now, the defamers of that description are more rare; and had we only them to address ourselves to, it would be sufficient at present to point out, how much unworthy of reason and religion this vice is, to inspire with a just detestation of it those who feel themselves guilty.

But there is another description of slanderers who condemn the vice, yet allow themselves the practice of it; who, without regard, defame their brethren, yet applaud themselves for circumspection and moderation; who carry the sting to the heart, but, because it is more brilliant and piercing, perceive not the wound it has made. Now, defamers of this character are every where to be found: the world is filled with them; even the holy asylums are not free: this vice is the bond of union to the assemblies of sinners; it often finds

its way even into the society of the just; and we may safely say, that all are tainted with it; and there is not one who has preserved his tongue pure, and his lips undefiled.

It is proper, then, my brethren, to expose at present the illusion of the pretexts made use of every day in the world, in justification of this vice, and to attack it in the circumstances where you believe it most innocent; for, were I to describe it to you, in general, with all its meanness, cruelty, and irreparability, you would no longer apply it to yourselves; and, far from inspiring you with horror at it, I should be necessary toward your persuasion that you are free from its guilt.

Now, what are the pretexts, which, in your eyes, soften or justify the vice of evil-speaking? In the first place, it is the lightness of the faults you censure: we persuade ourselves, that as it is not a matter of culpability, there cannot likewise be much harm in censuring it. Secondly, it is the public notoriety, by which, those to whom we speak being already informed of what is reprehensible in our brother, no loss of reputation can be the consequence of our discourses. Lastly, zeal for truth and the glory of God, which does not permit us to be silent on those disorders which dishonour him. Now, to these three pretexts, let us oppose three incontrovertible truths. To the pretext of the lightness of the faults; that the more the faults which you censure are light, the more is the slander unjust:—first truth. To the pretext of the public notoriety; that the more the faults of our brethren are known, the more cruel is the slander which censures them:—second truth. To the pretext of zeal; that the same charity, which, in piety, makes us hate sinners, makes us likewise cover the multitude of their faults:—last truth.

PART I.—The tongue, says the apostle James, is a devouring fire, a world of iniquity, an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. And, behold, what I would have applied to the tongue of the evil-speaker, had I undertaken to give you a just and natural idea of all the enormity of this vice,—I would have said, that the tongue of the slanderer is a devouring fire, which tarnishes whatever it touches; which exercises its fury on the good grain, equally as on the chaff; on the profane, as on the sacred; which, wherever it passes, leaves only desolation and ruin; digs even into the bowels of the earth, and fixes itself on things the most hidden; turns into vile ashes, what, only a moment before, had appeared to us so precious and brilliant; acts with more violence and danger than ever, in the time when it was apparently smothered up and almost extinct; which blackens what it cannot consume, and sometimes sparkles and delights before it destroys. I would have told you, that evil-speaking is an assemblage of iniquity; a secret pride, which discovers to us the mote in our brother's eye, but hides the beam which is in our own; a mean envy, which, hurt at the talents

or prosperity of others, makes them the subject of its censures, and studies to dim the splendour of whatever outshines itself; a disguised hatred, which sheds, in its speeches, the hidden venom of the heart; an unworthy duplicity, which praises to the face, and tears to pieces behind the back; a shameful levity, which has no command over itself or words, and often sacrifices both fortune and comfort to the imprudence of an amusing conversation; a deliberate barbarity, which goes to pierce your absent brother; a scandal, where you become a subject of shame and sin to those who listen to you; an injustice, where you ravish from your brother what is dearest to him. I would have said, that slander is a restless evil, which disturbs society, spreads dissension through cities and countries, disunites the strictest friendships, is the source of hatred and revenge, fills, wherever it enters, with disturbances and confusion, and every where is an enemy to peace, comfort, and Christian good-breeding. Lastly, I would have added, that it is an evil full of deadly poison; whatever flows from it is infected, and poisons whatever it approaches; that even its praises are enpoisoned, its applauses malicious, its silence criminal, its gestures, motions, and looks, have all their venom, and spread it each in their way.

Behold, what in this Discourse it would have been my duty, more at large, to have exposed to your view, had I not proposed only to paint to you the vileness of the vice, which I am now going to combat; but, as I have already said, these are only general invectives, which none apply to themselves. The more odious the vice is represented, the less do you perceive yourselves concerned in it; and though you acknowledge the principle, you make no use of it in the regulation of your manners; because, in these general paintings, we always find features which resemble us not. I wish, therefore, to confine myself at present to the single object of making you feel all the injustice of that description of slander which you think the most innocent; and, lest you should not feel yourselves connected with what I shall say, I shall attack it only in the pretexts which you continually employ in its justification.

Now, the first pretext which authorizes in the world almost all the defamations, and is the cause that our conversations are now continual censures upon our brethren, is the pretended insignificance of the vices we expose to view. We would not wish to tarnish a man of character, or ruin his fortune, by dishonouring him in the world; to stain the principles of a woman's conduct, by entering into the essential points of it: that would be too infamous and mean. But upon a thousand faults, which lead our judgment to believe them capable of all the rest; to inspire the minds of those who listen to us with a thousand suspicions which point out what we dare not say; to make satirical remarks, which discover a mystery, where no person before had perceived the

least intention of concealment; by poisonous interpretations, to give an air of ridicule to manners which had hitherto escaped observation; to let every thing, on certain points, be clearly understood, while protesting that they are incapable themselves of cunning or deceit,—is what the world makes little scruple of; and though the motives, the circumstances, and the effects of these discourses be highly criminal, yet gaiety and liveliness excuse their malignity, to those who listen to us, and conceal from ourselves their atrocity.

I say, in the first place, the motives. I know that it is, above all, by the innocency of the intention that they pretend to justify themselves; that you continually say, that your design is not to tarnish the reputation of your brother, but innocently to divert yourselves with faults which do not dishonour him in the eyes of the world. You, my dear hearer, to divert yourself with his faults! But what is that cruel pleasure, which carries sorrow and bitterness to the heart of your brother? Where is the innocency of an amusement, whose source springs from vices which ought to inspire you with compassion and grief? If Jesus Christ forbid us in the gospel to invigorate the languors of conversation by idle words, shall it be more permitted to you to enliven it by derisions and censures? If the law curse him who uncovers the nakedness of his relations, shall you, who add raillery and insult to the discovery, be more protected from that malediction? If whoever call his brother fool, be worthy, according to Jesus Christ, of eternal fire, shall he who renders him the contempt and laughing-stock of a profane assembly, escape the same punishment? You, to amuse yourself with his faults? But does charity delight in evil? Is that rejoicing in the Lord, as commanded by the apostle? If you love your brother as yourself, can you delight in what afflicts him? Ah! the church formerly held in horror the exhibitions of gladiators, and denied that believers, brought up in the tenderness and benignity of Jesus Christ, could innocently feast their eyes with the blood and death of these unfortunate slaves, or form a harmless recreation of so inhuman a pleasure. But you renew more detestable shows, to enliven your languor: you bring upon the stage, not infamous wretches devoted to death, but members of Jesus Christ, your brethren; and there you entertain the spectators with wounds which you inflict on persons rendered sacred by baptism.

Is it then necessary that your brother should suffer, to amuse you? Can you find no delight in your conversation, unless his blood, as I may say, is furnished toward your iniquitous pleasures? Edify each other, says St. Paul, by words of peace and charity; relate the wonders of God toward the just, the history of his mercies to sinners; recall the virtues of those who, with the sign of faith, have preceded us; make an agreeable relaxation to yourselves, in reciting the pious examples of your brethren

with whom you live; with a religious joy, speak of the victories of faith, of the aggrandisement of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, of the establishment of truth, and the extinction of error, of the favours which Jesus Christ bestows on his church, by raising up in it faithful pastors, enlightened members, and religious princes; animate yourselves to virtue, by contemplating the little solidity of the world, the emptiness of pleasures, and the unhappiness of sinners, who yield themselves up to their unruly passions. Are these grand objects not worthy the delight of Christians? It was thus, however, that the first believers rejoiced in the Lord, and, from the sweets of their conversations, formed one of the most holy consolations to their temporal calamities. It is the heart, my brethren, which decides upon our pleasures: a corrupted heart feels no delight but in what recalls to him the image of his vices: innocent delights are only suitable to virtue.

In effect, you excuse the malignity of your censures by the innocency of your intentions. But fathom the secret of your heart: whence comes it that your sarcasms are always pointed to such an individual, and that you never amuse yourself with more wit, or more agreeably, than in recalling his faults? May it not proceed from a secret jealousy? Do not his talents, fortune, credit, station, or character, hurt you more than his faults? Would you find him so fit a subject for censure, had he fewer of those qualities which exalt him above you? Would you experience such pleasure in exposing his foibles, did not the world find qualities in him both valuable and praiseworthy? Would Saul have so often repeated with such pleasure that David was only the son of Jesse, had he not considered him as a rival, more deserving than himself of the empire? Whence comes it, that the faults of all others find you more indulgent? That elsewhere you excuse every thing, but here every circumstance comes empoisoned from your mouth? Go to the source, and examine if it is not some secret root of bitterness in your heart? And can you pretend to justify, by the innocency of the intention, discourses which flow from so corrupted a principle? You maintain that it is neither from hatred nor jealousy against your brother: I wish to believe it; but in your sarcasms, may there not be motives, perhaps, still more shameful and mean? Is it not your wish to render yourself agreeable, by turning your brother into an object of contempt and ridicule? Do you not sacrifice his character to your fortune? Courts are always so filled with these adulatory and sordidly interested satires on each other! The great are to be pitied whenever they yield themselves up to unwarrantable aversions. Vices are soon found out, even in that virtue itself which displeases them.

But, after all, you do not feel yourselves guilty, you say, of all these vile motives; and that it is merely through indiscre-

tion, and levity of speech, if it sometimes happen that you defame your brethren. But is it by that you can suppose yourself more innocent? Levity and indiscretion! that vice, so unworthy of the gravity of a Christian, so distant from the seriousness and solidity of faith, and so often condemned in the gospel, can it justify another vice? What matters it to the brother whom you stab, whether it be done through indiscretion or malice? Does an arrow, unwittingly drawn, make a less dangerous or slighter wound than if sent on purpose? Is the deadly blow which you give to your brother, more slight, because it was lanced through imprudence and levity? And what signifies the innocency of the intention, when the action is a crime? But, besides, is there no criminality in indiscretion, with regard to the reputation of your brethren? In any case whatever, can more circumspection and prudence be required? Are not all the duties of Christianity comprised in that of charity? Does not all religion, as I may say, consist in that? And to be incapable of attention and care, in a point so highly essential, is it not considering, as it were, all the rest as a sport? Ah! it is here he ought to put a guard of circumspection on his tongue, weigh every word, put them together in his heart, says the sage Ecclesiasticus, and let them ripen in his mouth. Do any of these inconsiderate speeches ever escape you, against yourself? Do you ever fail in attention to what interests your honour or glory? What indefatigable cares! what exertions and industry, to make them prosper! To what lengths we see you go, to increase your interest or improve your fortune! If it ever happen that you take blame to yourself, it is always under circumstances which tend to your praise: you censure in yourself only faults which do you honour; and, in confessing your vices, you wish only to recapitulate your virtues: self-love connects every thing with yourself. Love your brother as you love yourself, and every thing will recall you to him; you will be incapable of indiscretion, where his interest is concerned, and will no longer need our instructions, in respect to what you owe to his character and glory.

But if these slanders, which you call trivial, be criminal in their motives, they are not less so in their circumstances.

In the first place, I should make you observe, that the world, familiarized with guilt, and accustomed to see the most heinous vices now become the vices of the multitude, is no longer shocked at them; denominates light, defamations which turn upon the most criminal and shameful weaknesses: suspicions of infidelity, in the sacred bond of marriage, are no longer a marked discredit or an essential stain,—they are sources of derision and pleasantry: to accuse a courtier of insincerity and double-dealing, is no attack upon his honour; it is only casting a ridicule on the protestations of sincerity with which he amuses us: to spread the suspicion of hypocrisy, in the sincerest piety,

is not an insult to God through his saints; it is a language of derision, which custom has rendered common: in a word, excepting those crimes punishable by the public authority, and which are attended with the loss of credit and property, all others seem trivial, and become the ordinary subject of conversation and of the public censure.

But let us not pursue this reflection farther. I wish to allow that your brother's faults are light: the more they are light, the more are you unjust in heightening them: the more he merits indulgence on your part, the more are we to presume in you a malignity of observation, from which nothing can escape; a natural hardness of heart, which can excuse nothing. Were the faults of your brother important, you would spare him, you say; you would find him entitled to your indulgence; politeness and religion would make your silence a duty. What! because his weaknesses are only trivial, you find him less worthy of your regard? The very circumstance which ought to make him respectable, authorizes you in making him the butt of your sarcasms? Are you not, says the apostle, become a judge of iniquitous thoughts? And your eye, is it then wicked, only because your brother is good? Besides, the faults which you censure are light; but would they appear so to you, were you to be reproached with them? When certain discourses, held in your absence, have reached your ears, and which, in fact, attacked essentially neither your honour nor probity, but only acquainted the public with some of your weaknesses, what have been your sensations? My God! Then it was that you magnified every thing; that every circumstance appeared important to you; that, not satisfied with exaggerating the malice of the words, you raked up the secret of the intention, and hoped to find motives still more odious than the discourses. In vain you are told, that these are not reproaches which essentially interest you, and at the worst cannot disgrace you: you think yourselves insulted; you mention them with bitter complaints; you blaze out, and are no longer masters of your resentment; and whilst all the world blames the excess of your sensibility, you alone obstinately persist in the belief of its being a serious affair, and that your honour is interested in it. Make use, then, of this rule in the faults which you publish of your brother: apply the offence to yourselves: every thing is light which is against him; but with regard to what touches you, the smallest circumstance appears important to your pride, and worthy of all your resentment.

Lastly. The vices which you censure are light; but do you add nothing of your own to them? Do you faithfully exhibit them as they are? In their relation, do you never mingle the malignity of your own conjectures? Do you not place them in a point of view different from their natural state? Do you not embellish your tale? And, in order to make the hero of

your ridicule agreeable, do you not fashion him to the wish of the company, and not such as in reality he is? Do you never accompany your speeches with certain gestures, which allow all to be understood; with certain expressions which open the minds of your hearers to a thousand suspicions equally rash as dishonourable? Even with a certain silence, which permits more to be imagined than any thing you could have possibly said? For, how difficult is it to confine ourselves to the bounds of truth, when we are no longer within those of charity! The more what we censure is light, the more is calumny to be dreaded; we must embellish, to attract attention; and we become calumniators, where we did not suppose ourselves even censurers.

Behold the circumstances which regard you; but if, on their account, the slanders which you think light, be highly criminal, will they be less so with respect to the individuals whom they attack?

In the first place, it is a person, perhaps of a sex, to whom, especially on certain points, the slightest stains are important; to whom it is a dishonour to be publicly spoken of; to whom raillery becomes an insult, and every suspicion an accusation; in a word, a person, whom not to praise, becomes an outrage and a disgrace to their station. Thus St. Paul would have every woman to be adorned with bashfulness and modesty; that is to say, he would wish those virtues to be as conspicuous in them as the ornaments with which they are covered; and the highest eulogy which the Holy Spirit makes on Judith, after speaking of her beauty, youth, and great wealth, is, that in all Israel not a person was to be found who had aspersed her conduct, and that her reputation corresponded with her virtue.

Secondly. Your censures are perhaps pointed toward your superiors; or against those whom Providence has established above you, and to whom the law of God commands you to render that respect and submission to which they are entitled. For the pride which hates inferiority, always recompenses itself by finding out weaknesses and foibles in those to whom it is under the necessity of yielding obedience; the more they are exalted, the more they are exposed to our censures. Malignity is even more quick-sighted in regard to their errors; nothing in their actions is pardoned; the very persons most loaded with their kindnesses, or most honoured by their familiarity, are frequently those who most openly publish their imperfections and vices; and besides violating the sacred duty of respect, they likewise render themselves guilty of the mean and shameful crime of ingratitude.

Thirdly. It is a person, perhaps consecrated to God, and established in the church, whom you censure; who, engaged by the sanctity of his vocation, to more exemplary, pure, and irre-

proachable manners, finds himself stained and dishonoured by censures which would not affect the reputation of persons of the world. Thus the Lord, in the Scriptures, curseth those who shall even meddle with his anointed. Nevertheless, the traits of slander are never more animated, more brilliant, or more applauded in the world, than when directed against the ministers of his word. The world, so indulgent to itself, seems to have preserved its severity only on their account; and for them it has eyes more censorious, and a tongue more empoisoned, than for the rest of men. It is true, O my God! that our conversation amongst the people is not always holy, and free from reproach; that we frequently adopt the manners, luxury, indolence, idleness, and pleasures of the world, against which we ought to struggle; that we hold out to believers more examples of pride and negligence than of virtue; that we are more jealous of pre-eminence than of the duties of our calling; and that it is difficult for the world to honour a character which we ourselves disgrace. But, as I have often said, my brethren, our infidelities ought rather to be the subject of your tears than of your pleasantry and censures. God generally punishes the disorders of the people by the corruption of the priests; and the most dreadful scourge with which he strikes kingdoms and empires, is that of not raising up in them venerable pastors, and zealous ministers, who may stem the torrent of dissipation; it is that of permitting faith and religion to become weakened, even amongst those who are its defenders and depositaries; that the light, which was meant to instruct you, should be changed into darkness; that the co-operators in your salvation should assist, by their example, toward your destruction; that even from the sanctuary, from whence ought to proceed only the good savour of Jesus Christ, there should issue a smell of death and scandal; and, in a word, that abominations should find their way even into the holy place. But what alteration does the relaxation of our manners make in the sanctity of the vocation which consecrates us? Are the sacred vases which serve on the altar, though composed of a mean metal, less worthy of your respect? And even granting the minister may merit your contempt, would you be less sacrilegious in not respecting his ministry?

What shall I say? Your detractions and censures are perhaps directed against persons who make a public profession of piety, and whose virtue your hearers formerly respected. You then persuade them that they had been too credulous; you authorize them to believe, that few worthy and intrinsically good characters are to be found on the earth; that all those held out as such, when narrowly examined, are like the rest of men: you confirm the prejudices of the world against virtue, and give fresh credit to those discourses, so usual, and so injurious to religion, with regard to the piety of the servants of Jesus Christ. Now, do all these appear so very light to you? Ah, my brethren! the just on this

earth are like the holy ark, in the midst of which the Lord dwells, and any contempt or insult to which, he most rigorously avenges. They may stagger in their road, like the ark of Israel, while conducting in triumph to Jerusalem, for the purest and most shining virtue has its spots and eclipses, and even the most solid cannot always equally support itself; but the Lord is incensed, when rash and impure hands, like those of Uzziah, shall venture to put them right; and scarcely have they touched them, when they are smote by his wrath. He takes to himself the slightest insults with which they dishonour his servants, and he cannot endure that virtue, which has found admirers, even amongst tyrants and the most barbarous nations, should frequently, among believers, find only censures and derisions. Thus the little children of Israel were devoured on the spot, for having mocked the small number of hairs of the man of God; nevertheless, these were only the puerile indiscretions so pardonable at their age. Fire from heaven fell upon the officer of the impious Ahaziah, and in a moment consumed him for having in derision called Elijah the man of God; nevertheless, it was a courtier, from whom little regard might be expected for the austerity and simplicity of a prophet, or for the virtue of a man, rustic in his appearance, and hateful to his master. Michal was struck with barrenness, for having too harshly censured the holy excesses of joy and piety of David before the altar; nevertheless, it proceeded merely from female delicacy. But to meddle with those who serve the Lord, is, according to the Scripture, to meddle with the apple of your eye. He invisibly curses those rash censures on piety; and though he may not strike them, as formerly, with instant death, yet he marks on their forehead, from this life forward, the stamp of reprobation, and denies to themselves that precious gift of sanctity and grace which they had despised in others. Nevertheless, it is the upright who are now become the general butt of the malignity of public discourses; and we may safely say, that virtue gives birth to more censurers in the world than vice.

I do not add, that if these slanders, which you term light, be highly criminal in their motives and circumstances, they are still more so in their consequences; I say their consequences, my brethren, which are always irreparable. You may expiate the crime of voluptuousness by mortification and penitence; the crime of hatred by love for your enemy; the crime of ambition by a renunciation of the honours and grandeurs of the age; the crime of injustice by a restoration of what you had unjustly ravished from your brother; even the crime of impiety and free-thinking, by a religious and public respect for the worship of your fathers; but what remedy, what virtue, can repair the crime of detraction? You revealed to only one person the vices of your brother: it may be so; but that unlucky confidant will soon, in his turn, have communicated it to others, who, on their part, no longer

regarding as a secret what they have just heard, will relate it to the first comers; in the relation of it, every one will add new circumstances; each, in his way, will empoison it with some new trait; in proportion as they publish, they will increase, they will magnify it: similar to a spark of fire, says St. James, which, wafted by an impetuous wind to different places, sets in flames the forests and countries it reaches: such is the destiny of detraction.

What you had mentioned in secret was nothing at first, and seemed stifled and buried under its own ashes; but this fire lies hid for a while only in order to burst forth with redoubled fury: that nothing soon acquires reality, by passing through a diversity of mouths; every one will add to it whatever his passion, interest, disposition of mind, or his own malignity, may hold out to him as probable. The source is hardly perceptible; but, assisted in its course by a thousand foreign streams, the united torrent will overwhelm the court, city, and country; and that, which at its birth was only a private and imprudent pleasantry, but a simple idea, but a malicious conjecture, will become a serious affair, a public and formal dishonour, the subject of every conversation, and an eternal stain upon the character of your brother. Repair now, if you can, the injustice and scandal; restore to your brother the good name of which you have deprived him. Will you pretend to oppose the public inveteracy, and singly hold forth his praise? But they will regard you as a new comer, who is ignorant of what has taken place in the world; and your praises, come far too late, will serve only to draw upon him fresh satires. Now, what a multitude of crimes proceeding from only one! The sins of a whole people become yours; you defame through the mouths of all your fellow-citizens; you are likewise answerable for the guilt of all who listen to you. What penitence can expiate evils to which it can no longer afford relief? And will your tears be able to blot out what shall never be effaced from the memory of man? Again, were the scandal to end with you, your death, by terminating it, might be its expiation before God. But it is a scandal which will survive you. The shameful histories of courts never die with their heroes. Lascivious writers have transmitted to us the anecdotes and irregularities of the courts which have preceded us; and licentious authors will be found amongst us, to acquaint the ages to come with the public rumours, the scandalous circumstances, and the vices of our own.

O my God! these are of that description of sins of which we know not either the enormity or extent; but we know, that to become a stumbling-block to our brethren is to overturn for them the work of thy Son's mission, and to destroy the fruit of his labours, of his death, and of all his ministry.—Such is the illusion of the pretext which you draw from the lightness of your slanders; the motives are never innocent, the circumstances always criminal, the

consequences irreparable. Let us examine if the pretext of the public notoriety be better founded. This is what yet remains for me to investigate.

PART II.—Whence comes it that the majority of precepts are violated by those very persons who profess themselves their observers, and that we find more difficulty in bringing the world to acknowledge than to correct its transgressions? The reason is, that our ideas of duty are never taken from the ground-work of religion; that we never enter into the spirit to decide upon the letter; and that few people ascend to the principle to clear up the doubts which corruption forms on the detail of the consequences.

Now, to apply this maxim to my subject: what are the rules in the gospel which constitute slander a crime to the disciples of Jesus Christ? In the first place, it is the precept of Christian humility, which, as it ought to establish in us a profound contempt of ourselves, and to open our eyes on the endless multitude of our own wants, should at the same time shut our eyes on those of our brethren. In the second place, it is the duty of charity; that charity so recommended in the gospel; the grand precept of the law, which covers the faults it cannot correct, excuses those it cannot cover, delights not in evil, and with difficulty believes, because it never wishes it to happen. Lastly, it is the inviolable rule of justice, which, never permitting us to do to others what we would not have done to ourselves, condemns whatever goes beyond these equitable bounds. Now, the scandalous discourses which turn upon those faults which you term public, essentially wound these three rules: judge, then, of their innocency.

First. They wound the precept of Christian humility. Indeed, my dear hearer, were you feelingly touched with your own wants, says a holy father; were your own sin incessantly before your eyes, like the penitent David, you would find neither sufficient leisure nor attention to remark the faults of your brethren. The more they were public, the more would you in secret thank the Lord for averting from you that scandal; the more would you feel your gratitude awakened, when you considered, that, though fallen perhaps into the same errors, he hath not permitted them to be proclaimed from the house-tops, like those of your brother; that he hath left in obscurity your deeds of darkness; that he hath covered them, as I may say, with his wings; and that, in the eyes of men, he hath preserved for you an honour and an innocence which you have so often forfeited before him: you would tremble, while saying to yourself, that perhaps he hath spared your confusion in this world, only to render it more bitter and more durable in the next.

Such is the disposition of Christian humility toward the public disgraces of our brethren. We should often speak of

them to ourselves, but almost never to others. Thus, when the Scribes and Pharisees presented to our Saviour the woman caught in adultery, and eagerly pressed him to give his judgment, though the guilt of the sinner was public, Jesus Christ kept a profound silence; and to their insidious and pressing intreaties to explain himself, he simply answered, "He that is without sin amongst you, let him first cast a stone at her;" as if he thereby meant to make them understand, that sinners like them were little entitled to condemn, with so high a hand, the crime of that woman; and that, to acquire the right of casting a single stone at her, it was necessary the individual should himself be free from reproach. And behold, my brethren, what I wish to say to you at present: the evil conduct of such a person is become notorious. Very well; whoever of you is without sin, let him cast the first stone! If, before God, you have nothing, perhaps, more criminal, with which to reproach yourself, speak with freedom; condemn, in the severest manner, his fault, and open upon him the whole flood of your derisions and censures: it is permitted to you. Ah! you, who so hardly speak of it, you are more fortunate; but are you more innocent than he? You are thought to possess more virtue, and more regard for your duty; but God, who knoweth you, will he judge like men? Were the darkness which conceals your shame to be dissipated, would not every stone you throw recoil upon yourselves? Were an unexpected circumstance to betray your secret, would not the audacity and malicious joy with which you censure, add additional ridicule to your confusion and disgrace? Ah! it is only to artifices and arrangements, which the justice of God may disconcert and lay open in an instant, that you are indebted for this phantom of reputation on which you pride yourselves so much. You perhaps border on the moment which shall reveal your shame; and, far from blushing in secret and in silence, when faults like your own are made known, you speak of and relate them with pleasure, and you furnish the public with traits which one day it will employ against yourself. It is the threat and prediction of our Saviour: "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." You pierce your brother with the sword of the tongue; with the same weapon shall you be pierced in your turn; and though you were even exempted from the vices you so boldly censure in others, the just God will deliver you up to it.

Disgrace is the common punishment of pride. Peter, on the evening of the Lord's supper, never ceased to exaggerate the guilt of the disciple by whom his Master was to be betrayed. He was the most anxious of them all to know his name, and the most forward to express his detestation of his perfidy; and, immediately after, he falls himself into the infidelity which he had so lately blamed with such pride and confidence. Nothing

draws down upon us the wrath and curse of God so much as the malicious pleasure with which we magnify the faults of our brethren; and his mercy is incensed, that these afflicting examples, which he permits for the sole purpose of recalling us to our own weaknesses and awakening our vigilance, should flatter our pride, and excite only our derisions and censures.

You depart, then, from the rules of Christian humility, when you permit yourselves to censure the faults, however public, of your brother; but you likewise essentially wound those of charity; for charity never faileth, says the apostle. Now, if the vices of your brother be known to those who listen to you, to what purpose, then, do you repeat them afresh? What, indeed, can be your intention? To blame his conduct? But, is his shame not already sufficient? Would you wish to overwhelm an unfortunate wretch, and give the last stab to a man already pierced with a thousand mortal blows? His guilt has already been exaggerated, by so many dark and malicious hearts, who have spread it in colours sufficient to blacken it for ever. Is he not sufficiently punished? He is now worthy of your pity rather than of your censures. What then could be your intentions? To condole with him for his misfortune? But to open afresh his wounds, is a strange way of condoling with an unfortunate brother. Is true compassion thus cruel? What is it then? To justify your prophecies and former suspicions on his conduct? To tell us, that you had always believed that, sooner or later, it would come to that? But you come, then, to triumph over his misfortune? To applaud yourself for his disgrace? To claim an honour to yourself for the malignity of your judgment? Alas! what glory can it be to a Christian to have suspected his brother; to have believed him guilty before he was known as such; to have rashly foreseen his disgraces yet to come;—we, who ought not to see them, even when they have taken place? Ah! you can prophesy so justly on the destiny of others: be a prophet in your own country, and anticipate the misfortunes which threaten you. Why do you not prophesy thus for yourself,—that unless you fly from such an opportunity, and such a danger, you will perish in it;—that unless you dissolve such a connexion, the public, which already murmurs, will at last break out, and then you will find it too late to repair the scandal;—that unless you quit these excesses, into which the passions of youth and a bad education have thrown you, your affairs and fortune will be ruined beyond resource? It is on these points that you ought to exercise your art of conjecture. What madness, while surrounded one's-self with precipices, to be occupied in contemplating from afar those that threaten our brethren!

Besides, the more your brother's disgraces are public, the more affected ought you to be with the scandal which they necessarily occasion to the church; with the advantage which the wicked and the freethinkers will draw from them, to blaspheme the name of the Lord, to harden themselves in impiety, and to

persuade themselves that these are weaknesses common to all men, and that they are most virtuous who best know how to conceal them;—the more ought you to be afflicted at the occasion which these public examples of irregularity give to weak souls to fall into the same disorders; the more does charity oblige you to grieve over them; the more ought you to wish, that the remembrance of these faults should perish; that the day and the places of their revelation should be effaced from the memory of men; and, lastly, the more ought you, by your silence, to endeavour to suppress them. But the whole world speaks of them, you say: your silence will not prevent the public conversations; consequently, you make remarks in your turn. The inference is barbarous. Because you are unable to repair the disgrace, are you permitted to augment it? Because you cannot save your brother from shame, shall you assist to overwhelm him with confusion and infamy? Because almost every one casts a stone at him, shall it be less cruel in you to throw one in your turn, and to unite with those who bruise and beat him in pieces? Setting religion aside, how beautiful it is to declare for the unfortunate! How much real dignity and greatness of soul in sheltering under our protection those abandoned by the world! And, even admitting the rules of charity were not to make it a duty to us, the feelings alone of glory and humanity should in this case be sufficient.

Thirdly. You not only violate the holy rules of charity, but you are also a breaker of those of justice: for the faults of your brother are public; let it be so; but place yourself in the same situation, would you exact from him less deference, or less humanity, were your disgrace to be no longer a mystery? Would you agree, that the public example gave to your brother a right against you, which you arrogate to yourself against him? Would you accept, on his part, in justification of his malignity, an excuse which would render him still more odious, mean, and cruel? Besides, how do you know whether the author of all these reports be not an impostor? So many false reports are circulated in the world; and the malice of men renders them so credulous on the faults of others! How do you know but these calumnies have been circulated by an enemy, a rival, or some envious person, in order to ruin him, who has thwarted his passions or his fortune? Are such instances rare? Whether it be not some heedless person who has given occasion to all these discourses, by an indiscreet expression, uttered without thought, and laid hold of through malice? Are such mistakes impossible? Whether it be not a mere conjecture, originally circulated as such, and afterwards given as a truth? Are such alterations uncommon in public rumours? What could have a greater appearance of feasibility, to the children of the captivity, than the alleged misconduct of Susanna. The judges of the people of God, venerable through their age and dignity, deposed against

her; the people exclaimed against her as an adulteress; they looked upon her as the disgrace of Israel: nevertheless, it was her modesty alone which drew upon her these insults; and had not a Daniel been found in her time, who had the courage to doubt a general report, the blood of that innocent woman must have stained the whole people. And, without departing from our gospel, were not the sacrilegious reports, which held out Jesus as an impostor and Samaritan, become the public discourses of all Judea? The Priests and Pharisees, to whom the dignity of their station, and the regularity of their manners, attracted the respect and confidence of the people, strengthened them by their authority. Nevertheless, would you excuse such amongst the Jews as, on reports so common, spoke of the Saviour of the world as a seducer, who imposed on the credulity of the people? You expose yourself, then, to the guilt of having calumniated your brother: however circulated the rumours against him may be, his crime, of which you have not been a witness, is always dubious to you, and you do him an injustice, when you propagate as true, what you have only heard from public reports, often false, and always rash.

But I go farther: when your brother's disgrace should even be certain, and the malignity of reports should have added nothing to its criminality; how can you know that the very shame of seeing it so public may not have recalled him to himself; and that a sincere repentance, and tears of compunction, may not have already effaced and expiated it before God? Years are not always required for grace to triumph over a rebellious heart; there are victories which it leaves not to time; and a public disgrace often turns out the moment of mercy, which decides upon the conversion of the sinner. Now, if your brother is in a state of repentance, are you not unjust and cruel to revive faults which his penitence has effaced, and which the Lord hath ceased to remember? Do you recollect the sinful woman in the gospel? Her irregularities were notorious, seeing she had been known through the whole city as a prostitute; nevertheless, when the Pharisees reproached her with her sins, her tears and love had effaced them at the feet of our Saviour; the goodness of God had remitted her errors, yet the malignity of men was unable to obliterate them.

Lastly. Your brother's disgrace was public; that is to say, it was confusedly known that his conduct was not free from reproach, and you come to particularize the circumstances, to proclaim his deeds, to explain the motives, and to lay open the whole mystery; to confirm what they but imperfectly knew; to tell them of what they knew not at all; and to applaud yourself for appearing better instructed in your brother's misfortune than those who listen to you. Some degree of character, though wavering, yet remained to him; he still preserved, at least, some remains of honour, a spark of life, and you completely extinguish it. I do not add,

that these public reports, perhaps, originated from people of no character, persons of neither reputation nor consequence to convince. Hitherto none durst yield credit to rumours so poorly supported; but you, who, by your rank, birth, and dignities, have acquired an influence over the minds, remove every shadow of doubt or uncertainty. Your name alone will now serve as a proof against the innocency of your brother; and in future it will be cited in justification of the general reports. Now, can any thing be harder or more unjust, both on account of the injury you do to him, and of the service you fail to perform? Your silence on his fault might alone perhaps have stopped the public defamation, and you would have been cited to clear his innocence, as you now are to blacken it. And what more respectable use could you have made of your rank and influence? The more you are exalted in the world, the more ought you to be religious and circumspect on the reputation of your brethren; the more ought a noble decency to render you reserved on their errors. The discourses of the vulgar are soon forgot, they expire in coming into the world; but the words of the great never fall in vain, and the public is always a faithful echo, either to the praises they bestow, or to the censures they allow themselves to utter. My God! thou teachest us, by concealing thyself the sins of men, to conceal them on our part; to reveal our faults, thou waitest with a merciful patience the day when the secrets of our hearts shall be manifested; and we, by a rash malignity, anticipate the time of thy vengeance; we, who are so interested, that the secrecies of our hearts, and the mystery of the consciences, should not as yet be laid open to thee.

Thus, you particularly, my brethren, whom rank and birth exalt above others, be not satisfied with putting a check upon your tongue; according to the advice of the Holy Spirit, present a melancholy and severe countenance, a silence of disapprobation and indignation to every defamatory discourse; for the crime is exactly equal between the malignity of the speaker and the satisfaction of those who listen to him. Let us surround our ears with thorns, that they may not be accessible to poisonous insinuations; that is to say, let us not only shut them against these words of blood and gall, but let us return them on their author in a manner equally bitter and mortifying. Were slander to find fewer approvers, the kingdom of Jesus Christ would soon be purged of that scandal. Slander is pleasing; and a vice which pleases, soon becomes a desirable talent. We animate slander by our applauses; and as there is no person but wishes to be applauded, there are few, likewise, who do not study it, and endeavour to make a merit of slandering with skill.

But what is surprising is, that piety itself frequently serves as a pretext to that vice, which saps the very foundations of

piety, and which sincere piety detests. This ought to be the last part of this Discourse; but I shall say only a single word upon it. Yes, my brethren, slander frequently finds, in piety itself, wherewithal to colour itself. It decks itself out in the appearance of zeal. Hatred to vice seems to authorize the censure of sinners. Those who make a profession of virtue often believe that they are honouring God, and rendering glory to him, when they dishonour and exclaim against those who offend him; as though the privilege of piety, whose soul is charity, were to dispense us even from charity. It is not that I wish here to justify the discourses of the world, and to furnish it with new traits against the zeal of the upright; but, at the same time, I ought not to dissemble, that the liberty which they assume, of censuring the conduct of their brethren, is one of the most common abuses of piety.

Now, my dear hearer, you whom this Discourse regards, listen to, and never forget, the rules which the gospel prescribes to true zeal.

First. Remember, that the zeal which makes us lament over the scandals that dishonour the church, is contented with lamenting them before God; with praying him not to forget his former mercies; to cast his propitious regards upon the people; to establish his reign in all hearts, and to recall sinners from their erroneous ways. Behold the holy manner of lamenting over the disgraces of your brethren; mention them frequently to the Lord, but forget them in the presence of men.

Secondly. Remember, that piety gives you no right of empire or authority over your brethren; that if you be not established over them, and responsible for their conduct, whether they fall or remain steadfast, is the concern of the Lord, and not yours; consequently, that your continual and public lamentations over their irregularities proceed from a principle of pride, malignity, levity, and intolerance; that the church has its pastors to superintend the flock; that the ark has its ministers to sustain it, without needing the interference of any foreign or imprudent succours; and, lastly, that by these means, far from correcting your brethren, you dishonour piety, you justify the discourses of the wicked against the just, and you authorize them in saying, as formerly in the Book of Wisdom, Why professeth the righteous to have a right to fill the streets, and the public places, with their clamours and upbraidings against our conduct, and holdeth it out as a point of virtue to defame us in the minds of our brethren?

Thirdly. Remember, that the zeal regulated by wisdom seeks the salvation, and not the defamation, of the brother it wishes to edify; that it loves not to injure; that, in order to render itself useful, it studies to render itself amiable; that it is more affected with the misfortune and loss of its brother, than irritated against, or scandalized by, his errors; that, far from going to

publish them to others, it would wish to be enabled to conceal them from itself; and that the zeal which censures them, far from lessening the evil, serves only to augment the scandal.

Fourthly. Remember, that the censorious zeal which you display is useless to your brother, seeing he witnesses it not; that, far from being of service, it is even hurtful to his conversion, to which you raise up obstacles, by irritating him against your censures, should he happen to be informed of them; that it is injurious to his reputation, which you wound; and, lastly, to those that listen to you, who, respecting your pretended virtue, never entertain a doubt that they can err, while following your steps, and no longer place slander among the number of vices. Zeal is humble, and has eyes for nothing but its own wants; it is simple, and much more disposed to be credulous with regard to good than evil; it is merciful, and is always indulgent to the faults of others, in the same proportion as it is severe to its own weaknesses; it is gentle and timorous, and prefers to have failed in sufficiently blaming vice, to rashly exposing itself to go too far in censuring the sinner.

Thus, my brethren, you who, returned from the errors of the world, now serve the Lord, allow me to conclude, with addressing to you the same words, formerly spoken by a holy father to the servants of Jesus Christ, who, through an indiscreet zeal, made no scruple of tearing in pieces the characters of their brethren:

“A tongue which has confessed Jesus Christ, which has renounced the errors and splendours of the world, which every day blesses the God of peace at the foot of the altar, and is often consecrated, by participation of the holy mysteries, should no longer be intolerant, dangerous, and full of gall and bitterness against its brethren. It is disgracing religion, after having offered up pure prayers and thanksgivings to the Lord in the assembly of believers, to go and spit out the venomous traits of the serpent, against those whom the unity of faith, charity, the sacrament, and even their very errors, should render more endeared and more respectable to you.”

By the wisdom and moderation of our discourses, let us deprive the enemies of virtue of every occasion to blaspheme against it; let us correct our brethren by the sanctity of our example rather than by the keenness of our censures; let us recall them, by living better than they, and not by speaking against them; let us render virtue respectable by its sweetness rather than by its severity; let us draw sinners toward us by compassionating rather than censuring their faults, in order that our virtue may be conspicuous to them only through our charity and indulgence, and that our tender care to cover and excuse their faults, may induce them to accuse and condemn themselves with more severity, when they perceive the difference of our conduct. By these means we shall regain our brethren; we shall honour piety; we shall over-

throw impiety and freethinking; we shall deprive the world of all occasion for those discourses, so common and so injurious to real virtue; and, after having used mercy toward our brethren, we shall with more confidence go to present ourselves before the Father of mercies, and the God of all consolation, to ask mercy for ourselves.

SERMON VII.

ON THE EMPLOYMENT OF TIME.

“ Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me.”—
JOHN vii. 33.

AN improper use of time is the source of all the disorders which reign amongst men. Some pass their whole life in idleness and sloth, equally useless to the world, their country, and themselves: others, in the tumult of business and worldly affairs. Some appear to exist only for the purpose of indulging an unworthy indolence, and escaping, by a diversity of pleasures, from the weariness which every where pursues them, in proportion as they fly from it: others, in a continual search, amidst the cares of the world, for occupations which may deliver them from themselves. It appears that time is a common enemy, against which all men have agreed to conspire. Their whole life is one continued and deplorable anxiety to rid themselves of it. The happiest are those who best succeed in not feeling the weight of its duration; and the principal satisfaction they reap, either from frivolous pleasures or serious occupations, is the abridgment of days and moments, and deliverance from them, almost without a perception of their being passed.

Time, that precious deposit confided to us by the Lord, is therefore become a burden which fatigues and oppresses us. We dread, as the greatest of evils, its deprivation for ever; and we almost equally dread the obligation to support its weariness and duration. It is a treasure which we would wish to retain for ever, yet which we cannot suffer to remain in our possession.

This time, however, of which we make so little estimation, is the only mean of our eternal salvation. We lose it without regret, which is a crime; we employ it only for worldly purposes,

which is a madness. Let us employ the time which God allows us, because it is short. Let us employ it only in labouring for our salvation, because it is only given us that we may be saved; that is to say, let us be sensible of the value of time, and let us lose it not: let us know the use of it, and employ it only for the purpose it was given. By these means, we shall avoid both the dangers of a slothful and the inconveniences of a hurried life. This is the subject of the present Discourse.

PART I.—Three circumstances, in general, decide upon the value of things among men:—the great advantages which may accrue to us from them; the short space we have to enjoy them; and, lastly, every hope destroyed of ever regaining them, if once lost. Now, behold, my brethren, the principal motives which ought to render time precious and estimable to every wise man: in the first place, it is the price of eternity: in the second place, it is short, and we cannot make too much haste to reap the benefit of it: and, lastly, it is irreparable; for, once lost, it can never be regained. It is the price of eternity. Yes, my brethren, man, condemned to death by the sin of his birth, ought to receive life only to lose it, even from the moment he has received it. The blood alone of Jesus Christ has effaced this sentence of death and punishment pronounced against all mankind in the person of the first sinner. We live, though the offspring of a father condemned to death, and inheritors ourselves of his punishment, because the Redeemer died for us. The death of Jesus Christ is, therefore, the source, and the only claim of right we have to life; our days, our moments, are the first blessings which have flowed to us from his cross; and the time which we so vainly lose, is the price, however, of his blood, the fruit of his death, and the merit of his sacrifice.

Not only as children of Adam, we deserve no longer to live; but even all the crimes we have added to those of our birth are become new sentences of death against us. So many times as we have violated the law of the Author of life, so many times, from that moment, ought we to have lost it.

Every sinner is, therefore, a child of death and anger; and every time the mercy of God has suspended, after each of our crimes, the sentence of condemnation and death, it is a new life, as it were, his goodness has granted, in order to allow us time to repair the criminal use we had hitherto made of our own.

I even speak not of the diseases, accidents, and numberless dangers which so often have menaced our life; which so often we have seen to terminate that of our friends and nearest connexions; and from which his goodness has always delivered us. The life which we enjoy is like a perpetual miracle, therefore, of his divine mercy. The time which is left to us, is the consequence of an infinity of tender mercies and grace, which compose the

thread and the train, as it were, of our life. Every moment we breathe is like a new gift we receive from God; and to waste that time, and these moments, in a deplorable inutility, is to insult that Infinite Goodness which has granted them to us, to dissipate an inestimable grace which is not our due, and to deliver up to chance the price of our eternity. Behold, my brethren, the first guilt attached to the loss of time. It is a precious treasure left to us, though we no longer have any right to it, which is given to us for the purpose alone of purchasing the kingdom of heaven, and which we dissipate as a thing the most vile and contemptible, and of which we know not any use to make.

In the world, we would regard that man as a fool, who, heir to a great fortune, should allow it to be wasted through want of care and attention, and should make no use of it, either to raise himself to places and dignities, which might draw him from obscurity, or in order to confirm to himself a solid establishment, which might place him in future beyond the reach of any reverse.

But, my brethren, time is that precious treasure which we have inherited from our birth, and which the Almighty leaves to us through pure compassion. It is in our possession, and it depends upon ourselves to make a proper use of it. It is not in order to exalt ourselves to frivolous dignities here below, or to worldly grandeurs: alas! whatever passes away is too vile to be the price of time, which is itself the price of eternity: it is in order to be placed in the heavens above, at the side of Jesus Christ; it is in order to separate us from the crowd of the children of Adam, above all the Cæsars and kings of the earth, in that immortal society of the happy, who shall all be kings, and whose reign shall have no bounds but those of eternity.

What madness, then, to make no use of a treasure so inestimable; in frivolous amusements to waste that time which may be the price of eternal salvation, and to allow the hopes of our immortality to be dissipated in smoke! Yes, my brethren, there is not a day, an hour, a moment, but which, properly employed, may merit us heaven. A single day lost ought therefore to leave us remorse a thousand times more lively and poignant than the failure of the greatest worldly prospects; yet, nevertheless, this time is a burden to us. Our whole life is only one continued science to lose it; and, in spite of all our anxieties to waste it, there always, however, remains more than we know how to employ; and yet, the thing upon the earth we have the smallest value for, is our time. Our acts of kindness we reserve for our friends; our bounties for our dependents; our riches for our children and relations; our praises for those who appear worthy of them: our time we give all to the world: we expose it, as I may say, a prey to all mankind; they even do us a pleasure in delivering us from it: it is a weight, as it were, which we support in the midst

of the world, while incessantly in search of some one who may ease us of its burden. In this manner, time, that gift of God, that most precious blessing of his clemency, and which ought to be the price of our eternity, occasions all our embarrassments, all our wearinesses, and becomes the most oppressive burden of our life.

But a second reason which makes us feel still more sensibly our absurdity in setting so little value upon the time the Almighty leaves to us, is, that not only it is the price of our eternity, but likewise it is short, and we cannot hasten too much to employ it to advantage. For, my brethren, had we even a long series of ages to exist upon the earth, that space would, in truth, be still too short to be employed in meriting everlasting happiness; yet its duration would at least enable us to retrieve those accidental losses. The days and moments lost would at least form only a point, scarcely perceptible, in that long series of ages we should have to pass here below. But, alas! our whole life is but an imperceptible point. The longest endures so little; our days and our years are shut up in such narrow limits, that we see not what we can have still to lose, in a space so short and rapid. We are only, as I may say, a moment upon the earth: like those fiery exhalations, which, in the obscurity of night, are seen wandering in the air, we only appear to vanish in a moment, and be replunged for ever into our original and everlasting darkness. The exhibition we make to the world is but a flash, which is extinguished almost in the same moment it exists: we say it ourselves every day. Alas! how can we take days and hours of rest from a life which is itself but a moment? And besides, if you retrench from that moment all you are under the necessity of allowing to the indispensable necessities of the body, to the duties of your station, to unexpected events, and the inevitable complaisances due to society, what remains for yourself, for God, and for eternity? And are we not worthy of pity; we, who know not how to employ the little which remains to us, and who fly to the assistance of a thousand artifices to abridge its duration?

To the little time, my brethren, we have to live upon the earth, add the number of past crimes which we have to expiate in this short interval. How many iniquities are collected upon our heads since our first years! Alas! ten lives, like ours, would scarcely suffice to expiate a part of them: the time would still be too short; and it would be necessary to call upon the goodness of God to prolong the duration of our penance. Great God! what portion can remain to me for pleasures and indolence, in a life so short and so criminal as mine? What place, then, can frivolous sports and amusements find in an interval so rapid, and which altogether would not suffice to expiate a single one of my crimes?

Ah! my brethren, do we even think upon it? A criminal condemned to death, and to whom a single day is only allowed to

endeavour toward obtaining his pardon, would he find hours and moments still to trifle away? Would he complain of the length of the time which the humanity and goodness of his judge had awarded him? Would he be embarrassed how to use it? Would he search for frivolous amusements to assist him to pass those precious moments which were left him to merit his pardon and deliverance? Would he not endeavour to profit by an interval so decisive with regard to his destiny? Would he not replace, by the anxiety, vivacity, and continuance of his exertions, what might be wanting from the brevity of the time allowed to him? Fools that we are! Our sentence is pronounced; our guilt renders our condemnation certain: we are left a single day to shun the evil, and to change the rigour of our eternal decree; and this only day, this rapid day, we indolently pass in occupations vain, slothful, and puerile.

This precious day is a burden to us, wearies us; we seek to abridge it; scarcely can we find amusements sufficient to fill the void; the evening arrives without our having made any other use of the day left to us than that of rendering ourselves still more worthy of the condemnation we had already merited. And, besides, my brethren, how do we know that the abuse of the day, left to us by the Almighty's goodness, will not oblige his justice to abridge and to cut off a portion of it? How many unexpected accidents may arrest us in a course so limited, and crop, in their fairest blossoms, the hopes of a longer life! How many sudden and astonishing deaths do we see; and generally the just punishment of the unworthy use they had made of life! What age has ever witnessed more of these melancholy examples? Formerly these accidents were rare and singular; at present they are events which happen every day. Whether it be, that our crimes have drawn down upon us this punishment; whether it be, that excesses unknown to our forefathers lead us to them; but at present they are the deaths most common and frequent. Number, if you can, those of your relations, friends, and connexions, whom a sudden death has surprised without preparation, repentance, or a moment allowed them to reflect upon themselves, upon that God whom they have offended, and upon those crimes which, far from detesting, they never had leisure sufficiently to be acquainted with.

Will you tell us, after this, that there are many spare moments in the day; that we must contrive to amuse ourselves some way or another?

There are many spare moments in the day! But your guilt consists in leaving them in that frightful void. The days of the upright are always full. Spare moments in the day! But are your duties always fulfilled? Are your houses regulated, your children instructed, the afflicted relieved, the poor visited, the works of piety accomplished? Time is short; your obligations

so infinite; and you can still find so many spare moments in the day? My God! how many holy characters have in solitude complained that their days passed too rapidly away; have borrowed from the night what the brevity of the day had taken from their labours and zeal; have lamented, even in the calm and leisure of their solitude, that sufficient time remained not for them to publish thy praises and eternal mercies: and we, charged with a multiplicity of cares; we, in the midst of the solitudes and the engagements of the age, which absorb almost all our days and our moments; we, responsible to our relations, to our children, to our friends, to our inferiors, to our superiors, to our stations, to our country, for such an infinity of duties,—we still find a void in our life; and the little which remains to us, we think too long to be employed in serving and blessing thy holy name!

But we are happy, you say, when we know how to amuse ourselves, and innocently to pass away the time. But how do you know that your course is not already run, and that you do not perhaps touch the fatal moment which commences your eternity? Does your time belong to you, to be disposed of as you please? Time itself passes away so soon; and are so many amusements necessary to assist it in passing still more rapidly?

But is time given to you for nothing serious, great, and eternal; nothing worthy of the elevation and destiny of man? And the Christian and inheritor of heaven, is he upon the earth only to amuse himself?

But are there not, you say, many innocent recreations in life? I grant there are many: but recreations suppose pains and cares, which have preceded them; while your whole life is one continued recreation. Recreations are permitted to those who, after fulfilling their duties, are under the necessity of affording some moments of relaxation to the weakness of human nature: but you, if you have occasion for relaxation, it is from the continuance of your pleasures, and even what you call your recreations: it is from the rage of inordinate gaming, of which the duration and earnest attention necessary, besides the loss of time, render you incapable, on quitting it, of application to any other duty of your station. What recreation can you find in a lawless and boundless passion, which occupies almost your whole life, ruins your health, deranges your fortune, and renders you the continual sport of a miserable chance? And is it not with such characters that we find neither order, rule, nor discipline? All serious duties forgotten; disorderly servants; children miserably educated; affairs declining; and public scorn and contempt attached to their names and their unfortunate posterity? The passion of gaming is almost never unaccompanied; and to those of one sex especially, is always the source or the occasion of all the others. These are the recreations you

believe innocent, and necessary to fill up the empty moments of the day.

Ah! my brethren, how many of the reprobate, in the midst of their anguish and punishments, intreat from the mercy of God only one of those moments which we know not how to employ! and, could their request be granted, what use would they not make of that precious moment! How many tears of compunction and penitence! How many prayers and supplications, to soften the Father of mercies, and to induce his paternal feelings to restore to them his affection! This only moment is nevertheless refused. Time, they are told, exists no more for them: and you find yourselves embarrassed with the little you are left? God will judge you, my brethren; and on the bed of death, and in that terrible hour which shall surprise you, in vain shall you demand a little more time; in vain shall you promise to God a more Christian use of what you will endeavour to obtain: his justice, without pity, will cut the thread of your days; and that time, which now oppresses and embarrasses you, shall then be denied.

But in what our blindness here is still more conspicuous, is, that not only the time which we lose with so much indifference and insensibility, is short and precious, but likewise irreparable; for, once lost, it is for ever gone, without resource.

I say irreparable: for, in the *first* place, riches, honours, reputation, and favour, though once lost, may again be retrieved. We may even replace each of these losses by other acquisitions, which will repay us with usury; but the moments lost in inutility are so many means of salvation which we never again can possess, but which are for ever cut off from the number which God, in his compassion, had allotted to us. Indeed, in a space so short as we have to live, there cannot be a doubt but that the Almighty had his particular designs with regard to each of our days and moments; that he hath marked the use we ought to have made of them; the connexion they were to have with our eternal salvation; and that, to each of them, he hath attached assistances of grace, in order to consummate the work of our sanctification. Now, these days and moments being lost, the grace attached to them must be equally so: the moments of God are finished, and return no more: the course of his mercies is regulated: we believed they were only useless moments we had lost; and with them we have lost inestimable succours of grace, which we find deducted from those the goodness of God had destined for us.

In the *second* place, irreparable, because every day, every moment, ought to advance us a step nearer heaven. Now, the days and moments lost leaving us in arrear, and the duration of our course being also determined, the end arrives when we

are yet at a distance; when there is no longer time to supply the remainder of the career; or, at least, to regain the lost moments, and reach the goal, we must double our speed;—in one day fill up the course of many years; make the most heroic exertions; and hasten in a degree even beyond our strength;—proceed to excesses of holiness, which are miracles of grace, and of which the generality of men are incapable; and consummate, in a small interval, what ought to be the labour of a whole life.

In the *last* place, irreparable, with respect to the works of penance and reparation, of which, in a certain period of life, we are capable, but are no longer so, when we wait the infirmities of a more advanced age. For, after all, it is in vain to say then, that God expects not impossibilities; that there is a penance for every age; and that religion does not wish us to hasten our days, under the pretext of expiating our crimes. It is you who have placed yourselves in this state of impossibility: your sins diminish not your obligations: guilt must be punished, in order to be effaced. The Almighty had allowed you both time and strength to satisfy this immutable and eternal law: this time you have wasted in accumulating new debts; this strength you have exhausted, either by new excesses, or at least without making any use of it, to further the designs of God respecting you: the Almighty must therefore do, what you have never done yourselves, and punish, after your death, the crimes you have never been inclined to expiate during your life.

This is to say, in order to concentrate all these reflections, that with every moment of our life it is as with our death. We die only once, and from thence we conclude, that we must die in a proper state, because there is no longer a possibility of returning, to repair, by a second death, the evil of the first. In like manner, we only once exist, such and such moments; we cannot return upon our steps, and, by commencing a new road, repair the errors and faults of our first path: in like manner, every moment of our life which we sacrifice becomes a point fixed for our eternity; that moment lost, shall change no more: it shall eternally be the same; it will be recalled to us, such as we had passed it, and will be marked with that ineffaceable stamp. How miserable, then, is our blindness, my brethren; we, whose life is only one continued attention to lose the time which returns no more, and, with so rapid a course, flies to precipitate itself into the abyss of eternity!

Great God! Thou who art the sovereign dispenser of times and moments; thou, in whose hands are our days and our years, with what eyes must thou behold us losing and dissipating the moments of which thou alone knowest the duration; of which, in irrevocable characters, thou hast marked the course and the

measure; moments, which thou drawest from the treasure of thine eternal mercies, to allow us time for penitence; moments which, every day, thy justice presses thee to abridge, as a punishment for their abuse; moments which, every day before our eyes, thou refusest to so many sinners, less culpable than we, whom a terrible death surprises and drags into the gulf of thine eternal vengeance; moments, in a word, which we shall not perhaps long enjoy, and of which thou soon intendest to terminate the melancholy career! Great God! Behold the greatest and the best part of my life already past and wholly lost. In all my days, there has not hitherto been a single serious one,—a single day for thee, for my salvation, and for eternity: my whole life is but a vapour, which leaves nothing real or solid in the hand of him who recalls it. Shall I, to the end, drag on my days in this melancholy inutility; in this weariness which pursues me, in the midst of my pleasures, and the efforts which unavailingly I make to avoid it? Shall the last hour surprise me, loaded with the void of my whole years? And, in all my course, shall there be nothing serious or important but the last moment, which will terminate it for ever, and decide my everlasting destiny? Great God! what a life for a soul destined to serve thee, called to the immortal society of thy Son and thy saints, enriched with thy gifts, and, in consequence of them, capable of works worthy of eternity! What a life is that life which, in reality, is nothing, has nothing in view, and fills up a time which is decisive of its eternal destiny, in doing nothing, and reckoning as well passed those days and hours which imperceptibly slip away!

But if inutility be opposite to the price of time, irregularity and multiplicity of occupations are not less so to the proper order of time, and to the Christian use we ought to make of it. You have just seen the dangers of a slothful, and I will now lay before you the inconveniences of a hurried life.

PART II.—To every thing we have hitherto said, my brethren, the majority of those who listen to me have, no doubt, secretly opposed, that their life is any thing but slothful and useless; that scarcely can they suffice for the duties, good offices, and endless engagements of their stations; that they live in an eternal vicissitude of occupations and business which absorbs their whole life; and that they think themselves happy when they can accomplish a moment for themselves, and enjoy, at leisure, the situation which their fortune denies to them.

Now this, my brethren, is a new way of abusing time, still more dangerous than even inutility and indolence. In effect, the Christian use of time is not merely the filling up of all its moments; it is that of filling them up in order, and according to the will of the Lord, who gives them to us. The life of faith

is a life of regularity and wisdom: fancy, passion, pride, and cupidity, are false principles of conduct, since they themselves are only a derangement of the mind and heart; and that order and reason ought to be our only guides.

Nevertheless, the life of the majority of men is a life always occupied and always useless; always laborious, and always void: their passion give birth to all their motions: these are the great springs which agitate men; make them run here and there like madmen; and leave them not a single moment's tranquillity; and, in filling up all their moments, they seek not to fulfil their duties, but to deliver themselves up to their restlessness, and to satisfy their iniquitous desires.

But in what doth this order consist, which ought to regulate the measure of our occupations and to sanctify the use of our time? It consists, in the first place, in limiting ourselves to the occupations attached to our stations; in not seeking places and situations which may multiply them; and in not reckoning, among our duties, the cares and embarrassments which anxiety, or our passions, alone generate within us. Secondly, however agitated may be our situations, amidst all our occupations, to regard as the most essential, and the most privileged, those we owe to our salvation.

I say, in the first place, not to reckon, amongst the occupations which sanctify the use of our time, those which restlessness or the passions alone generate.

Restlessness! Yes, my brethren, we all wish to avoid ourselves. To the generality of men nothing is more melancholy and disagreeable than to find themselves alone, and obliged to review their own hearts. As vain passions carry us away, as many criminal attachments stain us, and as many thousand illicit desires occupy every moment of our heart, in entering into ourselves, we find only an answer of death, a frightful void, cruel remorse, dark thoughts, and melancholy reflections. We search, therefore, in the variety of occupations and continual distractions, an oblivion of ourselves: we dread leisure as the signal of weariness; and we expect to find, in the confusion and multiplicity of external cares, that happy intoxication which enables us to go on without perceiving it, and makes us no longer to feel the weight of ourselves.

But, alas! we deceive ourselves: weariness is never found but in irregularity, and in a life of confusion, where every thing is out of its place: it is in living by hazard that we are a burden to ourselves; that we continually search after new occupations, and that disgust soon obliges us to repent that we ever sought for them; that we incessantly change our situation, in order to fly from ourselves; and, that wherever we go, we carry ourselves: in a word, that our whole life is but a diversified art to shun weariness, and a miserable talent to find it. Wherever order is not, weariness

must necessarily be found ; and, far from a life of irregularity and confusion being a remedy, on the contrary, it is the most fruitful source and universal cause of it.

The just souls who live in regularity ; they who yield nothing to caprice and temper, whose every occupation is exactly where it ought to be, whose moments are filled up, according to their destination, and to the will of the Lord who directs them, find, in order, a perfect remedy against, and protection from, weariness. That wise uniformity in the practice of duties which appear so gloomy in the eyes of the world, is the source of their joy, and of that happy equality of temper which nothing can derange : never embarrassed with the present time which stated duties occupy ; never in pain with regard to the future, for which new duties are arranged ; never delivered up to themselves by the change of occupations which succeed each other ; their days appear as moments, because every moment is in its place ; time hangs not upon them, because it always has its distinction and use ; and in the arrangement of an uniform and occupied life they find that peace and that joy which the rest of men in vain search for in the confusion of a continual agitation.

Restlessness, by multiplying our occupations, leaves us therefore a prey to weariness and disgust ; nor yet does it sanctify the use of our time : for if the moments, not regulated by the order of God, are moments lost, however occupied they may otherwise be ; if the life of man ought to be a life of wisdom and regularity, where every occupation has its allotted place ; what can be more opposite to such a life than this inconsistency, these eternal fluctuations in which restlessness makes us pass our time ? But the passions which keep us in perpetual motion do not form for us more legitimate employments.

Yes, my brethren, I know that it is only at a certain age of life that we appear occupied with frivolity and pleasures. More serious cares and more solid avocations succeed to the indolence and to the vain amusements of our younger years : and, after wasting our youth in sloth and in pleasures, we appropriate our maturity to our country, to fortune, and to ourselves ; but still, with respect to heaven we continue the same. I confess, that we owe our services to our country, to our sovereign, and to the national cares ; that amongst the number of duties prescribed to us by religion, it places that of zeal for our sovereign and for the interest and glory of our country ; and that religion alone can form faithful subjects, and citizens ever ready to sacrifice their all for the general good. But religion wishes not that pride and ambition should rashly plunge us in public affairs, and that we should anxiously endeavour, by all possible means, by intrigue and solicitations, to attain places, where, owing every thing to others, not a moment is left for ourselves : religion wishes us to dread these tumultuous situations ; to give ourselves up to them with regret and trembling,

when the order of God and the authority of our masters call us to them; and, were the choice left to us, always to prefer the safety and leisure of a private station to the dangers and eclat of dignities, and places. Alas! we have a short time to exist upon the earth, and the salvation or eternal condemnation which awaits us is so near, that every other care ought to be melancholy and burdensome to us; and every thing which diverts our attention from that grand object, for which we are allowed only a small portion of days, ought to appear as the heaviest misfortune. This is not a maxim of pure spirituality; it is the first maxim and the foundation of Christianity.

Nevertheless, ambition, pride, and all our passions, unite to render a private life insupportable to us. What in life we dread most, is a lot and a station which leave us to ourselves, and do not establish us upon others. We consult neither the order of God, nor the views of religion, nor the dangers of a too agitated situation, nor the happiness which faith points out in a private and tranquil station, where we have nothing but ourselves to answer for, and frequently not even our talents; we consult only our passions, and that insatiable desire of raising ourselves above our brethren; we wish to figure upon the stage of life, and become great personages, and upon a stage, alas! which to-morrow shall disappear, and leave us nothing real but the puerile trouble and pain of having acted upon it. Even the more these stations appear surrounded with tumult and embarrassment, the more do they appear worthy of our pursuit: we wish to be in every thing: that leisure so dear to a religious soul, to us appears shameful and mean: every thing which divides us between the public and ourselves; every thing which gives to others an absolute right over our time; every thing which plunges us into that abyss of cares and agitations, which credit, favour, and consideration drag after them, affects, attracts, and transports us. Thus, the majority of men inconsiderately create to themselves a tumultuous and agitated life, which the Almighty never required of them, and eagerly seek for cares where they cannot be in safety, unless the order of God had prepared them for us.

Indeed, we sometimes hear them complaining of the endless agitations inseparable from their places; sighing for rest, and envying the lot of a tranquil and private station; repeating, that it should indeed be time to live for themselves, after having so long lived for others. But these are merely words of course: they seem to groan under the weight of affairs; but with much more uneasiness and grief would they support the weight of leisure and of a private condition: they employ one part of their life in struggling against each other for the tumult of places and employments, and the other they employ in lamenting the misfortune of having obtained them. It is a language of vanity:

they would wish to appear superior to their fortune; and they are not so to the smallest reverse, or the slightest symptom of coldness which threatens them. Behold how our passions create occupations and embarrassments, which God required not, and deprive us of a time whose value we shall be ignorant of till we reach that moment when time finishes and eternity begins.

Yet still, my brethren, in the midst of the endless occupations attached to your stations, were you to regard as the most privileged those connected with your salvation, you would, in some measure at least, repair the dissipation of that portion of your life, which the world and the cares of this earth entirely occupy. But it is still on this point that our blindness is deplorable; we cannot find time for our eternal salvation. That which we bestow on fortune, the duties of a charge, the good offices expected from our station, the care of the body, and attention to dress; that which we give to friendship, society, recreation, and custom, all appear essential and indispensable: we even dare not encroach upon or limit these; we carry them beyond the bounds even of reason and necessity; and as life is too short, and our days too rapid to suffice for all, whatever we retrench is from the cares of our salvation: in the multiplicity of our occupations we are sure to sacrifice those which we ought to bestow on eternity. Yes, my brethren, in place of retrenching from our amusements, from the duties which ambition multiplies, from the ceremonies which idleness alone has established, from the cares and attentions we bestow on a vain dress which custom and effeminacy have rendered endless; in place of retrenching from these, at least, some little time every day, scarcely do they leave us some accidental remains which by chance have escaped from the world and pleasure; some rapid moments the world wishes not, with which we are perhaps embarrassed, and which we know not how to dispose of otherwise. So long as the world chooses to engage us; so long as it continues to offer pleasures, duties, trifles, and complaisances, we yield ourselves up to it with delight. When all is over, and we no longer know how to fill up our vacant hours, we then consecrate to some languid practices of religion those outcast moments which weariness or a deficiency of pleasures leaves us: properly speaking, they are moments of recreation which we bestow upon ourselves rather than upon God; an interval we place between the world and us, in order to return to it with more relish, and breathe a little from the fatigue, the disgust, and the satiety which are the necessary consequences of a life devoted to the world and pleasures, which, prolonged beyond a certain measure, are immediately followed by weariness and lassitude.

Such is the use which even persons who deck themselves out with a reputation for virtue make of their time. Their whole life is one continued and criminal preference given to the

world, fortune, ceremony and pleasures, above the business of their salvation; all is filled up by what they give to their masters, friends, places, and appetites, and nothing remains for God and for eternity. It would appear that time is given to us, in the first place, for the world, ambition, and earthly cares; and should any portion of it happen afterward to remain, that we are entitled to praise when we bestow it on our salvation.

Great God! for what purpose dost thou leave us on the earth but to render ourselves worthy of thine eternal possession? Every thing we do for the world shall perish with it; whatsoever we do for thee shall be immortal. All our cares and attentions here are in general for masters, ungrateful, unjust, difficult to please, weak, and incapable of rendering us happy. The duties we render to thee are given to a Lord and Master, faithful, just, compassionate, almighty, and who alone can recompense those who serve him. The cares of the earth, however brilliant, are foreign to us; they are unworthy of us; it is not for them we are created; we ought only to devote ourselves to them as they pass, in order to satisfy the transitory ties they exact from us, and which connect us with mankind: the cares of eternity alone are worthy of the nobility of our hopes, and fill all the grandeur and dignity of our destiny. Without the cares of salvation, those of this earth are profane and sullied; they are no longer but vain, fruitless, and almost always criminal agitations. The cares of salvation alone consecrate and sanctify them, give to them reality, elevation, the price and the merit which they wanted. All other cares wound, trouble, harden, and render us miserable, but the duties we render to thee leave us a real and heartfelt joy: they strengthen, calm, and console us, and even soften the anguish and bitterness of the others. In a word, we owe ourselves to thee, O my God! before masters, superiors, friends, or connexions. Thou alone hast the first right over our hearts and reason, which are the gifts of thy liberal hand; it is for thee, therefore, that in the first place we ought to make use of them; and we are Christians before we are princes, subjects, public characters, or any thing else on the earth.

You will perhaps tell us, my brethren, that, in fulfilling the painful and endless duties attached to your station, you believe that you serve God, accomplish your measure of righteousness, and labour toward your salvation. I grant it; but we must fulfil these duties according to the views of the Lord, from motives of faith, and in the true spirit of religion and piety. God reckons only what we do for him; of all our pains, fatigues, submissions, and sacrifices, he accepts only those which are offered to his glory, and not to our own; and our days are only full in his sight when they are full for eternity. All actions, which have nothing for their object but the world; a fame limited to this earth; a perishable fortune; some praises they may attract to us from

men, or some degree of grandeur and reputation to which they may raise us here below, are nothing in his presence, or, at least, are only puerile amusements, unworthy of the majesty of his regards.

Thus, my brethren, how different are the judgments of God from those of the world! In the world we call beautiful that splendid life in which great actions are numbered, victories gained, difficult negotiations concluded, undertakings successfully conducted, illustrious employments supported with reputation, eminent dignities acquired by important services, and exercised with glory; a life which passes into history, fills the public monuments, and of which the remembrance shall be preserved to the latest posterity. Such, according to the world, is a beautiful life. But if, in all this, they have sought more their own than the glory of God; if they have had nothing more in view than to erect to themselves a perishable edifice of grandeur on the earth; in vain shall they have furnished a splendid career to the eyes of men; in the sight of God, it is a life lost: in vain shall history record us; we shall be effaced from the book of life, and from the eternal histories: in vain shall our actions be the admiration of ages to come; they shall not be written on the immortal columns of the heavenly temple: in vain shall we have acted a dignified part upon the stage of all earthly ages; in the eternal ages we shall be as those who never were: in vain shall our titles and dignities be preserved upon the marble and brass; as the fingers of men have written them, they shall perish with them, and what the finger of God shall have written will alone endure as long as himself: in vain shall our life be proposed as a model to the ambition of our descendants; its reality, existing only in the passions of men, from the moment they shall cease to have passions and the objects which inflame them, shall be annihilated; this life shall be nothing, and shall be replunged into nonentity, with the world which admire it.

For, candidly, my brethren, can you really wish that in that awful and terrible day, when righteousness itself shall be judged, the Almighty should give you credit for all the pains, cares, and disgusts you have experienced and devoured, in order to raise yourselves in the world? That he should regard, as well employed, the time you have sacrificed to the world, fortune, glory, and the elevation of your name and race, as if you were upon the earth only for yourselves? That he should place, among the number of your works of salvation, those which have only had for principle, ambition, pride, envy, and self-interest; and that he should reckon your vices amongst your virtues.

And what will you be able to say to him on the bed of death, when he shall enter into judgment with you, and demand an account of the time which he had only granted you to be employed in glorifying and serving him? Will you say to him, Lord, I have gained many victories; I have usefully and gloriously served my

prince and country; I have established to myself a great name amongst men? Alas! you have never been able to gain a victory over yourself; you have usefully served the kings of the earth, and you have neglected, with contempt, the service of the King of kings. You have established to yourself a great name amongst men, and your name is not known amongst the chosen of God:—time lost for eternity. Will you say to him, I have conducted the most difficult negotiations; I have concluded the most important treaties; I have managed the interests and fortunes of princes; I have been in the secrets and in the councils of kings? Alas! you have concluded treaties and alliances with men, and you have a thousand times violated the holy covenant you have entered into with God; you have managed the interests of princes, and you have never known how to manage the interests of your salvation; you have entered into the secrets of kings, and you have ever been ignorant of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven:—time lost for eternity. Will you say to him, My whole life has been only an incessant toil and a painful and continued occupation? Alas! you have always toiled, and you have never been able to do any thing to save your soul:—time lost for eternity. Will you say to him, I have established my children in the world; I have exalted my relations; I have been useful to my friends; I have augmented the patrimony of my ancestors? Alas! you have bequeathed great establishments to your children, and you have not left them the fear of the Lord, by bringing them up and establishing them in faith and piety: you have augmented the patrimony of your ancestors, and you have dissipated the gifts of grace and the patrimony of Jesus Christ;—time lost for eternity. Will you say to him, I have made the most profound studies; I have enriched the public with useful and curious works; I have perfected the sciences by new discoveries; I improved my great talents, and rendered them useful to mankind? Alas! the great talent confided to you was that of faith and grace, of which you have made no use: you have rendered yourself learned in the sciences of men, and you have always been ignorant in the science of the holy:—time lost for eternity. In a word, will you tell him, I have passed my life in fulfilling the duties and good offices of my station; I have gained friends; I have rendered myself useful and agreeable to my masters? Alas! you have had friends to boast of on the earth, and you have acquired none to yourself in heaven; you have made every exertion to please men, and you have done nothing to please the Almighty:—time lost for eternity.

No, my brethren, what a frightful void the greatest part of men, who had governed states and empires, who appeared to regulate the whole universe, and had filled in it the most distinguished places; who were the subjects of every conversation, and of the desires and hopes of men; who engrossed, almost alone, the whole attentions of the earth; what a frightful void will they, on the bed of death, find their whole life to be! Whilst the days of the pious

and retired soul, regarded by them as obscure and indolent, shall appear full, complete, occupied, marked each by some victory of faith, and worthy of being celebrated by the eternal songs.

Meditate, my brethren, on these holy truths. Time is short; it is irreparable; it is the price of your eternal felicity; it is given to you only in order to render you worthy of that felicity. Calculate, therefore, what portion of it you should bestow on the world, pleasures, fortune, and on your salvation. My brethren, says the apostle, time is short; let us therefore use the world, as not abusing it; let us possess our riches, places, dignities, and titles, as though we possessed them not; let us enjoy the favour of our superiors, and the esteem of men, as though we enjoyed them not: they are only shadows which vanish and leave us for ever; and let us only reckon upon as real, in our whole life, the moments which we have employed for heaven.

SERMON VIII.

THE CERTAINTY OF A FUTURE STATE.

“And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal.”—MATT. xxv. 46.

BEHOLD, to what at last shall be brought the desires, hopes, counsels, and enterprises of men. Behold, upon what at last shall split the vain reflections of sages and freethinkers, the doubts and eternal uncertainties of unbelievers, the vast projects of conquerors, the monuments of human glory, the cares of ambition, the distinction of talents, the disquietudes of fortune, the prosperity of empires, and all the insignificant revolutions of the earth. Such shall be the awful conclusion which will unravel the mysteries of Providence on the divers lots of the children of Adam, and justify its conduct in the government of the universe. This life is, therefore, but a rapid instant, and the commencement of an eternal futurity. Torments without end, or the delights of an immortal felicity, shall be our lot as well as that of all men.

Nevertheless, the view of this grand object, which formerly had been able to startle the ferocity of tyrants, to shake the fortitude of philosophers, to disturb the effeminacy and voluptuousness

of Cæsars, to soften the most barbarous nations, to form so many martyrs, to people the deserts, and to bring the whole universe submissive to the yoke of the cross; this image, so terrifying, is now almost destined to alarm the timidity of merely the common people;—these grand objects are become like vulgar paintings, which we dare no longer expose to the false delicacy of the great and connoisseurs of the world: and the only fruit we generally reap from this sort of discourses, is, to make it be inquired, perhaps, after quitting them, whether every thing shall take place as we have said.

For, my brethren, we live in times in which the faith of many has been wrecked; in which a wretched philosophy, like a mortal venom, spreads in secret, and undertakes to justify abominations and vices, against the belief of future punishment and rewards. This evil has passed from the palaces of the great even to the people, and every where the piety of the just is insulted by the discourses of irreligion and the maxims of freethinking.

And, certainly, I am not surprised that dissolute men should doubt of a future state, and endeavour to combat or weaken a truth so capable of disturbing their criminal sensualities. It is horrible to look forward to everlasting misery. The world has no pleasure which can endure a thought so shocking; consequently, it has always endeavoured to efface it from the heart and mind of man. It well knows, that the belief of a future state is a troublesome check on the human passions, and that it will never succeed in making tranquil and resolute libertines, without having first made unbelievers.

Let us deprive, then, the corruption of the human heart of so wretched and weak a support: let us prove to dissolute souls that they shall survive their debaucheries; that all dies not with the body; that this life shall finish their crimes, but not their misery; and, more completely to confound impiety, let us attack it in the vain pretexts on which it depends.

First. Who knows, say the impious, that all dies not with us? Is that other life, of which we are told, quite certain? Who has ever returned to inform us of it?

Secondly. Is it worthy of the majesty of God, say they again, to demean himself by any attention to what passes among men? What matters it to him, that worms of the earth, like us, murder, deceive, and tear each other, live in luxury or in temperance? Is it not presumptuous in any man to suppose that an Almighty God is occupied with him?

Lastly. What likelihood, add they, that God, having made man such as he is, will punish, as crimes, inherent inclinations to pleasure which nature has given us. Behold the philosophy of the voluptuary; the uncertainty of a future state; the majesty of God, which a vile creature cannot offend; and the weakness of man,

which, being born with him, he would be unjust of it to constitute a crime.

Let us then prove, in the first place, against the uncertainty of the impious, that the truth of a future state is justified by the purest lights of reason. Secondly, against the unworthy idea, grounded upon the greatness of God, that this truth is justified by his wisdom and glory. Lastly, against the pretext, drawn from the weakness of man, that it is justified even by the testimony of his own conscience. The certainty of a future state; the necessity of a future state; the inward acknowledgment of a future state. Behold the subject and arrangement of my discourse.

O God! attend not to the insults which the blasphemies of impiety offer to thy glory: regard only, and see, of what reason is capable when thy light is withdrawn. In the wickedness of the human mind, behold all the severity of thy justice, when it abandons it, that the more I expose the foolish blasphemies of the impious soul, the more may he become, in thy sight, an object worthy of thy pity, and of the treasures of thine infinite mercy.

PART I.—It surely is melancholy to have to justify, before believers, the most consolatory truth of faith; to come to prove to men, to whom Jesus Christ has been declared, that their being is not a wild assemblage, and the wretched offspring of chance; that a wise and an almighty Artificer has presided at our formation and birth; that a spark of immortality animates our clay; that a portion of us shall survive ourselves; and that, on quitting this earthly mansion, our soul shall return to the bosom of God, from whence it came, and go to inhabit the eternal region of the living, where to each one shall be rendered according to his works.

It was with this truth that Paul began to announce faith before the Athenian judges. We are the immortal race of God, said he to that assembly of sages; and he has appointed a day to judge the universe. By that the Apostles spread the first principles of the doctrine of salvation through infidel and corrupted nations. But we, who come after the revolution of ages, when the plenitude of nations has entered into the church, when the whole universe has professed to believe, when all the mysteries have been cleared up, all the prophecies accomplished, Jesus Christ glorified, the path of heaven laid open; we, who appear in these latter times, when the day of the Lord is so much nearer than when our fathers believed, alas! what ought our ministry to be, unless to dispose believers for that grand hope, and to instruct them to hold themselves in readiness to appear before Jesus Christ, who will quickly come; far from having still to combat these shocking and foolish maxims

which the first preaching of the gospel had effaced from the universe.

The pretended uncertainty of a future state is, then, the grand foundation of the security of unbelievers. We know nothing, say they, of that other world of which you tell us so much. None of the dead have ever returned to inform us; perhaps there is nothing beyond the grave: let us enjoy, therefore, the present, and leave to chance a futurity which either exists not, or is meant to be concealed from our knowledge.

Now, I say, that this uncertainty is suspicious in the principle which produces it, foolish in the proofs on which it depends, and frightful in its consequences. Refuse me not here your attention.

Suspicious in the principle which produces it. For, how has this uncertainty of a future state been formed in the mind of the unbeliever? It requires only to trace the origin of an opinion, to know whether the interests of truth, or the passions, have established it on the earth.

At his birth, the impious man bore the principles of natural religion common to all men: he found written on his heart a law which forbade violence, injustice, treachery, and every action to another, which he would not have done to himself. Education fortified these sentiments of nature: he was taught to know a God, to love and fear him: virtue was shown to him in the rules; it was rendered amiable to him in the examples; and though, within himself, he felt inclinations in opposition to duty, yet, when he yielded to their seductions, his heart secretly espoused the cause of virtue against his own weakness.

Thus did the impious man at first live on the earth. With the rest of mankind, he adored a Supreme Being, respected his laws, dreaded his chastisements, and expected his promises. Whence comes it, then, that he no longer acknowledges a God; that crimes appear to him as human policies; hell a vulgar prejudice; a future state a chimera; and the soul a spark which is extinguished with the body? By what exertion has he attained to the knowledge of things so new and so surprising? By what means has he succeeded to rid himself of these ancient prejudices, so rooted among men, so consistent with the feelings of his heart and the lights of reason? Has he searched into, and maturely examined, them? Has he adopted every solid precaution, which an affair, the most important in life, requires? Has he withdrawn himself from the commerce of men, in solitude, to allow leisure for reflection and study? Has he purified his heart, lest the passions may have misled him? What anxious attentions and solicitude to investigate the truth are required, to reject the first feelings which the soul has imbibed!

Listen, my brethren, and adore the justice of God on these corrupted hearts whom he delivers up to the vanity of their own

judgment. In proportion as his manners become dissolute, the rules have appeared suspicious; in proportion as he became debased, he has endeavoured to persuade himself that man is like the beast. He is become impious only by shutting up every avenue which might lead him to the truth; by no longer regarding religion as an important concern; by searching into it only for the purpose of dishonouring it by blasphemies and sacrilegious witticisms. He is become impious only by seeking to steel himself against the cries of his own conscience, and delivering himself up to the most infamous gratifications. It is by that path that he has attained to the wonderful and sublime science of unbelief; it is to these grand efforts that he owes the discovery of a truth, of which the rest of men before him had either been ignorant, or had detested.

Behold the source of unbelief, the corruption of the heart. Yes, my brethren, find me, if you can, men wise, temperate, pure, regular, and lovers of truth, who believe not a God, who look forward to no future state, who look upon adulteries, abominations, and incests, as the inclinations and innocent pastimes of nature. If the world has seen impious characters, who bore the semblance of wisdom and temperance, it was either that they better concealed their irregularities, in order to give more credit to their impiety, or the satiety of pleasures which had brought them to that feigned temperance, debauchery, had been the original source of their irreligion; their hearts were corrupted before their faith was wrecked; they had an interest to believe that all dies with the body, before they succeeded in persuading themselves of it; and a long indulgence of luxury had fully disgusted them with guilt, but had not rendered virtue more amiable to them.

What consolation for us who believe, that we must first renounce probity, modesty, manners, and all the feelings of humanity, before we can renounce faith; and, to be no longer Christian, must first cease to be man!

Behold, then, the uncertainty of the impious, already suspicious in its principle; but, secondly, it is foolish in the proofs on which it depends.

For, surely, very decisive and convincing proofs must be required to make us espouse the cause of unbelief, and to render us tranquil on what we are told of an eternal state to come. It is not natural that man would hazard an interest so serious as that of eternity on light and frivolous proofs; still less so, that he would thereon abandon the general opinion, the belief of his fathers, the religion of all ages, the agreement of all nations, and the prejudices of his education, had he not, as it were, been forced to it by the evidence of the truth. Unless absolutely convinced that all dies with the body, nothing can bear a comparison with the madness and folly of the unbeliever.

Now, is he completely convinced? What are the grand reasons which have determined him to adopt this vile cause? We know not, says he, what happens in that other world of which you tell us: the good die equally as the wicked: man as the beast; and no one returns to say which was in the error. Press him a little farther, and you will be shocked to see the weakness of unbelief: vague discourses, hackneyed suspicions, everlasting uncertainties, and chimerical suppositions, on which nobody in their senses would wish to risk the happiness or disquiet of a single day, and upon which he, however, hazards an eternity.

Behold the insurmountable proofs which the freethinker opposes to the belief of the universe; behold that evidence, which, in his mind, prevails over all that is most clear and most established on the earth. We know nothing of what passes in that other world of which you tell us. O man! open here thine eyes. A single doubt is sufficient to render thee impious, and all the proofs of religion are too weak to make thee a believer. Thy mind hesitates to believe in a future state, and, in the mean time, thou livest as though there were none. The only foundation thou hast for thine opinion, is thine uncertainty, and thou reproachest to us, that faith is a vulgar credulity.

But I ask, On what side here is credulity? Is it on that of the freethinker or the believer? The latter believes in a future state, on the authority of the divine writings, that is to say, the book, without contradiction, which most deserves belief; on the deposition of holy men, that is to say, just, pure, and miraculous characters, who have shed their blood to render glory to the truth, and to that doctrine of which the conversion of the universe has rendered a testimony that to the end of ages shall rise up against the impious; on the accomplishment of the prophecies, that is to say, the only character of truth which the impostor cannot imitate; on the tradition of all ages, that is to say, on facts which, since the creation of the world, have appeared certain to all the greatest characters, the most acknowledged just men, the wisest and most civilized nations the universe could ever boast of: in a word, on proofs at least probable. The freethinker denies a futurity on a simple doubt, a mere suspicion. Who knows it? says he; who has returned from it? He has no argument, either solid or decisive, to overturn the truth of a future state. For, let him avow it, and then will we submit. He only mistrusts that there be any thing after this life, and upon that he believes that all dies with him.

Now I demand, Which here is the credulous? Is it he, who, in support of his belief, has whatever is probable among men, and most calculated to make impression on reason; or he who is resolved to deny a future state on the weakness of a simple doubt? Nevertheless, the freethinker imagines that he exerts his reason more than the believer: he looks down upon us as weak and cre-

dulous men; and he considers himself as a superior genius, exalted above all vulgar prejudices, and whom reason alone, and not the public opinion, determines. O God! how terrible art thou when thou deliverest up a sinner to his own infatuation! and how well thou knowest to draw glory to thyself even from the efforts which thine enemies make to oppose it.

But I go still farther: When, even in the doubt, formed by the unbeliever, of a future state, the arguments should be equal, and the trifling uncertainties, which render him incredulous, should balance the solid and evident truths which promise immortality to us; I say, that even in an equality of proofs, he at least ought to wish that the opinion of faith, with regard to the nature of our soul, were true; an opinion which is so honourable to man; which tells him that his origin is celestial and his hopes eternal; he ought to wish that the doctrine of impiety were false; a doctrine so melancholy, so humiliating to man; which confounds him with the beast; which makes him live only for the body; gives him neither purpose, destination, nor hope; and limits his lot to a small number of rapid, restless, and sorrowful days, which he passes on the earth. All things equal, a reason born with any degree of elevation would prefer being deceived by what is honourable to itself rather than adopt a side so disgraceful to its being. What a soul, then, must the unbeliever have received from nature, to prefer, in so great an inequality of proofs, the belief that he is created only for this earth, and favourably to regard himself as a vile assemblage of dirt and the companion of the ox and bull! What do I say? What a monster in the universe must be the unbeliever, who mistrusts the general belief only because it is too glorious for his nature; and believes that the vanity of men has alone introduced it on the earth, and has persuaded them that they are immortal.

But no, my brethren! These men of flesh and blood, with reason reject the honour which religion does to their nature, and persuade themselves that their soul is merely of earth, and that all dies with the body. Sensual, dissolute, and effeminate men, who have no other check than a brutal instinct; no other rule than the vehemence of their desires; no other occupation than to awaken, by new artifices, the cupidity already satiated; men of that character can have little difficulty to believe that no principle of spiritual life exists within them; that the body is their only being; and, as they imitate the manners of beasts, they are pardonable in attributing to themselves the same nature. But let them not judge of all men by themselves: there are still on earth chaste, pure, and temperate souls: let them not ascribe to nature the shameful tendencies of their own mind; let them not degrade humanity in general, because they have unworthily debased themselves. Let them seek out among men such as themselves; and,

finding that they are almost single in the universe, they shall then see that they are rather monsters than the ordinary productions of nature.

Besides, not only is the freethinker foolish, because that, even in an equality of proofs, his heart and glory should decide him in favour of faith, but likewise his own interest: for, as I have already said, What does he risk by believing? What disagreeable consequences will follow his mistake? He will live with honour, probity and innocence; he will be mild, affable, just, sincere, religious, a generous friend, a faithful husband, and an equitable master: he will moderate his passions, which would otherwise have occasioned all the misfortunes of his life: he will abstain from pleasures and excesses which would have prepared for him a painful and premature old age, or a deranged fortune: he will enjoy the character of a virtuous man, and the esteem of mankind. Behold what he risks.—When all should even finish with this life, that surely is still the way to pass it with happiness and tranquillity: such is the only inconveniency I can find. If no eternal recompense shall follow, what will he have lost by expecting it? He has lost some sensual and momentary gratifications, which would soon have either fatigued him by the disgust which always follows their enjoyment, or tyrannized over him by the new desires they light up. He has lost the wretched satisfaction of being, for the instant he appeared on earth, cruel, unnatural, voluptuous, without faith, morals, or constancy; perhaps despised and disgraced in the midst of his own people. I can see no other misfortune: he sinks back to his original non-existence, and his error has no other consequence.

But if there be a future state, and he should deceive himself in rejecting faith, what does he not risk? The loss of eternal riches; the possession of thy glory, O my God! which would for ever have rendered him happy. But even that is only the commencement of his misery: he goes to experience punishment without end or measure, an eternity of horror and wrath. Now, compare these two destinies: what party here will the freethinker adopt? Will he risk the short duration of his days, or a whole eternity? Will he hold by the present, which must finish to-morrow, and in which he even cannot be happy? Will he tremble at a futurity which has no other limits than eternity, and can never finish but with God himself? Where is the prudent man, who in an uncertainty even equal, durst here balance? And what name shall we give to the unbeliever, who, with nothing in his favour but frivolous doubts, while on the side of truth, beholding the authority, example, prescription, proof, and voice of all ages, the entire world, singly adopts the wretched cause of unbelief; dies tranquil, as though he were no longer to have existence; leaves his eternal destiny in the hands of chance, and carelessly prepares to encounter so awful a scene.

O God! is this a man conducted by cool reason; or, is it a madman, who looks forward to no resource but despair? The uncertainty of the freethinker is therefore foolish in the proofs on which it depends.

But, lastly, it is still more dreadful in its consequences. And here, my brethren, allow me to lay aside the deep reasonings of erudition and doctrine; I wish to speak only to the conscience of the unbeliever, and to confine myself to the proofs which his own feelings acknowledge.

Now, if all shall finish with us, if man have nothing to expect after this life, and that here is our country, our origin, and the only happiness we can promise ourselves, why are we not happy? If only created for the pleasures of the senses, why are they unable to satisfy us? and why do they always leave a fund of weariness and sorrow in the heart? If man have nothing superior to the beast, why, like it, do not his days flow on without care, uneasiness, disgust, or sorrow, in sensual and carnal enjoyments? If man have no other felicity to expect than merely a temporal happiness, why is he unable to find it on the earth? Whence comes it that riches serve only to render him uneasy; that honours fatigue him; that pleasures exhaust him; that the sciences, far from satisfying, confound and irritate his curiosity; that reputation constrains and embarrasses him; that all these united cannot fill the immensity of his heart, and still leave him something to wish for? All other beings, contented with their lot, appear happy in their way in the situation the Author of nature has placed them; the stars, tranquil in the firmament, quit not their station to illuminate another world; the earth, regular in its movements, shoots not upwards to occupy their place; the animals crawl in the fields, without envying the lot of man, who inhabits cities and sumptuous palaces. The birds carol in the air without troubling themselves whether there be happier creatures in the earth than themselves; all are happy, as I may say; every thing in nature is in its place. Man alone is uneasy and discontented; man alone is a prey to his desires, allows himself to be torn by fears, finds his punishment in his hopes, and becomes gloomy and unhappy in the midst even of his pleasures: man alone can meet with nothing here to fix his heart.

Whence comes this, O man? Must it not be that here thou art not in thy place; that thou art made for heaven; that thy heart is greater than the world; that the earth is not thy country; and that whatever is not God is nothing to thee? Answer, if thou canst, or rather question thy heart, and thou wilt believe.

Secondly. If all die with the body, who has been able to persuade all men, of every age, and of every country, that their soul was immortal? From whence has this strange idea of immortality descended to the human race? How could an opinion, so dis-

tant from the nature of man, were he born only for the functions of the senses, have pervaded the earth? For if man, like the beast, be created only for the present, nothing ought to be more incomprehensible to him than even the idea of immortality. Could machines of clay, whose only object should be a sensual happiness, have ever been able to form, or to find in themselves, an opinion so exalted, an idea so sublime? Nevertheless, this opinion, so extraordinary, is become that of all men; this opinion, so opposite even to the senses, since man, like the beast, dies wholly, in our sight is established on the earth; this opinion, which ought not to have even found an inventor in the universe, has been received with a universal docility of belief amongst all nations,—the most savage as the most cultivated, the most polished as the most brutal, the most incredulous as the most submissive to faith.

For, go back to the beginning of ages, examine all nations, read the history of kingdoms and empires, listen to those who return from the most distant isles; the immortality of the soul has always been, and still is, the belief of every people on the face of the earth. The knowledge of one God may have been obliterated; his glory, power, and immensity, may have been effaced, as I may say, from the hearts and minds of men; obstinate and savage nations may still live without worship, religion, or God, in this world; but they all look forward to a future state: nothing has ever been able to eradicate the opinion of the immortality of the soul; they all figure to themselves a region which our souls shall inhabit after death; and, in forgetting God, they have never discarded the idea of that provision for themselves.

Now, whence comes it that men so different in their dispositions, worship, country, opinions, interests, and even figure, that scarcely do they seem of the same species with each other, unanimously agree, however, on this point, and expect immortality? There is no collusion here; for how is it possible to assemble together men of all countries and ages? It is not a prejudice of education; for manners, habits, and worship, which are generally the consequences of prejudices, are not the same among all nations: the opinion of immortality is common to all. It is not a sect; for, besides that it is the universal religion of the world, that tenet has had neither head nor protector. Men have adopted it themselves, or rather nature has taught them to know it without the assistance of teachers; and, since the beginning of things, it alone has passed from father to son, and has been always received as an indisputable truth. O thou, who believest thyself to be only a mass of clay, quit the world, where thou findest thyself single in belief; go, and in other regions search for men of another species, and similar to the beast; or rather be struck with horror to find thyself single, as it were, in the universe, in revolt against nature, and disavowing thine own heart, and acknowledge, in an opinion common to all

men, the general impression of the Author who has formed them all!

Lastly. And with this proof I conclude. The universal fellowship of men, the laws which unite one to the other, the most sacred and inviolable duties of civil life, are all founded only on the certainty of a future state. Thus, if all die with the body, the universe must adopt other laws, manners, and habits, and a total change must take place in every thing. If all die with the body, the maxims of equity, friendship, honour, good faith, and gratitude, are only popular errors; since we owe nothing to men who are nothing to us, to whom no general bond of worship and hope unites us, who will to-morrow sink back to their original nonentity, and who are already no more. If all die with us, the tender names of child, parent, father, friend, and husband, are merely theatrical appellations and a mockery; since friendship, even that springing from virtue, is no longer a lasting tie; since our fathers, who preceded us, are no more; since our children shall not succeed us, for the nonentity in which we must one day be has no consequence; since the sacred society of marriage is only a brutal union, from which, by a strange and fortuitous concurrence, proceed beings who resemble us, but who have nothing in common with us but their nonentity.

What more shall I add? If all dies with us, domestic annals and the train of our ancestors are only a collection of chimeras; since we have no forefathers, and shall have no descendants, anxieties for a name and posterity are therefore ridiculous; the honours we render to the memory of illustrious men, a childish error, since it is absurd to honour what has no existence; the sacred respect we pay to the habitations of the dead, a vulgar illusion; the ashes of our fathers and friends, a vile dust which we should cast to the winds as belonging to no person; the last wishes of the dying, so sacred amongst even the most barbarous nations, the last sound of a machine which crumbles in pieces; and, to comprise all in a word, if all die with us, the laws are then a foolish subjection; kings and rulers phantoms, whom the imbecility of the people has exalted; justice a usurpation on the liberties of men; the law of marriage a vain scruple; modesty a prejudice; honour and probity chimeras; incests, parricides, and the blackest villainies, pastimes of nature, and names which the policy of legislators has invented.

Behold, to what the sublime philosophy of the freethinker amounts! Behold that force of argument, that reason, and that wisdom, which they are continually vaunting to us! Agree to their maxims, and the entire universe sinks back to a frightful chaos; all is overturned on the earth; all ideas of virtue and vice are reversed, and the most inviolable laws of society vanish; the institution of morals perishes; the government of states and empires is without direction; all harmony in the body politic falls. The

human species is only an assemblage of fools, barbarians, voluptuaries, madmen, and villains, who own no law but force; no other check than their passions and the terror of authority; no other bond than impiety and independence; and no other God than themselves. Behold the world of the freethinker! and if this hideous plan of a republic pleases you, constitute, if you can, a society of these monsters. The only thing that remains for us to say, is, that you are fully qualified to occupy a place in it.

How worthy, then, of man to look forward to an eternal destiny, to regulate his manners by the law, and to live as having one day to render account of his actions before Him who shall weigh us all in the balance.

The uncertainty of the believer is then suspicious in its principle, foolish in its proofs, and horrible in its consequences. But, after having shown you that nothing can be more repugnant to sound reason than the doubt which he entertains of a future state, let us completely confound his pretexts, and prove that nothing is more opposite to the idea of a wise God and to the opinion of his own conscience.

PART II.—It is no doubt astonishing that the freethinker should seek, even in the greatness of God, a shelter to his crimes; and that, finding nothing within himself to justify the horrors of his soul, he can expect to find in the awful Majesty of the Supreme Being an indulgence which he cannot find even in the corruption of his own heart.

Indeed, says the unbeliever, is it worthy the greatness of God to pay attention to what passes among men,—to calculate their virtues or vices,—to study even their thoughts, and their trifling and endless desires? Men, worms of the earth, who sink into nothing before the majesty of his looks, are they worthy his attentive inspection? And is it not degrading a God, whom we are taught to believe so great, to give him an employment by which even man would be dishonoured?

But, before I make you sensible of the whole absurdity of this blasphemy, I beg you will observe, that it is the freethinker himself who thus degrades the majesty of God, and brings him to a level with man: for, has the Almighty occasion narrowly to observe men, in order to know every thought and deed? Are cares and attentions necessary for him, to see what passes on the earth? Is it not in him that we are, that we live, that we act? And can we shun his looks, or can he even avert them from our crimes? What folly, then, in the freethinker, to suppose that it requires care and observation from the Divinity, if he wishes to remark what passes on the earth! His only employment is to know and enjoy himself.

This reflection admitted, I answer, in the first place, If it become the greatness of God to leave good and evil without punish-

ment or reward, it is then equally indifferent, whether we be just, sincere, friendly, and charitable, or cruel, deceitful, perfidious, and unnatural: God, consequently, does not love virtue, modesty, rectitude, religion, more than debauchery, perjury, impiety, and villainy; since the just and the impious, the pure and the impure, shall experience the same lot, and an eternal annihilation equally awaits them all in the grave.

What do I say? God even seems to declare in favour of the impious here against the just. He exalts him like the cedar of Lebanon, loads him with riches and honours, gratifies his desires, and assists his projects; for the impious are in general the prosperous on the earth. On the contrary, he seems to neglect the upright man; he humbles, afflicts, and delivers him up to the falsity and power of his enemies; for disgrace and affliction are the common portion of the good below. What a monster of a Supreme Being, if all must finish with man, and if neither miseries nor rewards, except those of this life, be to be expected!

Is he, then, the protector of adulteries, profanations, and the most shocking crimes; the persecutor of innocence, modesty, piety, and all the purest virtues? Are his favours the price of guilt, and his punishments the recompense of virtue? What a God of darkness, imbecility, confusion, and iniquity does the freethinker form to himself!

What, my brethren! It would become his greatness to leave the world he has created, in a general confusion; to see the wicked almost always prevail over the upright; the innocent crushed by the usurper; the father the victim of an ambitious and unnatural son? From the height of his greatness, God would amuse himself with these horrible transactions, without any interest in their commission? Because he is great, he should be either weak, unjust, or cruel? Because men are insignificant, they should have the privilege of being dissolute without guilt, or virtuous without merit?

O God! if such be the character of thy Supreme Being,—if it be thee whom we adore under such shocking ideas, I know thee no more than as my heavenly Father, my protector, the consolator of my sufferings, the support of my weakness, and the rewarder of my fidelity! Thou art then only an indolent and capricious tyrant, who sacrificest all men to thy vain pride, and hast drawn them from nothing only to serve as the sport of thy leisure or caprice!

For, lastly, if there be no future state, what design, worthy of his wisdom, could God have proposed in creating man? What, in forming them, had he no other view than in forming the beast? Man, that being so noble, who is capable of such sublime thoughts, such vast desires, and such grand sentiments,—susceptible of love, truth, and justice; man, of all creatures, alone worthy of a great destination, that of knowing and loving the Author of his being; that man should be made only for the earth, to pass a small portion of days, like the beast, in trifling

employments, or sensual gratifications ; he should fulfil his purpose, by acting so risible and so pitiable a part ; and afterward should sink back to nonentity, without any other use having been made of that vast mind and elevated heart which the Author of his being had given him ? O God ! where would here be thy wisdom, to have made so grand a work for the duration only of a moment ; to have exhibited men upon the earth only as a playful essay of thy power ; or to amuse thy leisure by a variety of shows ! The deity of the freethinker is not grand, therefore, but because he is more unjust, capricious, and despicable than men ! Pursue these reflections, and support, if you can, all the extravagance of their folly.

How worthy, then, of God, my brethren, to watch over the universe ; to conduct man, whom he has created, by the laws of justice, truth, charity, and innocence ; to make virtue and reason the bond of union and the foundation of human society ! How worthy of God to love in his creatures those virtues which render himself amiable ; to hate the vices which disfigure in them his image ; not to confound for ever the just with the impious ; to render happy with himself those souls who have lived only for him ; and to deliver up to their own misery those who believed they had found a happiness independent of him !

Behold the God of the Christians ; behold that wise, just, and holy Deity whom we adore ; and the advantage we have over the freethinker is, that ours is the God of an innocent and pure heart ; the God whom all creatures manifest to us ; whom all ages have invoked ; whom the sages, even of Paganism, have acknowledged ; and of whom nature has deeply engraven the idea on the very foundation of our being !

But, since God is so just, ought he to punish, as crimes, inclinations for pleasure born with us ; nay, which he alone has given us ? Last blasphemy of impiety, and last part of this Discourse. I shall abridge it, and conclude.

But, in the first place, be whom you may, who hold this absurd language, if you pretend to justify all your actions by the inclinations which induce you to them ; if whatever we wish become legitimate ; if our desires ought to be the only regulation of our duties ; on that principle, you have only to regard with an envious eye the fortune of your brother, to acquire a right to despoil him of it : his wife, with a corrupted heart, to be authorized to violate the sanctity of the nuptial bed, in opposition to the most sacred rights of society and nature. You have only to suspect, or dislike an opponent, to become entitled to destroy him ; to bear, with impatience, the authority of a father, or the severity of a master, to imbrue your hands in their blood : in a word, you have only to bear within you the impressions of every vice, to be permitted the gratification of all ; and, as each finds the fatal seeds in himself, none would be exempted from this

horrible privilege. It is necessary, therefore, that man conduct himself by other laws than his inclinations, and another rule than his desires.

Even the Pagan ages acknowledged the necessity of a philosophy, that is to say, of a light superior to the senses, which regulated their practice, and made reason a check to the human passions.

Nature alone led them to this truth, and taught them that blind instinct ought not to be the sole guide of the actions of men: this instinct, therefore, either is not the original institution of nature, or it must be a corruption of it, since all the laws ever framed on earth have avowedly been made to restrain it,—that all those who, in every age, have borne the character of wise and virtuous, have rejected its impressions,—that, amongst all nations, those infamous individuals who yielded themselves up without reserve or shame to brutal sensuality, have been always considered as monsters, and the disgrace of humanity,—and, the maxim once established, that our inclinations and desires cannot be considered as crimes, society can no longer exist; men must separate to be in safety, must bury themselves in the forests, and live solitary like the beasts.

Besides, let us render justice to men, or rather to the Author who has formed us. If we find within us inclinations to vice and voluptuousness, do we not also find sentiments of virtue, modesty, and innocence? If the law of the members drag us toward the pleasures of the senses, do we not also bear, written in our hearts, another law, which recalls us to chastity and temperance? Now, between these two tendencies, why does the freethinker decide that the inclination which impels us toward the senses is most conformable to the nature of man? Is it from being the most violent? But its violence alone is a proof of its disorder; and whatever proceeds from nature ought to be made moderate. Is it from being the strongest? But there are just and believing souls in whom it is always subject to reason. Is it from being more agreeable? But a sure proof that this pleasure is not made to render man happy, is, that disgust immediately follows it; and likewise that, to the good, virtue has a thousand times more charms than vice. Lastly, is it from being more worthy of man? You dare not say so, since it is through it that he confounds himself with the beast. Why, then, do you decide in favour of the senses, against reason, and insist, that it is more conformable to man to live like the beast than to be a reasonable being?

Lastly, were all men corrupted, and, like the animals, not gifted with reason; did they blindly yield themselves up to their brutal instinct, and to the empire of the senses and passions,—you, then, perhaps, might have reason to say that these are inclinations inseparable from nature, and in example find a sort of excuse for your excesses. But, look around you: do you no longer find any upright characters on the earth? There is no question here of those

vain discourses you so frequently hold against piety, and of which you feel yourselves the injustice. Speak candidly, and render glory to the truth: are there no longer chaste, faithful, and righteous souls, who live in the fear of the Lord, and in the observance of his holy law?

Whence comes it, then, that you have not the same empire over your passions as enjoyed by these just men? Have they not inherited from nature the same inclinations? Do the objects of the passions not awaken in their hearts the same sensations as in yours? Do they not bear within them the sources of the same troubles? What have the just superior to you, but that command over themselves, and fidelity, of which you are destitute?

O man! thou imputest to God a weakness which is the work of thine own disorders! Thou accusest the Author of nature of the irregularities of thy own will. It is not enough to offend him; thou wishest to make him responsible for thy deeds, and pretendest that the fruit of thy crimes becomes the title of thine innocence! With what chimeras is a corrupted heart not capable of feeding its delusions, in order to justify to itself the shame and infamy of its vices!

God is then just, my brethren, when he punisheth the transgressions of his law. And let not the freethinker here say to himself that the recompense of the just shall then be resurrection to eternal life, and the punishment of the sinner the everlasting annihilation of his soul; for behold the last resource of impiety.

But what punishment would it be to the freethinker to exist no more? He wishes that annihilation; he looks forward to it as his sweetest hope: amidst his pleasures he lives tranquil only in that expectation. What! the just God would punish a sinner by affording him a destiny according to the summit of his wishes? Ah! it is not thus that God punisheth. For what would the freethinker find so shocking in a return to nonentity? Would it be the deprivation of his God? But he loves him not; he knows him not; he desires no communication with him; for his only god is himself. Would it be to exist no more? But what could be more desirable to a monster, who knows that, beyond the term of his crimes, he cannot live but in sufferance, and in the expiation of the horrors of an infamous life? Would it be by having for ever lost the worldly pleasures he enjoyed, and the different objects of his passions? But, when he exists no more, the love of these must equally be extinguished. A more desirable fate cannot therefore be pointed out to the freethinker. It indeed would be the happy conclusion of all his excesses, horrors, and blasphemies.

No, my brethren! The hopes of the freethinker, but not his crimes, shall perish: his torments shall be as eternal as his debaucheries would have been, had he been master of his own destiny. He would willingly have eternized himself on the earth, in the practice of every sensual vice. Death has bounded his crimes, but has not limited his criminal desires. The just and upright Judge, who

fathoms the heart, will therefore proportion the punishment to the guilt.

What are we to conclude from this Discourse? That the free-thinker is to be pitied for grounding the only consolation of his future destiny on the uncertainty of the truths of the gospel: that he is to be pitied because his only tranquillity must be in living without faith, worship, confidence, or God; because the only hope he can indulge, is, that the gospel is a fable; the belief of all ages a childish credulity; the universal opinion of men a popular error; the first principles of nature and reason prejudices of education; the blood of so many martyrs, whom the hopes of a future state supported under all their sufferings and tortures, a mere tale concerted to deceive mankind; the conversion of the world a human enterprise; and the accomplishment of the promises a mere stroke of chance: in a word, that every thing, the best established, and the most consistent with truth and reason in the world, must all be false, to accomplish the only happiness he can promise himself, and to save him from eternal misery.

O man! I will point out to thee a much surer way to render thyself tranquil, and to enjoy the sweets of internal peace. Dread that futurity thou forcest thyself to disbelieve. Question us no more what they do in that other world of which we tell thee; but ask thyself, without ceasing, what thou art doing in this? Quiet thy conscience by the innocency of thy life, and not by the impiety of thy unbelief; give repose to thy heart by calling upon God, and not by doubting that he pays attention to thee. The peace of the unbeliever is despair. Seek, then, thy happiness, not by freeing thyself from the yoke of faith, but by tasting how sweet and agreeable it is. Follow the maxims it prescribes to thee, and thy reason will no longer refuse submission to the mysteries it commands thee to believe. A future state will cease to appear incredible to thee from the moment thou ceasest to live like those who centre all their happiness in the fleeting moments of this life. Then, far from dreading a futurity, thy wishes will anticipate it. Thou wilt sigh for the arrival of that happy day, when the Son of man, the Father of all future ages, shall come to punish the unbelieving, and to conduct thee to his kingdom, along with those who have lived on the earth in the expectation and hope of a blessed immortality.

That you, my brethren, may be partakers of this eternal felicity, is my fervent prayer. Amen.

SERMON IX.

ON DEATH.

“ Now, when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.”—LUKE vii. 12.

WAS death ever accompanied with more affecting circumstances? It is an only son, sole successor to the name, titles, and fortune of his ancestors, whom death snatches from an afflicted mother and widow; he is ravished from her in the flower of age, and almost at his entry into life; at a period when, happily past the dangers of infancy, and attained to that first degree of strength and reason which commences man, he seemed least exposed to the shafts of death, and at last allowed maternal tenderness to breathe from the fears which accompany the uncertain progress of education. The citizens run in crowds, to mingle their tears with those of the disconsolate mother; they assiduously seek to lessen her grief, by the consolation of those vague and common-place discourses to which profound sorrow little attends; with her they surround the mournful bier, and they deck the obsequies with their mourning and presence; the train of this funeral pomp to them is a show; but is it an instruction? They are struck and affected, but are they from it less attached to life? And will not the remembrance of this death perish in their minds, with the noise and decorations of the funeral?

To similar examples, we every day bring the same dispositions. The feelings which an unexpected death awakens in our hearts are the feelings of a day, as though death itself ought to be the concern of a day. We exhaust ourselves in vain reflections on the inconstancy of human things; but, the object which struck us once out of sight, the heart, become tranquil, finds itself the same. Our projects, our cares, our attachments to the world, are not less lively than if we were labouring for eternal ages; and, at our departure from a melancholy spectacle, where we have sometimes seen birth, youth, titles, and fame, wither in a moment, and for ever buried in the grave, we return to the world more occupied with, and more eager than ever after all those vain objects of which we so lately had seen with our eyes, and almost felt with our hands, the insignificancy and meanness.

Let us at present examine the reasons of so deplorable a mistake. Whence comes it that men reflect so little upon death, and that the thoughts of it make such transitory impressions? It is this: the uncertainty of death amuses us, and removes from our mind its remembrance; the certainty of death appals, and forces us to turn our eyes from the gloomy picture: the uncertainty of it lulls and encourages us; whatever is awful and certain, with regard to it, makes us dread the thoughts of it. Now, I wish at present to combat the dangerous security of the first, and the improper dread of the other. Death is uncertain; you are therefore imprudent not to be occupied with the thoughts of it, but to allow it to surprise you. Death is certain; you then are foolish to dread the thoughts of it, and it ought never to be out of your sight. Think upon death, because you know not the hour it will arrive: think upon death, because it must arrive. This is the subject of the present Discourse.

PART I.—The first step which man makes in life, is likewise the first toward the grave: from the moment his eyes open to the light, the sentence of death is pronounced against him; and, as though it were a crime to live, it is sufficient that he lives to make him deserving of death. That was not our first destiny. The Author of our being had at first animated our clay with a breath of immortality: he had placed in us a seed of life, which the revolution of neither years nor time could have weakened or extinguished: his work was so perfect, that it might have defied the duration of ages, while nothing external could have dissolved or even injured its harmony. Sin alone withered this divine seed, overturned this blessed order, and armed all created beings against man: and Adam became mortal from the moment he became a sinner: “By sin,” said the apostle, “did death enter into the world.”

From our birth, therefore, we all bear it within us. It appears, that, in our mother's womb, we have sucked in a slow poison, with which we come into the world; which makes us languish on the earth, some a longer, others a more limited period, but which always terminates in death. We die every day; every moment deprives us of a portion of life, and advances us a step toward the grave: the body pines, health decays, and every thing which surrounds assists to destroy us; food corrupts, medicines weaken us; the spiritual fire, which internally animates, consumes us; and our whole life is only a long and painful sickness. Now, in this situation, what image ought to be so familiar to man as death? A criminal condemned to die, whichever way he casts his eyes, what can he see but this melancholy object? And does the longer or shorter period we have to live, make a sufficient difference to entitle us to think ourselves immortal on this earth?

It is true, that the measure of our lots is not alike: some, in peace, see their days grow upon them to the most advanced age, and, inheritors of the blessings of their primeval age, expire full of years in the midst of a numerous posterity: others, arrested in the middle of their course, see, like king Hezekiah, the gates of the grave open for them while yet in their prime; and, like him, "seek in vain for the residue of their years:" there are some who only show themselves as it were on the earth, who finish their course with the day, and who, like the flowers of the field, leave scarcely an interval between the instant which views them in their bloom and that which sees them withered and cut off. The fatal moment marked for each is a secret written in the book of life, which the Lamb of God alone has a right to open. We all live, then, uncertain of the duration of our life; and this uncertainty, of itself so fit to render us watchful of our last hour, even lulls our vigilance. We never think on death, because we know not exactly in what age of life to place it: we even regard not old age as the term, at least sure and inevitable: the doubt of ever reaching that period, which surely ought to fix and limit our hopes to this side of decrepitude, serves only to stretch them beyond it. Unable to settle itself on any thing certain, our dread becomes a vague and confused feeling, which fixes on nothing; insomuch that the uncertainty, which ought only to dwell on the length or brevity of it, renders us tranquil on our existence itself.

Now I say, in the first place, that of all dispositions, this is the rashest and most imprudent; I appeal to yourselves for this truth. Is an evil which may take place every day, to be more disregarded than another which threatens you only at the expiration of a number of years? What! because your soul may every moment be recalled, you would tranquilly live as though you were never to lose it? Because the danger is always present, circumspection becomes less necessary? But in what other situation or circumstance of life, except that of our eternal salvation, does uncertainty become an excuse for security and neglect? Does the conduct of that servant in the gospel, who, under pretence that his master delayed to return, and that he knew not the hour when he should arrive, applied his property to his own purposes, as if he never were to render account of it, appear to you a prudent discharge of his duty? What other motives has Jesus Christ made use of to exhort us to incessant watching? and what in religion is more proper to awake our vigilance than the uncertainty of this last day?

Ah! my brethren, were the hour unalterably marked for each of us; were the kingdom of God, like the stars, to come at a known and fixed revolution; at our birth, were our portions written on our foreheads, the number of our years, and the fatal day which shall terminate them; that fixed and certain object, however distant, would incessantly employ our thoughts, would agitate and

deprive us of every tranquil moment; we would always regard the interval before us as too short; that object, in spite of us, always present to our mind, would disgust us with every thing; would render every pleasure insipid, fortune indifferent, and the whole world tiresome and a burden: that terrible moment, which we would no more lose sight of, would repress our passions, extinguish our animosities, disarm revenge, calm the revolts of the flesh, and mingle itself in all our schemes; and our life, thus limited to a certain number of days, fixed and known, would be only a preparation for that last moment. Are we in our senses, my brethren? Death seen at a distance, at a sure and fixed point, would fill us with dread, detach us from the world and ourselves, call us to God, and incessantly occupy our thoughts; and this same death, uncertain, which may happen every day, every instant,—this same death, which must surprise us when we least expect it, which is perhaps at the gate, engages not our attention, and leaves us tranquil,—what do I say?—leaves us all our passions, our criminal attachments, our ardour for the world, pleasures, and fortune: and, because it is not certain that we shall die to-day, we live as if we were to live for ever.

Observe, my brethren, that this uncertainty is in effect accompanied with all the circumstances most capable of alarming, or at least of engaging the attention of a prudent man, who makes any use of his reason. In the first place, the surprise of that last day you have to dread, is not one of those rare and singular accidents which befall only some unfortunate wretches, and which it is more prudent to disregard than to foresee. In order to be surprised by death, the question at present is not that the thunder should fall upon your heads, that you should be buried under the ruins of your palaces, that you should be swallowed up by the waves, nor many other accidents, whose singularity renders them more terrible, though less dreaded; it is a common evil; not a day passes, without furnishing some examples; almost all men are surprised by death; all see it approach, while they believe it yet at a distance; all say to themselves, like the foolish man in the gospel, “Why should I be afraid? I have many years yet to come.” In this manner have you seen depart, your relations, friends, and almost all those whose death you have witnessed; every instance surprised you; you expected it not so soon; and you endeavoured to account for it by human reasons, such as the imprudence of the patient, or the want of proper advice and medicines; but the only and true reason is, that the hour of the Lord always takes us by surprise.

The earth is like a vast field of battle, where we are every day engaged with the enemy. You have happily escaped to-day; but you have witnessed the fall of many, who, like you, expected to survive: to-morrow you again must enter the lists; and who has told you that fortune, so capricious with regard to

others, to you alone will continue favourable? And since you at last must perish there, are you prudent in building a fixed and permanent habitation, on the very spot, perhaps, intended for your tomb? Place yourselves in any possible situation, there is not a moment but may be your last, and has actually been so to some of your brethren; no brilliant action, but may terminate in the eternal shades of the graves; and Herod is struck in the midst of the servile and foolish applauses of his people: no day set apart for the solemn display of worldly magnificence, but may conclude with your funeral pomp; and Jezebel was precipitated, the very day she had chosen to show herself in her greatest pride and ostentation, from the windows of her palace: no festival but may be the feast of death; and Belshazzar expired in the midst of a sumptuous banquet: no repose but may conduct you to an everlasting sleep; and Holofernes, in the heart of his army, and conqueror of so many kingdoms and provinces, fell under the stroke of a simple Jewish woman: no disease, but may be the fatal term of your course; and every day you see the slightest complaints deceive the opinions of the most skilful and the expectations of the patient, and almost in an instant take the turn of death:—in a word, figure yourselves in any possible stage or station of life, and with difficulty can you number those who have been surprised in a similar situation; and what right have you to expect, that you alone shall be exempted from a lot common to all? You allow, you confess this; but these confessions are merely words of course, and are never followed by a single precaution to secure you from the danger.

Secondly. Did this uncertainty turn only on the hour, the place, or the manner of your death, it would appear less shocking; for, after all, says a holy father, what matters it to a Christian, whether he shall expire in the midst of his connexions or in the country of strangers; in the bed of sorrow or the abyss of the waves; provided he dies in piety and righteousness? But what renders this terrible, is, the uncertainty whether you shall die in the Lord or in sin; that you shall know not what will be your lot in that other region where conditions change no more; into whose hands, at its departure from the body, your soul, trembling, a stranger and alone, shall fall; whether it shall be surrounded with light, and carried to the foot of the throne on the wings of blessed and happy spirits, or enveloped in darkness, and cast headlong into the gulf: you hang between these two eternities; you know not to which you shall be attached: death alone will disclose the secret; and in this uncertainty you remain tranquil, and indolently wait its approach, as though it were a matter of no importance to you, nor to determine your eternal happiness or misery? Ah! my brethren, were it even true that all ends with us, the impious man would still be foolish in saying, “Let us think not on death; let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.” The more

he found life agreeable, the more reason would he have to be afraid of death, which to him would, however, be only a cessation of existence. But we, to whom faith opens prospects of punishment or eternal rewards beyond the grave; we, who must reach the gates of death, still uncertain of this dreadful alternative, is there not a folly,—what do I say?—a madness, (not, to be sure, in professing the sentiments of the impious, “Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die,)” in living as though we thought like him! Is it possible we can remain a single instant unoccupied with that decisive moment, and without allaying, by the precautions of faith, that trouble and dread into which this uncertainty must cast a soul who has not yet renounced his eternal hopes?

Thirdly. In all other uncertainties, the number of those who share the same danger may inspire us with confidence; or resources, with which we flatter ourselves, may leave us more tranquil; or, even at the worst, the disappointment becomes a lesson, which teaches us, to our cost, to be more guarded in future. But, in the dreadful uncertainty in question, the number of those who run the same risk can diminish nothing from our danger; all the resources with which we may flatter ourselves on the bed of death, are, in general, merely illusive; and religion itself, which furnishes them, dare ground but small hopes on them: in a word, the mistake is irremediable; we die only once, and our past folly can no more serve as a lesson to guard us from future error. Our misfortunes indeed open our eyes; but these new lights, which dissipate our blindness, become useless, by the immutability of our state, and are rather a cruel knowledge of our misery, which prepares to tear us with eternal remorse, and to occasion the most grievous portion of our punishment, than wise reflections which may lead us to repentance.

Upon what, then, can you justify this profound and incomprehensible neglect of your last day, in which you live? On youth, which may seem to promise you many years yet to come?

Youth! But the son of the widow of Nain was young. Does death respect ages or rank? Youth! But that is exactly what makes me tremble for you: licentious manners, pleasures to excess, extravagant passions, ambitious desires, the dangers of war, thirst for renown, and the sallies of revenge; is it not during the pursuit or gratification of some one of these passions, that the majority of men finish their career? Adonias, but for his debaucheries, might have lived to a good old age; Absalom, but for his ambition; the king of Schem's son, but for his love of Dinah; Jonathan, had glory not dug a grave for him in the mountains of Gilboa. Youth! Alas! it is the season of dangers, and the rock upon which life generally splits.

Once more, then, upon what do you found your hopes? On the strength of your constitution? But what is the best-estab-

lished health? A spark which a breath shall extinguish: a single day's sickness is sufficient to lay low the most robust. I examine not after this, whether you do not even flatter yourselves on this point; if a body, exhausted by the irregularities of youth, do not announce to your own minds the sentence of death; if habitual infirmities do not lay open before you the gates of the grave; if disagreeable indications do not menace you with some sudden accident. I wish you to lengthen out your days even beyond your hopes. Alas! my brethren, can any period appear long which must at last come to an end? Look back, and see where now are your youthful years? What trace of solid joy do they leave in your remembrance? Not more than a vision of the night; you dream that you have lived, and behold all that is left to you of it: all that interval, elapsed from your birth to the present day, is like a rapid flash, whose passage the eye, far from dwelling on, can with difficulty see. Had you begun to live even with the world itself, the past would now appear to you neither longer nor more real: all the ages elapsed down to the present day you would look upon as fugitive instants; all the nations which have appeared and disappeared on the earth; all the revolutions of empires and kingdoms; all those grand events which embellish our histories, to you would be only the different scenes of a show which you had seen concluded in a day. Recollect the victories, the captured cities, the glorious treaties, the magnificence, the splendid events of the first years of this reign; most of you have not only witnessed, but have shared in their danger and glory; our annals will convey them down to our latest posterity; but to you they are already but a dream, but a momentary flash, which is extinguished, and which every day effaces more and more from your remembrance. What, then, is this small portion you have still to accomplish? Can you believe that the days to come have more reality than those already past? Years appear long while yet at a distance; arrived, they vanish, they slip from us in an instant; and scarcely shall we have looked around us, when, as if by enchantment, we shall find ourselves at the fatal term, which still appeared so distant that we rashly concluded it would never arrive. View the world, such as you have seen it in your youthful days, and such as you now see it: new personages have mounted the stage; the grand parts are filled by new actors; there are new events, new intrigues, new passions, new heroes in virtue as well as in vice, which engage the praises, derisions, and censures of the public; a new world, without your having perceived it, has insensibly risen on the wrecks of the first; every thing passes with and like you; a velocity, which nothing can stop, drags all into the gulf of eternity: yesterday our ancestors cleared the way for us; and tomorrow we shall do the same for those who are to follow. Ages succeed each other; the appearance of the world incessantly changes; the dead and the living continually replace and succeed

each other. Nothing stands still; all changes, all wastes away, all has an end. God alone remaineth always the same: the torrent of ages, which sweeps away all men, flows before his eyes; and, with indignation, he sees weak mortals, carried down by that rapid course, insult him while passing; wish, of that transitory instant, to constitute all their happiness; and, at their departure from it, fall into the hands of his vengeance and wrath. Where, says the apostle, amongst us, are now the wise? And a man, were he even capable of governing the world, can he merit that name from the moment that he forgets what he is and what he must be?

Nevertheless, my brethren, what impression on us does the instability of every thing worldly make? The death of our relations, friends, competitors, and masters? We never think that we are immediately to follow them! we think only of decking ourselves out in their spoils; we think not on the little time they had enjoyed them, but only on the pleasure they must have had in their possession: we hasten to profit ourselves from the wreck of each other: we are like those foolish soldiers, who, in the heat of battle, when their companions are every moment falling around them, eagerly load themselves with their clothes; and scarcely are they put on, when a mortal blow at once deprives them of their absurd decorations and life. In this manner, the son decks himself with the spoils of the father; closes his eyes; succeeds to his rank, fortune, and dignities; conducts the pomp of his funeral, and leaves it more occupied with, more affected by, the new titles with which he is now invested, than instructed by the last advices of a dying parent; than afflicted for his loss, or even undeceived with regard to the things of the earth, by a sight which places before his eyes their insignificancy, and announces to him the same destiny soon. The death of our companions is not a more useful lesson to us: such a person leaves vacant an office which we hasten to obtain; another promotes us a step in the service; claims expire with this one, which might have greatly embarrassed us; that one now leaves us the undisputed favourite of our sovereign; another brings us a step nearer to a certain dignity, and opens the road to a rank which his death alone could render attainable; and, on these occasions, our spirits are invigorated; we adopt new measures, and form new projects; and, far from our eyes being opened, by the examples of those whom we see disappear, there issue, even from their ashes, fatal sparks, which inflame all our desires and attachments to the world; and death, that gloomy picture of our misery, reanimates more passions among men than even all the illusions of life. What, then, can detach us from this wretched world, since death itself seems only to knit more strongly the bonds, and strengthen us in the errors which bind us to it.

Here, my brethren, I require nothing from you but reason. What are the natural consequences which good sense alone ought to draw from the uncertainty of death?

First. The hour of death is uncertain : every year, every day, every moment, may be the last of our life. It is absurd, then, by attaching ourselves to what must pass away in an instant, to sacrifice the only riches which are eternal ; every thing you do for the earth ought therefore to appear as lost, since you have no interest there ; you can depend on nothing there, and can carry nothing from it, but what you shall have done for heaven. The kingdoms of the earth, and all their glory, ought not then for a moment to balance the interests of your eternal welfare, since the greatest fortune cannot assure you of a day more than the most humble ; and, since the only consequence which can accrue from it is a more deep and bitter sorrow on the bed of death, when you shall be obliged for ever to part from them, every care, every movement, every desire, ought therefore to centre in establishing for yourselves a permanent and unchangeable fortune, an eternal happiness, which fadeth not away.

Secondly. The hour of your death is uncertain : you ought then to expect it every day ; never to permit yourselves an action, in which you would wish not to be surprised ; to consider all your proceedings as those of a dying man, who every moment expects his soul to be recalled ; to act, in every thing, as though you were that instant to render account of your conduct ; and, since you cannot answer for the time which is to come, in such a manner to regulate the present that you may have no occasion for the future to repair its errors.

Lastly. The hour of your death is uncertain : delay not, then, your repentance. Time presses ; hasten, then, your conversion to the Lord ; you cannot assure yourselves of a day, and you defer it to a distant and uncertain period to come. Were you unfortunately to swallow a mortal poison, would you put off to another day the trial of the only antidote which might save your life ? Would the agent of death, which you carried in your bowels, allow of delays and neglect ? Such is your state. If you be wise, have instant recourse to your precautions. You carry death in your soul, since in it you carry sin ; hasten to apply the remedy, since every moment is precious to him who cannot depend on one. The poisonous beverage which infects your soul cannot long be trifled with ; the goodness of God still holds out to you a cure ; hasten, once more I say, to secure it, while it is not yet too late. Should entreaties be necessary to determine your compliance, ought not the prospect of relief to be sufficient ? Is it necessary to exhort an unfortunate wretch, just sinking in the waves, to exert his endeavours to save himself ? Ought you, in this matter, to have occasion for our ministry ? Your last hour approaches ; you soon shall have to appear before the tribunal of God. You may usefully employ the moment which yet remains to you ; almost all those, whose departure from this world you are daily witnessing,

allow it to slip from them, and die without having reaped any advantage from it. You imitate their neglect; the same surprise awaits you, and, like them, you will be cut off before the work of reformation has commenced. They had been warned of it, and in the same manner we warn you; their misery touches you not; and the unfortunate lot which awaits you, will not more sensibly affect those to whom we shall one day announce it; it is a succession of blindness, which passes from father to son, and is perpetuated on the earth: we all wish to live better, and we all die before we have begun to reform.

Such, my brethren, are the prudent and natural reflections which the uncertainty of our last hour should lead us to make. But if, on account of its uncertainty, you are imprudent in paying no more attention to it, than as if it were never to arrive, the fearful portion attending its certainty still less excuses your folly, in striving to remove that melancholy image from your mind, under the pretence of its only tending to empoison every comfort, and to destroy the tranquillity of life. This is what I have still to lay before you.

PART II.—Man loves not to dwell upon his nothingness and meanness; whatever recalls to him his origin, puts him in mind also of his end, wounds his pride, interests his self-love, attacks the foundation of all his passions, and gives birth to gloomy and disagreeable ideas. To die, to disappear from the earth, to enter the dark abyss of eternity, to become a carcase, the food of worms, the horror of men, the hideous inmate of a tomb; that sight alone revolts every sense, distracts reason, blackens imagination, and empoisons every comfort in life; we dare not fix our looks on so hideous an image; we reject that thought, as the most gloomy and bitter of all. We dread, we fly from every thing which may force its remembrance on our mind, as though it would hasten the approach of the fatal hour. Under a pretence of tenderness, we love not to hear mention of our departed friends; care is taken to remove our attention from the places in which they have dwelt, and from every thing which, along with their idea, at the same time awakens that of death which has deprived us of them. We dread all melancholy recitals; in that respect we carry our terrors even to the most childish superstition; in every trifle our fancy sees fatal prognostications of death; in the wanderings of a dream, in the nightly sounds of a bird, in the casual number of a company, and in many other circumstances still more ridiculous; every where we imagine it before us; and, for that very reason, we endeavour to expel it from our thoughts.

Now, my brethren, these excessive terrors were pardonable in Pagans, to whom death was the greatest misfortune, seeing

they had no expectation beyond the grave; and that, living without hope, they died without consolation. But, that death should be so terrible to Christians is a matter of astonishment; and that the dread of that image should even serve as a pretext to remove its idea from their minds, is still more so.

For, in the first place, I grant that you have reason to dread that last hour; but, as it is certain, I cannot conceive why the terrors of it should prevent your mind from dwelling upon, and endeavouring to anticipate its evils; on the contrary, it seems to me, that in proportion as the danger is great, to which you are exposed, you ought more constantly to keep it in view, and to use every precaution that it may not take you unawares. What! the more the danger alarms you, the more it should render you indolent and careless! The excessive and improper terrors of your imagination should cure you, even of that prudent dread which operates your salvation; and, because you dread too much, you should abandon every thought of it! But, where is the man whom a too lively sense of danger renders calm and intrepid? Were it necessary to march through a narrow and steep defile, surrounded on all sides by precipices, would you order your eyes to be bound, that you might not see your danger, and lest the depth of the gulf below should turn your head? Ah! my dear hearer, you see the grave open before you, and that spectacle alarms you; but, in place of taking all the precautions offered to you by religion, to prevent you falling headlong into the gulf, you cover your eyes that you may not see it;—you fly to dissipation, to chase its idea from your mind; and, like those unfortunate victims of Paganism, you run to the stake, your eyes covered, crowned with flowers, and surrounded by dancing and songs of joy, that you may not have leisure to reflect on the fatal term to which this pomp conducts, and lest you should see the altar, that is to say, the bed of death, where you are immediately to be sacrificed.

Besides, by repelling that thought, could you likewise repel death, your terrors would then at least have an excuse. But think, or think not on it, death always advances; every effort you make to exclude its remembrance brings you nearer to it; and at the appointed hour it will come. What, then, do you gain by turning your mind from that thought? Do you lessen the danger? On the contrary, you augment it, and render a surprisal inevitable. By averting your eyes, do you soften the horror of that spectacle? Alas! you only multiply its terrors. Were you to familiarize yourselves more with the thoughts of death, your mind, weak and timid, would insensibly accustom itself to it. You would gradually acquire courage to view it without anguish, or at least with resignation on the bed of death; it would no longer be an unusual and strange sight. A long anticipated danger astonishes not: death is only formidable the first time that the imagination dwells

upon it; and it is only when not expected, and no provision made against it, that it is to be dreaded.

But, when that thought should even disquiet, and fill you with impressions of dread and sorrow, where would be the disappointment? Are you, upon the earth, to live only in an indolent ease, and solely engrossed by agreeable and smiling objects? We should lose our reason, say you, were we to devote our attention to this dismal spectacle, without the relaxation of pleasures. We should lose our reason! But so many faithful souls, who, in all their actions, mingle that thought; who make the remembrance of that last hour the check to curb their passions, and the most powerful inducement to fidelity; so many illustrious penitents, who have buried themselves alive in their tombs, that they might never lose sight of that object; the holy who every day suffered death, like the apostle, that they might live for ever, have they in consequence of it, lost their reason? You should lose your reason! that is to say, you would regard the world as an exilement, pleasures as an intoxication, sin as the greatest of evils; places, honours, favour, and fortune, as dreams; and salvation as the grand and only object worthy of attention. Is that to lose your reason? Blessed folly! And would that you, from this moment, were amongst the number of these foolish sages. You would lose your reason! Yes, that false, worldly, proud, carnal, and mistaken reason, which seduces you; that corrupted reason, which obscures faith, authorizes the passions, makes us prefer the present moment to eternity, takes the shadow for the substance, and leads all men astray. Yes, that deplorable reason, that vain philosophy, which looks upon as a weakness the dread of a future state, and, because it dreads it too much, seems, in appearance, or endeavours to force itself, not to believe it at all. But that prudent, enlightened, moderate, and Christian reason, that wisdom of the serpent, so recommended in the gospel, it is in that remembrance that you would find it: that wisdom, says the Holy Spirit, preferable to all the treasures and honours of the earth; that wisdom so honourable to man, and which exalts him so much above himself; that wisdom which has formed so many Christian heroes; it is the image always present of your last hour, which will embellish your soul with it. But that thought, you add, should we take it into our head to enter deeply into, and to dwell continually upon it, would be fit to make us renounce all, and to form the most violent and overstrained resolutions; that is to say, would detach you from the world, your vices, passions, the infamy of your excesses, and make you lead a chaste, regular, and Christian life, alone worthy of reason. These are what the world calls violent and overstrained resolutions. But likewise, under pretence of shunning pretended excesses, would you refuse to adopt the most necessary resolutions? Make a beginning at any rate; the first transports soon begin to abate; and it is much more easy to moderate the

excesses of piety than to animate its coldness and indolence. Dread nothing from the excessive fervour and transports of your zeal; you can never, in that respect, go too far. An indolent and sensual heart, such as yours, nursed in pleasures and effeminacy, and void of all taste for whatever pertains to the service of God, does not promise any very great indiscretions in the steps of a Christian life. You know not yourselves; you have never experienced what obstacles all your inclinations will cast in the way of your simplest exertions in piety. Take measures only against coldness and discouragement, which are the only rocks you have to dread. What blindness! In the fear of doing too much for God, we do nothing at all; the dread of bestowing too much attention on our salvation, prevents us from labouring toward it; and we lose ourselves for ever, lest we should too surely attain salvation: we dread chimerical excesses of piety, and we are not afraid of a departure from, and an actual contempt of piety itself. Does the fear of doing too much for fortune and rank check your exertions, or cool the ardour of your ambition? Is it not that very hope which supports and animates them? Nothing is too much for the world, but all is excess for God: we fear, and we reproach ourselves, lest we never do enough for an earthly establishment; and we check ourselves, in the dread of doing too much for an eternal fortune.

But I go farther, and say, that it is a criminal ingratitude toward God to reject the thought of death, merely because it disquiets and alarms you; for that impression of dread and terror is a special grace with which you are favoured by God. Alas! how many impious characters exist, who despise it, who claim a miserable merit in beholding with firmness its approach, and who regard it as the annihilation of their being! How many sages and philosophers in Christianity, who, without renouncing faith, limit all their reflections, all the superiority of their talents, to the tranquil view of its arrival; and who, during life, exert the powers of their reason only in preparing for that last moment; a constancy and serenity of mind equally absurd as the most vulgar terrors; a purpose the most imprudent to which reason can be applied. It is, therefore, a special grace bestowed on you by God, when he permits that thought to have such an energy and ascendancy in your soul; in all probability it is the way by which he wishes to recall you to himself: should you ever quit your erroneous and iniquitous courses, it will be through its influence: your salvation seems to depend on that remedy.

Tremble, my dear hearer, lest your hearts should fortify itself against these salutary terrors; lest God should withdraw from you this mean of salvation, and harden you against all the terrors of religion. A favour, not only despised but even regarded as a punishment, is soon followed with the indignation, or at least the indifference, of the benefactor. Should that unfortunately

be ever the case, then will the image of death leave you all your tranquillity: you will fly to an entertainment the moment you have quitted the solemnity of a funeral; with the same eyes will you behold a hideous carcase, or the criminal object of your passion; then will you be even pleased with yourself for having soared above all these vulgar fears, and even applaud yourself for a change so terrible toward your salvation. Profit, then, toward the regulation of your manners, by that sensibility, while it is yet left to you by God. Let your mind dwell on all the objects proper to recall that image, while yet it has influence to disturb the false peace of your passions. Visit the tomb of your ancestors, in the presence of their ashes, to meditate on the vanity of all earthly things. Go and ask, What now, in these dark habitations of death, remains to them of all their pleasures, dignities, and splendour? Open yourself these gloomy dwellings, and, reflecting on what they had formerly been in the eyes of men, see what they now are; spectres, whose presence you with difficulty can support; loathsome masses of worms and putrefaction: such are they in the eyes of men; but what are they in the sight of God? Descend, in idea, into these dwellings of horror and infection, and choose beforehand your own place; figure yourself, in that last hour, extended on the bed of anguish, struggling with death, your limbs benumbed and already seized with a mortal coldness; your tongue already bound in the chains of death; your eyes fixed, covered with a cloud of confusion, and before which all things begin to disappear; your relations and friends around you, offering up ineffectual wishes for your recovery, and augmenting your fears and regrets by the tenderness of their sighs and the abundance of their tears: reflect upon that sight, so instructive, so interesting; you then, in the dismal struggles of that last combat, proving that you are still in life only by the convulsions which announce your death; the whole world annihilated to you; despoiled for ever of all your dignities and titles; accompanied solely by your works, and ready to appear in the presence of God. This is not a prediction; it is the history of all those who die every day to your knowledge, and it is the anticipation of your own. Think upon that terrible moment; the day, perhaps, is not far removed, yet, however distant it may be, you will at last reach it, and the interval will seem to you only an instant; and the only consolation you then can have, shall be, to have made the study of, and preparation for death, the employment of your life.

Lastly. As my final argument:—trace to their source these excessive errors, which render the image and thoughts of death so terrible, and you will undoubtedly find them originating from the disorders of a criminal conscience: it is not death which you dread, it is the justice of God which awaits you beyond it, to

punish the infidelities and crimes of your life : it is, that, covered as you are with the most shameful wounds, which disfigure in you his image, you are not in a state to present yourselves before him ; and that to die in your present situation, must be to perish for ever. Purify, then, your conscience, put an end to, and expiate your criminal passions ; recall God to your heart ; no longer offer to his sight any thing worthy of his anger or punishment ; place yourselves in a state to hope something, after death, from his infinite mercy : then shall you see that last moment approach with less dread and trembling ; and the sacrifice which you shall have already made to God, of the world and your passions, will not only render easy, but even sweet and consoling, the sacrifice you will then make to him of your life.

For say, What has death so fearful to a faithful soul ? From what does it separate him ? From a world which shall perish, and which is the country of the reprobate ; from his riches, which torment him, of which the use is surrounded with dangers, and which he is forbid to use in the gratification of the senses ; from his relations and friends, whom he precedes only by a moment, and who shall soon follow him ; from his body, which hitherto had been either a rock to his innocence or a perpetual obstacle to his holy desires ; from his offices and dignities, which, in multiplying his duties, augmented his dangers ; lastly, from life, which to him was only an excitement, and an anxious desire to be delivered from it. What does death bestow on him, to compensate for what it takes away ? It bestows unfading riches, of which none can ever deprive him ; eternal joys, which he shall enjoy without fear or remorse ; the peaceable and certain possession of God himself, from which he can never be degraded ; deliverance from all his passions, which had ever been a constant source of disquiet and distress ; an unalterable peace, which he never could find on the earth ; and, lastly, the society of the just and happy, in place of that of sinners, from whom it separates him. What then, O my God ! has the world so delightful, to attach a faithful soul ? To him it is a vale of tears, where dangers are infinite, combats daily, victories rare, and defeats certain ; where every gratification must be denied to the senses ; where all tempts, and all is forbidden to us ; where we must fly from and dread most, what most pleases us ; in a word, where, if you suffer not, if you weep not, if you resist not to the utmost extremity, if you combat not without ceasing, if you hate not yourself, you are lost. What, then, do you find so amiable, so alluring, so capable of attaching a Christian soul ? And to die, is it not a gain and a triumph for him ?

Besides, death is the only object he looks forward to ; it is the only consolation which supports the fidelity of the just. Do they bend under afflictions ? They know that their end is near ;

that the short and fleeting tribulations of this life shall soon be followed by a load of eternal glory; and in that thought they find an inexhaustible source of patience, fortitude, and joy. Do they feel the law of the members warring against the law of the spirit, and exciting commotions which bring innocence to the very brink of the precipice? They are not ignorant, that, after the dissolution of the earthly frame, it shall be restored to them pure and celestial; and that, delivered from these bonds of misery, they shall then resemble the heavenly spirits: and that remembrance soothes and strengthens them. Do they groan under the weight of the yoke of Jesus Christ; and their faith, more weak, is it on the point of relaxing and sinking under the rigid duties of the gospel? Ah! the day of the Lord is nigh; they almost touch the blessed recompense; and the end of their course, which they already see, animates, and gives them fresh vigour. Hear in what manner the apostle consoled the first Christians: My brethren, said he to them, time is short, the day approaches, the Lord is at the gate, and he will not delay; rejoice then; I again say to you, rejoice. Such was the only consolation of men, persecuted, insulted, proscribed, trampled upon, regarded as the scum of the earth, the disgrace of the Jews, and the scoff of the Gentiles. They knew that death would soon dry up their tears; that for them there would then be neither mourning, sorrow, nor sufferance; that all would be changed; and that thought softened every pain. Ah! whosoever had told these generous justifiers of faith, that the Lord would never make them know death, but would leave them to dwell for ever on the earth, would have shaken their faith, tempted their constancy, and, by robbing them of that hope, would have deprived them of every consolation.

You, my brethren, are, no doubt, little surprised at this, because death must appear a refuge to men afflicted and unhappy as they were. You are mistaken; it was neither their persecutions nor sufferings which occasioned their distress and sorrow; these were their joy, consolation, and pride: we glory, said they, in tribulations; it was the state of separation in which they still lived from Jesus Christ, that alone was the source of their tears, and what rendered death so desirable.

While we are in the body, said the apostle, we are separated from the Lord; and that separation was a state of anguish and sorrow to these faithful Christians. Piety consists in wishing for a re-union with Jesus Christ, our Head; in sighing for the happy moment which shall incorporate us with the chosen of God, in that mystical body, which, from the beginning of the world, is forming, of every tongue, every tribe, and every nation; which is the completion of the designs of God, and which will glorify him, with Jesus Christ, to all eternity. Here

we are like branches torn from their stem ; like strangers wandering in a foreign land ; like fettered captives in a prison, waiting their deliverance ; like children, banished for a time from their paternal inheritance and mansion : in a word, like members separated from their body. Since Jesus Christ, our Head, ascended to heaven, the earth is no longer the place of our establishment : we look forward, in blessed expectation, to the coming of the Lord. That desire constitutes all our piety and consolation ; and a Christian, not to long for that happy moment, but to dread, and even look upon it as a misfortune, is to fly in the face of Jesus Christ ; to renounce all communication with him ; to reject the promises of faith and the glorious title of a citizen of heaven ; it is to centre our happiness on the things of the earth, to doubt of a future state, to regard religion as a dream, and to believe that all dies with us.

No, my brethren, death has nothing to a just soul but what is pleasing and desirable. Arrived at that happy moment, he, without regret, sees a world perish, which he had never loved, and which to him had never appeared otherwise than a confusion of vanities : his eyes close with pleasure on all those vain shows which the earth offers, which he had always regarded as the splendour of a moment, and whose dangerous illusions he had never ceased to dread : he feels, without uneasiness,—what do I say?—with satisfaction, that mortal body, which had been the subject of all his temptations, and the fatal source of all his weaknesses, become clothed with immortality : he regrets nothing on the earth, where he leaves nothing, and from whence his heart flies along with his soul : he even complains, not that he is carried off in the middle of his career, and that his days are concluded in the flower of his age ; on the contrary, he thanks his deliverer for having abridged his sufferings with his years, for having exacted only a portion of his debt as the price of his eternity, and for having speedily consummated his sacrifice, lest a longer residence in a corrupted world should have perverted his heart. His trials, his mortifications, which had cost so much to the weakness of the flesh, are then his sweetest reflections : he sees that all now vanishes, except what he has done for God ; that all now abandon him, his riches, relations, friends, and dignities, his works alone remaining ; and he is transported with joy, to think that he had never placed his trust in the favour of princes, in the children of men, in the vain hopes of fortune, in things which must soon perish, but in the Lord alone, who remaineth eternally, and in whose bosom he goes to experience that peace and tranquillity which mortals cannot bestow. Thus tranquil on the past, desising the present, transported to touch at last that futurity, the sole object of his desires, already seeing the bosom of Abraham open to receive him, and the Son of Man, seated at the right hand of his Father, holding out for him the crown of

immortality, he sleeps in the Lord : he is wafted by blessed spirits to the habitation of the holy, and returns to the place from whence he originally came.

May you, my brethren, in this manner see your course terminated.

SERMON X.

ON THE DEATH OF A SINNER, AND THAT OF A RIGHTEOUS CHARACTER.

“ Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.”—REV. xiv. 13.

THERE is something peculiarly striking and incomprehensible in the human passions.

All men wish to live : they look upon death as the most dreadful of all evils : all their passions attach them to life : yet, nevertheless, those very passions incessantly urge them toward that death for which they feel such horror ; nay, it should even seem, that their only purpose in life is to accelerate the moment of death.

All men flatter themselves that they shall die the death of the righteous ; they wish it, they expect it. Knowing the impossibility of remaining for ever on this earth, they trust that, before the arrival of their last moment, the passions which at present pollute and hold them in captivity, shall be completely overcome. They figure to themselves, as horrible, the lot of a sinner who expires in his iniquity and under the wrath of God ; yet, nevertheless, they tranquilly prepare for themselves the same destiny. This dreadful period of human life, which is death in sin, strikes and appals them ; yet, like fools, they blindly and merrily pursue the road which leads to it. In vain do we announce to them, that, in general, men die as they have lived. They wish to live the life of a sinner, yet, nevertheless, to die the death of the righteous.

My intention, at present, is not to undeceive you with regard to an illusion so common and so ridiculous, (let us reserve this subject for another occasion) ; but, since the death of the righteous appears so earnestly to be wished for, and that of the sinner so dreadful to you, I mean, by a representation of them both, to excite your desires for the one, and to awaken your just terrors for the other. As

you must finally quit this world in one of these two situations, it is proper to familiarize yourselves with a view of them both, that, by placing before your eyes the melancholy spectacle of the one, and the soothing consolations of the other, you may be enabled to judge which of the lots awaits you; and, consequently, to adopt the necessary means to secure the decision in your favour.

In the picture of the expiring sinner, you will see in what the world, with all its glory and pleasures, terminates; from the recital of the last moments of the righteous man, you will learn to what virtue conducts, in spite of all its momentary checks and troubles. In the one, you will see the world from the eyes of a sinner in the moment of death; and how vain, frivolous, and different from what is seems at present, will it then appear to you! In the other, you will see virtue from the eyes of the expiring righteous man: how grand and inestimable will your heart then acknowledge it to be!

In the one, you will comprehend all the misery of a soul which has lived forgetful of its God; in the other, the happiness of him who has lived only to please and to serve him: in a word, the picture of the death of the sinner will make you wish to live the life of the righteous; and the image of the death of the just will inspire you with a holy horror at the life of the sinner.

PART I.—In vain do we repel the image of death: every day brings it nearer. Youth glides away; years hurry on; and, like water, says the scripture, spilt upon the ground, which cannot be gathered up again, we rapidly course toward the abyss of eternity, where, for ever swallowed up, we can never return upon our steps to appear once more upon the earth.

I know that the brevity and uncertainty of life are continual subjects of conversation to us. The deaths of our relations, our friends, our companions, frequently sudden, and always unexpected, furnish us with a thousand reflections on the frailty of every thing terrestrial.

We are incessantly repeating that the world is nothing, that life is but a dream, and that it is a striking folly our interesting ourselves so deeply for what must pass so quickly away. But these are merely words: they are not the sentiments of the heart: they are discourses offered up at the shrine of custom; and that very custom occasions their being immediately and for ever forgot.

Now, my brethren, form to yourselves a destiny on this earth agreeable to your own wishes: lengthen out, in your own minds, your days to a term beyond your most sanguine hopes. I even wish you to indulge in the enjoyment of so pleasing an illusion: but, at last, you must follow the track which your forefathers have trod; you will at last see that day arrive, to which no other shall succeed; and that day will be the day of your eternity. Happy if

you die in the Lord : miserable if you depart in sin. One of these lots awaits you. In the final decision upon all men there will be only two sides—the right and the left : two divisions—the goats and the sheep. Allow me, then, to recall you to the bed of death, and to expose to your view the double spectacle of this last hour, so terrible to the sinner, and so consolatory to the righteous man.

I say, terrible to the sinner, who, lulled by vain hopes of a conversion, at last reaches this fatal moment, full of desires, empty of good works, having ever lived a stranger to the Lord, and unable now to make any offering to him but of his crimes, and the anguish of seeing a period put to those days which he vainly believed would have endured for ever. Now, nothing can be more dreadful than the situation of this unfortunate wretch in the last moments of his life ! Whichever way his mind is employed, whether in recalling the past, or considering what is acting around him : in a word, whether he penetrates into that awful futurity upon the brink of which he hangs, or limits his reflections to the present moment, these objects, the only ones which can occupy his thoughts, or present themselves to his fancy, only open to him the blackest prospects, which overwhelm him with despair.

For what can the past offer to a sinner, who, extended upon the bed of death, begins now to yield up dependence upon life, and reads, in the countenances of those around him, the dreadful intelligence that all is over with him ? What now does he see in that long course of days which he has run through upon the earth ? Alas ! he sees only vain cares and anxieties ; pleasures which passed away before they could be enjoyed, and iniquities which must endure for ever.

Vain cares.—His whole life, which now appears to have occupied but a moment, presents itself to him, and in it he views nothing but one continued restraint and a useless agitation. He recalls to his mind all he has suffered for a world which now flies from him ; for a fortune which now vanishes ; for a vain reputation, which accompanies him not into the presence of God ; for friends, whom he loses : for masters, who will soon forget him ; for a name, which will be written only on the ashes of his tomb. What regret must agitate the mind of this unfortunate wretch, when he sees that his whole life has been one continued toil, yet that nothing to the purpose has been accomplished for himself ! What regret, to have so often done violence to his inclinations, without gaining the advance of a single step toward heaven !—to have always believed himself too feeble for the service of God, and yet to have had the strength and the constancy to fall a martyr to vanity and to a world which is on the eve of perishing !

Alas ! it is then that the sinner, overwhelmed, terrified at his

own blindness and mistake, no longer finding but an empty space in a life which the world had alone engrossed; perceiving, that, after a long succession of years upon the earth, he has not yet begun to live; leaving history, perhaps, full of his actions, the public monuments loaded with the transactions of his life, the world filled with his name, and nothing, alas! which deserves to be written in the book of eternity, or which may follow him into the presence of God. Then it is, though too late, that he begins to hold a language to himself, which we have frequent opportunities of hearing. "I have lived, then, only for vanity? Why have I not served my God as I have served my masters? Alas! were so many anxieties, and so much trouble, necessary to accomplish my own destruction? Why, at least, did I not receive my consolation in this world? I should have enjoyed the present, that fleeting moment which passes away from me; and I should not then have lost all. But my life has been always filled with anxieties, subjections, fatigues, and restraints, and all these in order to prepare for me everlasting misery. What madness, to have suffered more toward my own ruin, than was required to have accomplished my salvation; and to have regarded the life of the upright as a melancholy and an insupportable one; seeing they have done nothing so difficult for God, that I have not performed an hundred-fold for the world, which is nothing, and from which I have consequently nothing to expect."

Yes, my brethren, it is in that last moment that your whole life will present itself to your view; but in very different colours from those in which it appears to you to-day. At present you count upon services performed for the state; places which you have filled; actions in which you have distinguished yourselves; wounds, which still bear testimony to your valour; the number of your campaigns; the splendour of your orders; all these appear objects of importance and reality to you. The public applauses which accompany them; the rewards with which they are followed; the fame which publishes them; the distinctions attached to them; all these only recall your past days to you, as days full, occupied, marked each by some memorable action, and by events worthy of being for ever preserved to posterity. You even distinguish yourselves, in your own minds, from those indolent characters of your own rank, who have led an obscure, idle, and useless life, and dishonoured their names by that slothful effeminacy which has kept them always groveling in the dust. But, on the bed of death, in that last moment when the world flies off and eternity approaches, your eyes will be opened; the scene will be changed; the illusion, which at present magnifies these objects, will be dissipated. You will see things as they really are; and that which formerly appeared so grand, so illustrious, as it was done

only for the sake of the world, of glory, of fortune, will no longer appear of the least importance to you.

You will no longer find any thing real in your life but what you shall have done for God ; nothing praiseworthy but works of faith and of piety ; nothing great but what will merit eternity ; and a single drop of cold water in the name of Jesus Christ, a single tear shed in his presence, and the slightest mortification suffered for his sake, will all appear more precious, more estimable to you, than all the wonders which the world admires, and which shall perish with it.

Not that the dying sinner finds only cares and anxieties thrown away in his past life, he finds the remembrance likewise of his pleasures ; but this very remembrance depresses and overwhelms him : pleasures, which have existed only for a moment : he now perceives that he has sacrificed his soul, and his eternal welfare, to a fugitive moment of passion and voluptuousness. Alas ! life had appeared too long to him to be entirely consecrated to God. He was afraid to adopt too early the side of virtue, lest he should be unable to support its duration, its weariness, and its consequences. He looked forward to the years he had still to run as to an immense space, through which he must travel under the weight of the cross, and separated from the world in the practice of Christian works. This idea alone had always suspended his good intentions ; and, in order to return to God, he waited the last stage of life as the one in which perseverance is most certain. What a surprise in this last hour, to find that what had to him appeared so long has in reality been but an instant ; that his infancy and old age so nearly touch each other, that they only form, as I may say, one day ; and that, from his mother's breast, he has made but one step toward the grave. Nor is this the bitterest pang which he experiences in the remembrance of his pleasures : they have vanished like a dream ; but he, who formerly claimed an honour to himself from their gratification, is now covered with confusion and shame at their recollection : so many shameful excesses ; such weakness and debauchery. He, who piqued himself upon reason, elevation of mind, and haughtiness toward man ; O my God ! he then finds himself the weakest, the most despicable of sinners ! Apparently, perhaps, a life of prudence, yet sunk in all the infamy of the senses and the puerility of the passions ! A life of glory in the eyes of men ; but, in the sight of God, the most shameful, the most deserving of contempt and disgrace ! A life which success, perhaps, had continually accompanied ; yet, nevertheless, in private, the most absurd, the most trifling, the most destitute of reflection and wisdom !

Pleasures, in a word, which have been the source of all his chagrins ; which have empoisoned every enjoyment of life ;

which have changed his happiest days into days of madness and lamentation.

Pleasures for which he has ever paid dear, and of which he has never experienced but the anxieties and the bitterness: such are the foundations of this frivolous happiness. His passions alone have rendered life miserable to him; and the only moments of tranquility he has enjoyed in the whole course of his life, are those in which his heart has been sheltered from their influence. "The days of my pleasures are fled," says the sinner then to himself, but in a disposition of mind very different from that of Job: "Those days which have occasioned all the sorrows of my life, by which my rest has been broken, and the calm stillness of the night changed into the blackest thoughts and uneasinesses: yet, nevertheless, great God! thou wilt still punish the sorrows and distresses of my unfortunate life! All the bitterness of my passions is marked against me in the book of thy wrath; and thou preparest for me, in addition to gratifications which have always been the source of all my miseries, a misery without end, and boundless."

Behold what the expiring sinner experiences in the remembrance of the past: crimes which shall endure for ever; the weaknesses of childhood; the dissipations of youth; the passions and the disorders of a more advanced period: what do I know, perhaps even the shameful excesses of a licentious old age. Ah! my brethren, whilst in health, we perceive only the surface of our conscience; we recall only a vague and confused remembrance of our life; we see only the passions which actually enchain us; a complete life, spent in the habits of iniquity, appears to us only a single crime: but, on the bed of death, the darkness spread over the conscience of the sinner is dissipated. The more he searches into his heart, the more does he discover new stains; the deeper he enters into that abyss, the more do new monsters of horror present themselves to his sight. He is lost in the chaos, and knows not how to proceed. To enlighten it, an entire new life would be necessary: alas! and time flies: scarcely do a few moments now remain to him, and he must precipitate a confession for which the greatest leisure would hardly suffice, and which can precede but an instant the awful judgment of the justice of God. Alas! we often complain, during life, of a treacherous memory,—that we forget every thing,—that the minister of God is under the necessity of remedying our inattention, and of assisting us to know and to judge of ourselves: but in that last moment the expiring sinner shall require no assistance to recall the remembrance of his crimes: the justice of God, which had delivered him up during health to all the profundity of his darkness, will then enlighten him in his wrath.

Every thing around his bed of death awakens the remembrance of some new crime: servants, whom he has scandalized by his example; children, whom he has neglected; a wife, whom he has

rendered miserable by unlawful attachments; ministers of the church, whom he has despised; riches, which he has abused; the luxury which surrounds him, for which the poor and his creditors have suffered; the pride and magnificence of his edifices, which have been reared up upon the inheritance of the widow and the orphan, or perhaps by the public calamity: every thing, in a word, the heavens and the earth, says Job, shall reveal his iniquity, and rise up against him; shall recall to him the frightful history of his passions and of his crimes.

Thus, the recollection of the past forms one of the most dreadful situations of the expiring sinner; because in it he finds nothing but labours lost; pleasures which have been dissipated the moment almost of their existence; and crimes which shall endure for ever.

But the scenes around him are not less gloomy to this unfortunate soul: his surprises, his separations, his changes.

His surprises.—He had always flattered himself that the hour of the Lord would not surprise him. Whatever had been said to him on the subject from the pulpit had not prevented him from assuring himself that his conscience should be properly arranged before the arrival of this dreaded moment. He has reached it, however, still loaded with all his crimes, without preparation, without the performance of a single exertion toward appeasing the wrath of the Almighty: he has reached it while he least thought of it, and he is now to be judged.

His surprises.—God strikes him in the zenith of his passions,—in the time when the thoughts of death were most distant from his mind,—when he had attained to places he had long ardently struggled for, and when, like the foolish man in the gospel, he had exhorted his soul to repose itself, and to enjoy in peace the fruit of its labours: it is in this moment that the justice of God surprises him, and he sees life, with every imaginary hope of happiness, blasted for ever.

His surprises.—He is on the brink of the gulf, and the Almighty willeth that no one shall dare to inform him of his situation. His relations flatter him; his friends leave him undeceived: they already lament him in secret as dead, yet they continue to speak of his recovery: they deceive him, in order that he may deceive himself. The Scriptures must be fulfilled: the sinner must be taken by surprise in this last moment. Thou hast said it, O my God! and thy words are the words of truth.

His surprises.—Abandoned by all the succours of art, delivered up alone to anguish and disease, he still cannot persuade himself that death is near. He flatters himself; he still hopes: the justice of God, it would seem, leaves him a remnant of reason, for the sole purpose of seducing himself. From his terrors, his astonishment, his inquietudes, we see clearly that he

still comprehends not the necessity of death. He torments, he agitates himself, as if by these means he could escape death; but his agitations are only occasioned by regret for the loss of life, and are not the effects of grief for having wickedly spent it. The blinded sinner must be so to the end; and his death must be similar to his life.

In a word, his surprises.—He sees now that the world has all along deceived him; that it has continually led him from illusion to illusion, and from hope to hope; that things have never taken place exactly as he had promised himself; and that he has always been the dupe of his own errors. He cannot comprehend how his blindness could possibly be so constant; that for such a series of years he could obstinately continue to make such sacrifices for a world, for masters, whose only payment has been vain promises; and that his entire life has been one continued indifference on the part of the world to him, and an intoxication on his to the world. But what overpowers him is, the impossibility of remedying the mistake; that he can die only once; and that, after having badly run his race, he can no more recall the past, or, by retracing his steps, undertake a new trial. Thou art just, O my God! and thou wilt that the sinner should in advance pronounce against himself, in order that he may afterward be judged from his own mouth.

The surprises of the dying sinner are, therefore, overwhelming; but the separations which take place in that last moment are not less so for him. The more he was attached to the world, to life, to all its works, the more does he suffer when a separation becomes inevitable. Every tie, which now must be broken asunder, becomes a wound which rankles in his heart; every separation becomes a new death to his mind.

Separation from the riches which, with such constant and laborious attention he had accumulated, by means, perhaps, repugnant to salvation; in the possession of which he obstinately persisted, in spite of all the reproaches of his conscience, and which he had cruelly refused to the necessities of his brethren.—They now, however, escape from him; the mass of earth is dissipated before his eyes; his love, his regret for their loss, and the guilt of having acquired them, are the only remaining proofs that they were once in his possession.

Separation from the magnificence which surrounds him; from his proud edifices, in whose stately walls he once fondly believed he had erected an asylum against death; from the vanity and luxury of his furniture, of all which no portion shall now remain to him but the mournful cloth which is to encircle him in the tomb; from that air of opulence in the midst of which he had always lived. All escape from him; all abandon him; and he begins to look upon himself as a stranger in the midst of his palaces; where, indeed, he ought always to have considered himself as such; as an

unknown, who no longer possesses any thing there; as an unfortunate wretch, whom they are on the point of stripping before his eyes, and whom they only allow to gratify his sight with the spoils for a little while, in order to augment his regret and his punishment.

Separation from his honours and offices, which he leaves, perhaps to a rival; to which he had at last attained, by wading through so many dangers, so many anxieties, so many meannesses, and which he had enjoyed with so much insolence and pride. He is already on the bed of death, stripped of all the marks of his dignities, and of all his titles, preserving that of a sinner alone, which he in vain, and now too late, bestows upon himself. Alas! in this last moment, he would gladly embrace the most servile condition; he would accept, as a favour, the most obscure and the most grovelling station, could but his days be prolonged on these conditions; he envies the lot of his slaves, whom he leaves behind him; he rapidly advances toward death, and turns back his eyes with regret, to take a lingering look of life.

Separation from his body, for whose gratification he had always lived, and with which, by favouring all its passions, he had contracted such lively and intimate ties. He feels that the house of mud is crumbling into dust; he feels the approaches of death in each of his senses; he no longer holds to life, but by a carcase which moulders away; by the cruel agonies which his diseases make him feel; by the excess of his love for it, and which becomes more lively in proportion as he advances toward the moment of separation: from his relations, from his friends, whom he sees surrounding his bed, and whose tears and lamentations wring his heart, and make him cruelly feel the anguish of losing them for ever.

Separation from the world, where he had enjoyed so many distinguished offices; where he had established, aggrandized, and arranged himself, as if it had been intended for the place of his eternal residence; from the world, in whose smiles he only lived; on whose stage he had ever been one of the principal actors; in whose transactions he had always taken such an active part, and where he had figured with so much splendour, and so many talents, to render himself conspicuous in it. His body now quits it; but his heart and all his affections are centered in it still: the world dies to him, but he himself, in expiring, dies not to the world.

Then it is that the Almighty is great in the eyes of the expiring sinner. It is in that terrible moment, that the whole world, crumbling; disappearing from his sight, he sees only God who remaineth, who filleth all, who alone changeth not, and passeth not away. Formerly he used to complain, with an impious and ironical air, that it is very difficult to feel any fervent emotions for a God whom we see not, and not to love beings whom we perceive, and

who interest all our senses. Ah! in this last moment, he shall see only God; the hitherto invisible will now be visible to him; his senses, already extinguished, will reject all sensual objects; all shall vanish around him; and God will take the place of those delusions which had misled and deceived him through life.

Thus every thing changes to this unfortunate wretch; and these changes, with his separations and surprises, occasion the last bitterness of the spectacle of death.

Change in his credit and in his authority.—From the moment that nothing farther is to be expected from his life, the world ceases to reckon upon him; his pretended friends withdraw; his dependants already seek, elsewhere, other protectors, and other masters; even his slaves are employed in securing to themselves, after his death, an establishment which may suit them; scarcely does a sufficient number remain around him to catch his last sighs. All abandon him; all withdraw themselves; he no longer sees around him that eager crowd of worshippers; it is a successor, perhaps, upon whom they already lavish the same attentions; whilst he, says Job, alone in the bed of his anguish, is no longer surrounded but by the horrors of death; already enters into that frightful solitude which the grave prepares for him, and makes bitter reflections on the inconstancy of the world and the little dependence to be placed on men.

Change in the public esteem, with which he had been so flattered, so intoxicated.—Alas! that world, by which he had been so celebrated, has already forgotten him. The change which his death shall necessarily occasion in the scene, may perhaps engage, for a few days, the public attention; but this short interval over, and he shall be plunged in oblivion; scarcely will it be remembered that he has existed; every tongue will now be employed in celebrating the abilities of a successor, and exalting his character upon the wrecks of his memory and reputation. He already perceives this neglect; that he has only to die, and the blank will speedily be filled up; that no vestige of him shall even remain in the world; and that the upright alone, who had seen him surrounded with all his pomp, will say to themselves, Where is he now? Where now are those flatteries which his greatness attracted? Behold to what the world conducts, and what is to be the portion of those who serve it!

Change in his body.—That flesh, which he had flattered, idolized so much; that vain beauty, which had attracted so many glances, and corrupted so many hearts, is already but a spectacle of horror, whose sight is hardly supportable; it is no longer but a carcase, which is approached with dread. That unfortunate creature, who had lighted up so many unjust passions: alas! his friends, his relations, even his slaves avoid him, conceal themselves, dare not approach him but with precaution, and no longer bestow upon him but the common offices of decency, and even these with reluc-

tance. He himself shrinks with horror, and shudders at himself. "I," says he to himself, who formerly attracted every look, "I call my servants, and they give me no answer: my breath is corrupt; my days are extinct; the grave is ready for me."—Job xix. 17.

Lastly, change in every thing which surrounds him.—His eyes seek some resting-place, some object of comfort, and no where do they find but the dreary representations of death. Yet even still, the remembrance of the past, and the view of the present, would be little to the expiring sinner; could he confine himself to these, he would not be so completely miserable; but the thoughts of a futurity convulse him with horror and despair. That futurity, that incomprehensible region of darkness, which he now approaches, conscience his only companion; that futurity, that unknown land from which no traveller has ever returned, where he knows not whom he shall find, nor what awaits him; that futurity, that fathomless abyss, in which his mind is lost and bewildered, and into which he must now plunge, ignorant of his destiny; that futurity, that tomb, that residence of horror, where he must now occupy his place amongst the ashes and the carcases of his ancestors; that futurity, that incomprehensible eternity, even the aspect of which he cannot support; that futurity, in a word, that dreadful judgment to which, before the wrath of God, he must now appear, and render account of a life of which every moment almost has been occupied by crimes. Alas! while he only looked forward to this terrible futurity, at a distance, he made an infamous boast of not dreading it; he continually demanded, with a tone of blasphemy and derision, Who is returned from it? He ridiculed the vulgar apprehensions, and piqued himself upon his undaunted courage. But from the moment that the hand of God is upon him; from the moment that death approaches near, that the gates of eternity open to receive him, and that he touches upon that terrible futurity, against which he seemed so fortified; ah! he then becomes either weak, trembling, dissolved in tears, raising up suppliant hands to heaven, or gloomy, silent, agitated, revolving within himself the most dreadful thoughts, and no longer expecting more consolation or mercy, from his weak tears and lamentations, than from his frenzies and despair.

Yes, my brethren, this unfortunate wretch, who had always lulled himself in his excesses; always flattered himself, that one good moment alone was necessary, one sentiment of compunction before death, to appease the anger of God, despairs then of his clemency. In vain is he told of his eternal mercies: he feels to what a degree he is unworthy of them: in vain the minister of the church endeavours to soothe his terrors, by opening to him the bosom of his divine mercy; these promises touch him little, because he knows well that the charity

of the church, which never despairs of salvation for its children, cannot, however, alter the awful justice of the judgments of God. In vain is he promised forgiveness of his crimes; a secret and terrible voice resounds from the bottom of his heart, and tells him that there is no salvation for the impious, and that he can have no dependence upon promises which are given to his miseries rather than to the truth. In vain is he exhorted to apply to those last remedies which the church offers to the dying: he regards them as desperate reliefs, which are hazarded when hope is over, and which are bestowed more for the consolation of the living than from any prospect of utility to those who are departing. Servants of Jesus Christ are called in to support him in this last moment; whilst all he is enabled to do, is, secretly to envy their lot, and to detest the misery of his own. His friends and relations are assembled round his bed, to receive his last sighs, and he turns away from them his eyes, because he finds still amidst them the remembrance of his crimes. Death, however, approaches; the minister endeavours to support, by prayer, the spark of life which still remains: "Depart, Christian soul!" says he. He says not to him, Prince, grandee of the world, depart. During his life, the public monuments were hardly sufficient for the number and pride of his titles: in this last moment they give him that title alone which he had received in baptism; the only one to which he had paid no attention, and the only one which can remain to him for ever—Depart, Christian soul. Alas! he had lived as if the body had formed his only being and treasure: he had even tried to persuade himself that his soul was nothing, that man is only a composition of flesh and blood, and that every thing perishes with us: he is now informed that it is his body, which is nothing but a morsel of clay now on the point of crumbling into pieces, and his only immortal being is that soul, that image of Divinity, that intelligence, alone capable of knowing and loving its Creator, which now prepares to quit its earthly mansion and appear before his awful tribunal.—Depart, Christian soul. You had looked upon the earth as your country; and it was only a place of pilgrimage from which you must depart. The church thought to have announced glad tidings to you, the expiration of your exilement, in announcing the dissolution of your earthly frame: alas! and it only brings you melancholy and frightful news, and opens the commencement of your miseries and anguish!

Depart, then, Christian soul.—Soul, marked with the seal of salvation, which you have effaced,—redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, which you have trampled under foot,—purified by the grace of regeneration, which you have a thousand times stained,—enlightened by the lights of the faith, which you have always rejected,—loaded with all the tender mercies of heaven, which you have always unworthily profaned—depart, Christian soul. Go,

and carry before Jesus Christ that august title, which should have been the illustrious mark of thy salvation, but which now becomes the greatest of thy crimes.

Then, the expiring sinner, no longer finding in the remembrance of the past but regrets which overwhelm him,—in all which takes place around him but images which afflict him,—in the thoughts of futurity but horrors which appal him,—no longer knowing to whom to have recourse,—neither to created beings, who now leave him,—nor to the world, which vanishes,—nor to men, who cannot save him from death,—nor to the just God, whom he looks upon as a declared enemy, and from whom he has no indulgence to expect—a thousand horrors occupy his thoughts; he torments, he agitates himself, in order to fly from death, which grasps him, or at least to fly from himself: from his expiring eyes issue something, I know not what, of dark and gloomy, which expresses the fury of his soul. In his anguish he utters words, interrupted by sobs, which are unintelligible, and to which they know not whether repentance or despair gives birth. He is seized with convulsions, which they are ignorant whether to ascribe to the actual dissolution of his body, or to the soul which feels the approach of its Judge. He deeply sighs, and they know not whether the remembrance of his past crimes, or the despair of quitting life, forces from him such groans of anguish. At last, in the midst of these melancholy exertions, his eyes fix, his features change, his countenance becomes disfigured, his livid lips convulsively separate, his whole frame quivers, and, by this last effort, his unfortunate soul tears itself reluctantly from that body of clay, falls into the hands of its God, and finds itself alone at the foot of the awful tribunal.

My brethren, in this manner do those expire who forget their Creator during life. Thus shall you yourselves die, if your crimes accompany you to that last moment.

Every thing will change in your eyes, and you shall not change yourselves: you shall die, and you shall die in sin as you have lived; and your death will be similar to your life. Prevent this misery, O my brethren! live the life of the righteous, and your death, similar to theirs, will be accompanied with joy, peace, and consolation. This is what I mean to explain in the second part of this Discourse.

PART II.—I know, that even to the most upright souls there is always something terrible in death. The judgments of God, whose profound secrecy they dread,—the darkness of their own conscience, in which they continually figure to themselves hidden stains, known to the Almighty alone,—the liveliness of their faith, and of their love, which in their own sight magnifies their smallest faults; in a word, the dissolution itself of their earthly frame, and the natural horror we feel for the grave,—all these occasion death to be at-

tended by a natural sensation of dread and repugnance, insomuch that as St. Paul says, the most upright themselves, who anxiously long to be clothed with that immortality promised to them, would yet willingly attain it without being divested of the mortality which encompasses them.

It is not less true, however, that in them grace rises superior to that horror of death which springs from nature; and in that moment, whether they recall the past, consider the present, or look forward to the future, they find in the remembrance of the past the end of their troubles,—in the consideration of the present a novelty which moves them with a holy joy,—in their views toward the future the certainty of an eternity which fills them with rapture, insomuch, that the same situations which are the occasion of despair to the dying sinner, become then an abundant source of consolation to the faithful soul.

I say, whether they recall the past; and here, my brethren, figure to yourselves a righteous character on the bed of death, who has long, by the practice of Christian works, prepared himself for this last moment, has amassed a treasure of righteousness, that he may not appear empty-handed in the presence of his Judge, and has lived in faith, that he may die in peace, and in all the consolations of hope; figure to yourselves this soul, reaching at last that final hour of which he had never lost sight, and with which he had always connected all the troubles, all the wants, all the self-denials, all the events of his mortal life: I say that nothing is more soothing to him than the remembrance of the past,—of his sufferings, of his mortifications, of all the trials which he has undergone. Yes, my brethren, it appears frightful to you at present to suffer for God; the smallest exertions upon yourselves, required by religion, seem to overpower you; you consider as unhappy those who bear the yoke of Jesus Christ, and who, to please him, renounce the world and all its charms: but, on the bed of death, the most soothing reflection to a faithful soul is the remembrance of what he has suffered for his God. He then comprehends all the merit of penitence, and how absurd men are to dispute with God a moment of constraint which will be entitled to the recompense of a felicity without end and without measure; for then his consolation is, that he has sacrificed only the gratifications of a moment, of which there would only remain to him now the confusion and the shame,—that whatever he might have suffered for the world, would in this moment be lost to him; on the contrary, that the smallest suffering for God, a tear, a mortification, a vain pleasure sacrificed, an improper desire repressed, will never be forgotten, but shall last as long as God himself. What consoles him is, that of all the human luxuries and enjoyments, alas! on the bed of death, there remain no

more to the sinner who has always indulged in them, than to the righteous man who has always abstained from them; that they are equally past to them both; but that the one shall bear eternally the guilt of having delivered himself up to them, and the other the glory of having known how to vanquish them.

This is what the past offers to a faithful soul on the bed of death: sufferings, afflictions, which have endured but a little while, and which are now to be eternally rewarded,—the time of dangers and temptations past,—the attacks made by the world upon his faith at last terminated,—the trials in which his innocence had run so many risks, at last disappeared,—the occasions in which his virtue had so nearly been shipwrecked, at last, for ever removed,—the continual combats which he had to sustain against his passions, at last ended,—and every obstacle which flesh and blood had always placed in the way of his piety, for ever annihilated. How sweet it is, when safely arrived in port, to recall the remembrance of past dangers and tempests! When victorious in the race, how pleasing to retrace, in imagination, our exertions, and to review those parts of the course most distinguished by the toils, the obstacles, and the difficulties which have rendered them celebrated.

The righteous man, then, appears to me, like another Moses, expiring on the holy mountain, where the Lord had marked out to him his grave: "Get thee up into the mountain Abarim, and die," &c., Deut. xxxii. 49; who, before he expired, looking down from that sacred place, and casting his eyes over that extent of country, the nations and kingdoms he had traversed, and now leaves behind him,—reviews, in imagination, the numberless dangers he had escaped,—his battles with so many conquered nations,—the fatigues of the desert,—the snares of Midian,—the murmurs and calamities of his brethren,—the rocks split in pieces,—the dangers of Egypt avoided,—the waters of the Red Sea got over,—hunger, thirst, and weariness struggled against,—and touching at last the happy term of so many labours, and viewing from afar that country promised to his father, he sings a song of thanksgiving and praise to God, dies transported with joy, both at the remembrance of so many dangers avoided, and at the prospect of that place of rest which the Lord shows him from afar, and looks upon the holy mountain, where he is to expire, as the reward of his toils, and the happy term of his course.

Not that the remembrance of the past, in recalling to the dying righteous soul the trials and dangers of his past life, does not also remind him of his infidelities and wanderings; but these are errors expiated by the sighs of repentance, wanderings which have fortunately been followed by a renewal of fervour and fidelity, wanderings, which recall to him the mercies of God to his soul, who hath made his crimes the means of his repentance, his passions of his conversion, and his errors of his salvation. The grief for his faults, in his last moment, becomes

only a sorrow of consolation and tenderness; the tears which this remembrance draws from him still are no longer but the tears of joy and gratitude.

The former mercies of God to his soul fill him with confidence, and inspire him with a just hope of more; the past conduct of God, with regard to him, comforts his heart, and seems to answer for what he shall experience in future. He no longer, as in the days of his penitence and mourning, figures to himself the Almighty under the idea of a terrible and severe Judge, whom he had insulted, and whom it was necessary to appease; but as the Father of Mercies, and a God of all consolation, who prepares to receive him into his bosom, and there shelter him from all his afflictions.

“Awake, righteous soul,” says then to him, in secret, his Lord and his God; “Thou who hast drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling, thou shalt no more drink it again; the days of thy tribulation are past. Shake thyself from the dust, arise, and sit down; loose thyself from the bands of thy neck. O, captive daughter of Zion! put on thy strength, put on thy beautiful garments: enter into the everlasting joy of thy Lord, where thou shalt obtain gladness and peace, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away;” Isaiah li. 17, &c.

First consolation of the upright soul in the bed of death; the remembrance of the past.—But all which takes place around him; the world which flies from him; all created beings which disappear; all that phantom of vanity which vanishes; this change, this novelty, is the source still of a thousand consolations to him.

We have just seen, that the despair of the dying sinner, in viewing what passes around him, is occasioned by his surprises, his separations, his changes; these are precisely the sources of consolation to the faithful soul in this last moment. Nothing surprises him; he is separated from nothing; in his eyes nothing is changed.

Nothing surprises him.—The hour of the Lord surprises him not; he expected, he longed for it. The thought of this last moment accompanied all his actions, entered into all his projects, regulated all his desires, and animated his whole conduct through life. Every hour, every moment, seemed to him the one which the upright Judge had appointed for that dreadful reckoning, where righteousness itself shall be judged. Thus had he lived, incessantly preparing his soul for that last hour. Thus he expires, tranquil, consoled, without surprise or dread, in the peace of his Lord; death never approaching nearer to him than he had always beheld it; and experiencing no difference between the day of his death and the ordinary ones of his life.

Besides, what occasions the surprise and the despair of the sinner on the bed of death, is to see that the world, in which he had

ever placed all his confidence, is nothing, is but a dream, which vanishes and is annihilated.

But the faithful soul, in this last moment, ah! he sees the world in the same light he had always viewed it; as a shadow which flitteth away;—as a vapour which deceives at a distance, but, when approached, has neither reality nor substance. He feels, then, the holy joy of having estimated the world according to its merit; of having judged with propriety; of never being attached to what must one day slip from him in a moment; and of having placed his confidence in God alone, who remaineth for ever, eternally to reward those who trust in him.

How sweet, then, to a faithful soul, to say to himself, I have made the happiest choice; how fortunate for me that I attached myself only to God, since he alone will endure to me for ever! My choice was regarded as a folly; the world laughed it to scorn, and found me whimsical and singular in not conforming myself to its ways; but now this last moment verifies all. It is death that decides on which side are the wise or the foolish, and which of the two has judged aright, the worldly or the faithful.

Thus does the upright soul, on the bed of death, view the world and all its glory. When the ministers of the church come to converse with him of God and the nothingness of all human things, these holy truths, so new to the sinner in that last moment, are subjects familiar to him, objects of which he had never lost sight. These consolatory truths are then his sweetest occupation; he meditates upon, he enjoys them, he draws them from the bottom of his heart, where they had always been cherished, to place them full in his view, and he contemplates them with joy. The minister of Jesus Christ speaks no new or foreign language to him; it is the language of his heart: they are the sentiments of his whole life. Nothing soothes him so much, then, as to hear that God spoken of whom he had always loved; those eternal riches, which he had always coveted; that happiness of another life, for which he had always sighed; and the nothingness of that world which he had always despised. All other subjects of conversation become insipid to him; he can listen only to the mercies of the God of his fathers, and he regrets the moments as lost, which must necessarily be devoted to the regulation of an earthly mansion and the succession of his ancestors. Great God! what knowledge! what peace! what delicious transports! what holy emotions of love, of joy, of confidence, of thanksgiving, then fill the soul of this righteous character! His faith is renewed; his love is invigorated; his fervour is excited; his compunction is awakened. The nearer the dissolution of the earthly man approaches, the more is the new man completed and perfected! The more his mansion of clay crumbles, the more is his soul purified and exalted! In proportion as the body falls into ruin, the spirit is disengaged

and renewed; like a pure and brilliant flame, which ascends and shines forth with additional splendour, in proportion as it disengages itself from the remains of matter which held it down, and as the substance to which it was attached is consumed and dissipated.

Alas! all discourses upon God fatigue the sinner on the bed of death: they irritate his evils; his head suffers by them, and his rest is disturbed. It becomes necessary to manage his weakness, by venturing only a few words at proper periods; to do it with precaution, lest their length should incommode him; to choose the moments for speaking to him of the God who is ready to judge him, and whom he has never known. Holy artifices of charity are required, nay, deception is even necessary sometimes, to make him bestow a thought upon his salvation. Even the ministers of the church but rarely approach him, because they well know that their presence is only an intrusion. They are excluded as disagreeable and melancholy prophets; his friends around him carefully turn the conversation from salvation, as conveying the news of death, and as a dismal subject which wearies him; they endeavour to enliven his spirits by relating the affairs and vanities of the age, which had engrossed him during life. Great God! and thou permittest that this unfortunate wretch should bear, even to death, his dislike to truth; that worldly images shall still occupy him in this last moment; and that they shall dread to speak to him of his God whom he has always dreaded to serve and to know!

But let us not lose sight of the faithful soul. Not only he sees nothing on the bed of death which surprises him, but he is likewise separated from nothing which he laments or regrets. For what can death separate him from to occasion either regret or tears? From the world? Alas! from a world in which he had always lived as an exile; in which he had found only shameful excesses which grieved his faith; rocks, at which his innocence trembled; attentions, which were troublesome to him; subjections, which, in spite of himself, still divided him between heaven and the earth: we feel little regret for the loss of what we have never loved. From his riches and wealth? Alas! his treasure was in heaven: his riches had been the riches of the poor: he loses them not; he only goes to regain them for ever in the bosom of God. From his titles and his dignities? Alas! it is a yoke from which he is delivered. The only title dear to him was the one he had received in baptism, which he now bears to the presence of God, and which constitutes his claim to the eternal promises. From his relations and friends? Alas! he knows that he only precedes them by a moment; that death cannot separate those whom charity hath joined upon the earth; and that, soon united together in the bosom of God, they shall again form the same church and the same people, and shall enjoy the delights of an immortal society. From his children?

He leaves to them the Lord as a father; his example and his instructions as an inheritance; his good wishes and his blessing as a final consolation. And, like David, he expires in intreating for his son Solomon, not temporal prosperities, but a perfect heart, love of the law, and the fear of the God of his fathers. From his body? Alas! from that body which he had always chastised, crucified; which he considered as his enemy; which kept him still dependent upon the senses and the flesh; which overwhelmed him under the weight of so many humiliating wants; from that house of clay which confined him prisoner; which prolonged the days of his banishment and his slavery, and retarded his union with Jesus Christ. Ah! like St. Paul, he earnestly wishes its dissolution: it is an irksome clothing from which he is delivered; it is a wall of separation from his God, which is destroyed, and which now leaves him free and qualified to take his flight toward the eternal mountains. Thus, death separates him from nothing, because faith had already separated him from all.

I do not add, that the changes which take place on the bed of death, so full of despair to the sinner, change nothing in the faithful soul. His reason, it is true, decays; but, for a long time past, he had subjected it to the yoke of faith, and extinguished its vain lights before the light of God and the profundity of his mysteries. His expiring eyes become darkened, and are closed upon all visible objects; but long ago they had been fixed on the Invisible alone. His tongue is immoveable; but he had long before planted the guard of circumspection on it, and meditated in silence the mercies of the God of his fathers. All his senses are blunted and lose their natural use; but, for a long time past, he had himself interdicted their influence. He had eyes, and saw not; ears, and heard not; taste, and relished only the things of heaven. Nothing is changed, therefore, to this soul on the bed of death. His body falls in pieces; all created beings vanish from his eyes; light retires; all nature returns to nothing; and, in the midst of all these changes, he alone changeth not; he alone is always the same.

How grand, my brethren, does faith render the righteous on the bed of death! How worthy of God, of angels, and of men, is the sight of the upright soul in that last moment! It is then that the faithful heart appears master of the world, and of all the created; it is then that, participating already in the greatness and the immutability of the God to whom he is on the eve of being united, he is elevated above all; in the world, without any connexion with it; in a mortal body, without being chained to it; in the midst of his relations and friends, without seeing or knowing them; in the midst of the embarrassments and changes which his death opens to his sight, without the smallest interruption to his tranquillity. He is already fixed in the bosom of God, in the midst of the destruction of all things.

Once more, my brethren, how grand is it to have lived in the observance of the law of the Lord, and to die in his fear! With what dignity does not faith then display itself in the righteous soul! It is the moment of his glory and triumph; it is the centre at which the whole lustre of his life and of his virtues unite.

How beautiful to see the righteous man, then, moving with a tranquil and majestic pace toward eternity! And with reason did the false prophet cry out, when he saw the triumphal march of the Israelites into the Land of Promise,—“Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his;” Numb. xxiii. 10.

And behold, my brethren, what completely fills with joy and consolation the faithful soul on the bed of death: it is the thought of futurity. The sinner, during health, looks forward to a future state with a tranquil eye: but in this last moment, beholding its approach, his tranquillity is changed into shudderings and terror. The upright man, on the contrary, during the days of his mortal life, durst never regard, with a fixed eye, the depth and the extent of God's judgments: he wrought out his salvation with fear and trembling; he shuddered at the very thought of that dreadful futurity, where even the just, if judged without mercy, shall hardly be saved: but, on the bed of death, ah! the God of peace, who displays himself to him, calms his agitations; his fears immediately cease, and are changed into a sweet hope. He already pierces, with expiring eyes, through that cloud of mortality which still surrounds him, and sees the throne of glory, and the Son of man at his Father's right-hand, ready to receive him; that immortal country, for which he had longed so much, and upon which his mind had always dwelt; that holy Zion, which the God of his fathers filleth with his glory and his presence; where he overfloweth the elect with a torrent of delights, and maketh them for ever to enjoy the incomprehensible riches which he hath prepared for those who love him; that city of the people of God, the residence of the saints, the habitation of the just, and of the prophets, where he shall again find his brethren, with whom charity had united him on the earth, and with whom he will bless eternally the tender mercies of the Lord, and join with them in hallelujahs to his praise.

Ah! when also the ministers of the church come to announce to this soul that the hour is come, and that eternity approaches; when they come to tell him in the name of the church, which sends them; “Depart, Christian soul; quit at last that earth where you have so long been a stranger and a captive: the time of trial and tribulation is over: behold at last the upright Judge, who comes to strike off the chains of your mortality: return to the bosom of God from whence you came: quit now a world which was unworthy of you: the Almighty hath at last been touched with your tears; he at last openeth to you the gate of

eternity, the gate of the upright: depart faithful soul; go and unite thyself to the heavenly church which expects thee: only remember your brethren whom you leave upon the earth still exposed to temptations and to storms: be touched with the melancholy state of the church here below, which has given you birth in Jesus Christ, and which envies your departure: intreat the end of her captivity, and her re-union with her spouse, from whom she is still separated. Those who sleep in the Lord perish not for ever: we only quit you on the earth in order to regain you in a little time with Jesus Christ in the kingdom of the holy: the body, which you are on the point of leaving a prey to worms and to putrefaction, shall soon follow you, immortal and glorious. Not a hair of your head shall perish. There shall remain in your ashes a seed of immortality, even to the day of revelation, when your parched bones shall be vivified, and again appear more resplendent than light: what happiness for you to be at last quit of all the miseries which still afflict us; to be no longer exposed, like your brethren, to lose that God whom you go to enjoy; to shut your eyes at last on all the scandals which grieve us; on that vanity which seduces us; on those examples which lead us astray; on those attachments which engross us; and on those troubles which consume us! What happiness to quit at last a place where every thing tires and every thing sullies us; where we are a burden to ourselves, and where we only exist in order to be unhappy; and to go to a residence of peace, of joy, of quiet, where our only occupation will be to enjoy the God whom we love!"

What blessed tidings, then, of joy and immortality to this righteous soul! What blessed arrangement! With what peace, what confidence, what thanksgivings, does he not accept it! He raises, like old Simeon, his dying eyes to heaven; and viewing the Lord, who cometh inwardly, says to him, "Break, O my God! when thou pleasest, these remains of mortality; these feeble ties which still keep me here: I wait, in peace and in hope, the effects of thine eternal promises." Thus, purified by the expiation of a holy and Christian life, fortified by the last remedies of the church, washed in the blood of the Lamb, supported by the hope of the promises, and ripe for eternity, he shuts his eyes with a holy joy on all sublunary creatures: he tranquilly goes to sleep in the Lord, and returns to the bosom of that God from whence he came.

My brethren, any observation here would be useless. Such is the end of those who have lived in the fear of the Lord: their death is precious before God, like their life. Such is the deplorable end of those who have neglected him to that last hour: the death of sinners is abominable in the eyes of the Lord equally as their life. If you live in sin, you will die in all the horrors and in all the useless regrets of the sinner, and your death shall be an eternal

death. If you live in righteousness, you will die in peace, and in the confidence of the just, and your death will be only a passage to a blessed immortality.

Now, to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now, henceforth, and for evermore. Amen.

SERMON XI.

ON CHARITY.

“ And Jesus took the loaves, and, when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down.”—*JOHN* vi. 11.

It is not without design that our Saviour associates the disciples, in the prodigy of multiplying the loaves, and that he makes use of their ministry in distributing the miraculous food among a people pressed with hunger and want. He might again, no doubt, have made manna to rain upon the desert, and saved his disciples the trouble of so tedious a distribution.

But might he not, after raising up Lazarus from the dead, have dispensed with their assistance in unloosing him? Could his almighty voice, which had just broken asunder the chains of death, have found any resistance from the feeble bands which the hand of man had formed? It is because he wished to point out to them, before-hand, the sacred exercise of their ministry; the part they were afterward to have in the spiritual resurrection of sinners; and that whatever they should unloose upon the earth should be unloosed in heaven.

Again, when there was question of paying tribute to Cæsar, he needed not to have recourse to the expedient of Peter's casting his hook into the sea for the purpose of producing a piece of money out of the bowels of a fish: he who, even from stones, was able to raise up children to Abraham, might surely with greater ease have converted them into a precious metal, and thereby furnished the amount of the tribute due to Cæsar. But, in the character of the Head of the Church, he meant to teach his ministers to respect those in authority; and, by rendering honour and tribute to the powers established by God, to set an example of submission to other believers.

Thus, in making use, upon this occasion, of the intervention of the apostles to distribute the loaves to the multitude, his design is, to accustom all his disciples to compassion and liberality toward the unfortunate: he establishes you the ministers of his providence, and multiplies the riches of the earth in your hands, for the sole purpose of being distributed from thence among that multitude of unfortunate fellow-creatures which surrounds you.

He, no doubt, might nourish them himself, as he formerly nourished Paul and Elijah in the desert; without your interference he might comfort those creatures which bear his image; he, whose invisible hand prepares food even for the young ravens which invoke him in their want; but he wishes to associate you in the merit of his liberality; he wishes you to be placed between himself and the poor, like refreshing clouds, always ready to shower upon them those fructifying streams which you have only received for their advantage.

Such is the order of his providence; it was necessary that means of salvation should be provided for all men: riches would corrupt the heart, if charity were not to expiate their abuse; indigence would fatigue and weary out virtue, if the succours of compassion were not to soften its bitterness; the poor facilitate to the rich the pardon of their pleasures; the rich animate the poor not to lose the merit of their sufferings.

Apply yourself, then, be whom you may, to all the consequence of this gospel. If you groan under the yoke of poverty, the tenderness and the care of Jesus Christ toward all the wants of a wandering and unprovided people will console you: if born to opulence, the example of the disciples will now instruct you. You will there see, first, the pretexts which they oppose to the duty of charity confuted: secondly, you will learn what ought to be its rules. That is to say, that in the first part of this Discourse we shall establish this duty against all the vain excuses of avarice; in the second we shall instruct you in the manner of fulfilling it against even the defects of charity; it is the most natural instruction with which the history of the gospel presents us.

PART I.—It is scarcely a matter of controversy now in the world, whether the law of God make a precept to us of charity. The gospel is so pointed on this duty; the spirit and the groundwork of religion lead us so naturally to it; the idea alone which we have of Providence, in the dispensation of temporal things, leaves so little room on that point to opinion or doubt, that, though many are ignorant of the extent of this obligation, yet there are almost none who do not admit of the foundation and principle.

Who, indeed, is ignorant that the Lord, whose providence hath regulated all things with an order so admirable and beau-

tiful, and prepared food even for the beasts of the field, would never have left men, created after his own image, a prey to hunger and indigence, whilst he would liberally shower upon a small number of happy individuals the blessings of heaven and the fat of the earth, if he had not intended that the abundance of the one should supply the necessities of the other.

Who is ignorant, that originally every thing belonged in common to all men; that simple nature knew neither property nor portions; and that at first, she left each of us in possession of the universe: but that, in order to put bounds to avarice, and to avoid trouble and dissensions, the common consent of the people established that the wisest, the most humane, and the most upright, should likewise be the most opulent; that, besides the portion of wealth destined to them by nature, they should also be charged with that of the weakest, to be its depositaries, and to defend it against usurpation and violence: consequently, that they were established by nature itself as the guardians of the unfortunate, and that whatever surplus they had was only the patrimony of their brethren confided to their care and to their equity?

Who, lastly, is ignorant that the ties of religion have still more firmly cemented the first bonds of union which nature had formed among men; that the grace of Jesus Christ, which brought forth the first believers, made of them not only one heart and one soul, but also one family, where the idea of individual property was exploded; and that the gospel, making it a law to us to love our brethren as ourselves, no longer permits us to be ignorant of their wants, or to be insensible to their sorrows?

But it is with the duty of charity as with all the other duties of the law: in general, the obligation is not, even in idea, denied; but does the circumstance of its fulfilment take place? A pretext is never wanting, either to dispense with it entirely, or at least to be quit for a moiety of the duty. Now, it would appear that the Spirit of God hath meant to point out to us all these pretexts, in the answers which the disciples made to Jesus Christ in order to excuse themselves from assisting the famished multitude which had followed him to the desert.

In the first place, they remind him that they had scarcely wherewithal to supply their own wants; and that only five loaves of barley and two fishes remained: behold the first pretext, made use of by covetousness, in opposition to the duty of compassion. Scarcely have they sufficient for themselves; they have a name and a rank to support in the world; children to establish; creditors to satisfy; public charges to support; a thousand expenses of pure benevolence, to which attention must be paid; now, what is any income, not entirely unlimited, to such endless demands? In this manner the world continually speaks; and a world the most brilliant, and the most sumptuous.

Now, I well know, that the limits of what is called a sufficiency, are not the same for all stations; that they extend in proportion to rank and birth; that one star, says the apostle, must differ in lustre from another; that, even from the apostolic ages, men were seen in the assemblies of believers, clothed in robes of distinction, with rings of gold, while others, of a more obscure station, were forced to content themselves with the apparel necessary to cover their nakedness; that, consequently, religion does not confound stations; and that, if it forbid those who dwell in the palaces of kings to be effeminate in their manners, and indecently luxurious in their dress, it doth not at the same time prescribe to them the poverty and the simplicity of those who dwell in cottages, or of those who form the lower ranks of the people: I know it.

But, my brethren, it is an incontestable truth, that, whatever surplus you may have, belongs not to you; that it is the portion of the poor; and that you are entitled to consider as your own, only that proportion of your revenues which is necessary to support that station in which Providence hath placed you. I ask, then, is it the gospel or covetousness, which must regulate that sufficiency? Would you dare to pretend, that all those vanities of which custom has now made a law, are to be held, in the sight of God, as expenses inseparable from your condition? That every thing which flatters, and is agreeable to you, which nourishes your pride, gratifies your caprices, and corrupts your heart, is for that reason necessary to you? That all which you sacrifice to the fortune of a child, in order to raise him above his ancestors; all which you risk in gaming; that luxury, which either suits not your birth, or is an abuse of it: would you dare to pretend, that all these have incontestable claims on your revenues, which are to be preferred to those of charity? Lastly, would you dare to pretend, that, because your father, perhaps obscure, and of the lowest rank, may have left to you all his wealth, and perhaps his crimes, you are entitled to forget your family and the house of your father, in order to mingle with the highest ranks, and to support the same eclat, because you are enabled to support the same expense?

If this be the case, my brethren, if you consider as a surplus only, that which may escape from your pleasures, from your extravagancies, and from your caprices, you have only to be voluptuous, capricious, dissolute, and prodigal, in order to be wholly dispensed from the duty of charity. The more passions you shall have to satisfy, the more will your obligation to charity diminish; and your excesses, which the Lord hath commanded you to expiate by acts of compassion, will themselves become a privilege to dispense yourselves from them. There must necessarily, therefore, be some rule here to observe, and some limits to appoint ourselves, different from those of avarice; and behold it, my brethren,—the rule of faith. Whatever tends to nourish only the

life of the senses, to flatter the passions, to countenance the vain pomp and abuses of the world, is superfluous to a Christian: these are what you ought to retrench, and to set apart; these are the funds and the heritage of the poor; you are only their depositaries, and you cannot encroach upon them without usurpation and injustice. The gospel reduces to very little the sufficiency of a Christian, however exalted in the world; religion retrenches much from the expenses; and, did we live all according to the rules of faith, our wants, which would no longer be multiplied by our passions, would still be fewer; the greatest part of our wealth would be found entirely useless; and, as in the first age of faith, indigence would no longer grieve the church, nor be seen among believers. Our expenses continually increase, because our passions are every day multiplied; the opulence of our fathers is no longer to us but an uncomfortable poverty; and our great riches can no longer suffice, because nothing can satisfy those who refuse themselves nothing.

And, in order to give this truth all the extent which the subject in question demands, I ask you, secondly, do the elevation and abundance in which you are born dispense you from simplicity, frugality, modesty, and holy restraint? By being born great, you are not the less Christians. In vain, like those Israelites in the desert, have you amassed more manna than your brethren; you cannot preserve for your use more than the measure prescribed by the law. Were it not so, our Saviour would have forbidden pomp, luxury, and worldly pleasures but to the poor and unfortunate, those to whom the misery of their condition renders needless that defence.

Now, this grand truth admitted, if, according to the rule of faith, it be not permitted to you to employ your riches in the gratification of your appetites; if the rich be obliged to bear the cross, continually to renounce themselves, and to look for no consolation in this world, equally as the poor; what can the design of Providence have been in pouring upon you all the riches of the earth, and what advantage could even accrue to you from them? Could it be in order to administer to your irregular desires? But you are no longer bound to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. Could it be in order to support the pride of rank and birth? But whatever you give to vanity, you cut off from charity. Could it be for the purpose of hoarding up for your posterity? But your treasure should be only in heaven. Could it be in order that you might pass your life more agreeably? But if you weep not, if you suffer not, if you combat not, you are lost. Could it be in order to attach you more strongly to the world? But the Christian is not of this world; he is citizen of the age to come. Could it be for the purpose of aggrandizing your possessions and your inheritances? But you would never aggrandize but the place of your exile; and the gain of the whole world would be vain, if you

thereby lost your soul. Could it be that your table might be loaded with the most exquisite dishes? But you well know, that the gospel forbids a life of sensuality and voluptuousness, equally to the rich as to the indigent. Review all the advantages, which, according to the world, you can reap from your prosperity, and you will find almost the whole of them forbidden by the law of God.

It has not, therefore, been his design, that they should be merely for your own purposes, when he multiplied in your hands the riches of the earth. It is not for yourself, as Mordecai formerly said to the pious Esther, that the Lord hath exalted you to this point of prosperity and grandeur; it is for the sake of his afflicted people; it is to be the protector of the unfortunate. If you fulfil not the intentions of God, with regard to you, continued that wise Israelite, he will employ some other, who shall more faithfully serve him; he will transfer to them that crown which was intended for you; he will elsewhere provide the enlargement and deliverance of his afflicted people; for he will not permit them to perish; but you, and your father's house shall perish. In the designs of the Almighty, you therefore are but the ministers of his providence toward those who suffer; your great riches are only sacred deposits, which his goodness hath entrusted to your care, for security against usurpation and violence, and in order to be more safely preserved for the widow and the orphan: your abundance, in the order of his wisdom, is destined only to supply their necessities; your authority, only to protect them; your dignities, only to avenge their interests; your rank, only to console them by your good offices: whatsoever you be, you are it only for them; your elevation would no longer be the work of God, and he would have cursed you, in bestowing on you all the riches of the earth, had he given them to you for any other use.

Ah! allege, then, no more to us, as an excuse for your hard-heartedness toward your brethren, wants which are condemned by the law of God; rather justify his providence toward all who suffer; by entering into his order, let them know, that there is a God for them as well as for you; and make them bless the adorable designs of his wisdom, in the dispensation of earthly things, which hath supplied them, through your abundance, with such resources of consolation.

But, besides, what can the small contributions required from you retrench from those wants, the urgency of which you tell us so much? The Lord exacteth not from you any part of your possessions and heritages, though they belong wholly to him, and he hath a right to despoil you of them. He leaveth you tranquil possessors of those lands, of those palaces, which distinguish you and your people, and with which the piety of your ancestors formerly enriched our temples. He doth not command you, like the young man in the gospel, to renounce all, to distribute

your whole wealth among the poor, and to follow him : he maketh it not a law to you, as formerly to the first believers, to bring all your riches to the feet of your pastors : he doth not strike you with anathema, as formerly Annanias and Sapphira, for daring to retain only a portion of that wealth which they had received from their ancestors ;—you, who only owe the aggrandizement of your fortunes perhaps to public calamities, or other shameful means of acquirement, he consenteth that, as the prophet saith, you shall call the land by your name, and that you transmit to your posterity those possessions which you have inherited from your ancestors ;—he wisheth that you lay apart only a portion for the unfortunate, whom he leaveth in indigence : he wisheth that, while in the luxury and splendour of your apparel you bear the nourishment of a whole people of unfortunate fellow-creatures, you spare wherewith to cover the nakedness of his servants who languish in poverty, and know not where to repose their head : he wisheth that, from those tables of voluptuousness, where your great riches are scarcely sufficient to supply your sensuality and the profusions of an extravagant delicacy, you drop at least a portion for the relief of the Lazaruses pressed with hunger and want : he wisheth that, while paintings of the most absurd and the most boundless price are seen to cover the walls of your palaces, your revenues may suffice to honour the living images of your God : he wisheth, in a word, that while nothing is spared toward the gratification of an inordinate passion for gaming, and every thing is on the verge of being for ever swallowed up in that gulf, you come not to calculate your expenses, to measure your ability, to allege to us the mediocrity of your fortune and the embarrassment of your affairs, when there is question of consoling an afflicted Christian. He wisheth it ; and with reason doth he wish it. What ! shall you be rich for evil, and poor for good !—your revenues be amply sufficient to effect your destruction, and not suffice to save your soul, and to purchase heaven !—and, because you carry self-love to the extreme, that every barbarity of heart should be permitted you toward your unfortunate brethren ?

But whence comes it that, in this single circumstance, you wish to lower the opinion that the world has of your riches ? On every other occasion you wish to be thought powerful ; you give yourselves out as such ; you even frequently conceal, under appearances of the greatest splendour, affairs already ruined, merely to support the vain reputation of wealth. This vanity, then, does not abandon you but when you are put in remembrance of the duty of compassion. Not satisfied then with confessing the mediocrity of your fortune, you exaggerate it, and sordidness triumphs in your heart, not only over truth, but even over vanity. Ah ! the Lord formerly reproached to the angel of the church of Laodicea, “ Because thou sayest, I am rich and in-

creased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that in my sight thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." But at present he ought, with regard to you, to change that reproach and to say, "O! you complain that you are poor and destitute of every thing, and you will not see that you are rich and loaded with wealth; and that in times when almost all around you suffer, you alone want for nothing in my sight."

This is the second pretext made use of in opposition to the duty of charity—the general poverty. Thus the disciples reply, in the second place, to our Saviour, as an excuse for not assisting the famishing multitude—that the place is desert and barren, that it is now late, and that he ought to send away the people that they might go to the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread, for they had nothing to eat. A fresh pretext they make use of to dispense themselves from compassion—the misery of the times, the sterility and irregularity of the seasons.

But, first, might not our Saviour have answered to the disciples, as a holy father says, It is because the place is barren and desert, and that this people knows not where to find food to allay their hunger, that they should not be sent away fasting, lest their strength fail them by the way. And, behold, my brethren, what I might also reply to you—the times are bad, the seasons are unfavourable. Ah! for that very reason you ought to enter with a more feeling concern, with a more lively and tender anxiety, into the wants of your fellow-creatures. If the place be desert and barren even for you, what must it be for so many unfortunate people! If you, with all your resources, feel so much the misery of the times, what must they not suffer, those who are destitute of every comfort! If the plagues of Egypt obtrude even into the palaces of the great, and of Pharaoh, what must be the desolation in the hut of the poor and of the labourer! If the princes of Israel, afflicted in Samaria, no longer find consolation in their palaces, to what dreadful extremities must the common people not be reduced! Reduced, alas! perhaps like that unfortunate mother, not to nourish herself with the blood of her child, but to make her innocence and her soul the melancholy price of her necessity.

But, besides, these evils with which we are afflicted, and of which you so loudly complain, are the punishment of your hardness toward the poor: God avengeth upon your possessions the iniquitous use to which you apply them: it is the cries and the groanings of the unfortunate, whom you abandon, which draw down the vengeance of Heaven upon your lands and territories. It is in these times, then, of public calamity, that you ought to hasten to appease the anger of God by the abundance of your charities: it is then that, more than ever, you should interest the poor in your behalf. Alas! you bethink yourselves of addressing your general

supplications to the Almighty, through these to obtain more favourable seasons, the cessation of public calamities, and the return of peace and abundance; but it is not there alone that your vows and your prayers ought to be carried. You can never expect that the Almighty will attend to your distresses while you remain callous to those of your fellow-creatures. You have here on the earth the masters of the winds and of the seasons: address yourselves to the poor and the afflicted; it is they who have, as I may say, the keys of heaven; it is their prayers which regulate the times and the seasons,—which bring back to us days of peace or of misery,—which arrest or attract the blessings of heaven: for abundance is given to the earth only for their consolation, and it is only on their account that the Almighty punisheth or is bountiful to you.

But, completely to confute you, my brethren, you who so strongly allege to us the evil of the times, does the pretended rigour of these times retrench any thing from your pleasures? What do your passions suffer from the public calamities? If the misfortune of the times oblige you to retrench from your expenses, begin with those of which religion condemns the use; regulate your tables, your apparel, your amusements, your followers, and your edifices, according to the gospel; let your retrenchings in charity at least only follow the others. Lessen your crimes before you begin to diminish from your duties. When the Almighty strikes with sterility the kingdoms of the earth, it is his intention to deprive the great and the powerful of all occasions of debauchery and excess: enter, then, into the order of his justice and his wisdom: consider yourselves as public criminals, whom the Lord chastiseth by public punishments. Say to him, like David, when he beheld the hand of the Lord weighing down his people, “Lo, I have sinned, and have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me and against my father’s house.”

Behold your model. By terminating your disorders, terminate the cause of the public evils: in the persons of the poor, offer up to God the retrenchment of your pleasures and of your profusions, as the only righteous and acceptable sacrifice which is capable of disarming his anger; and seeing these scourges fall upon the earth only in punishment of the abuses which you have made of your abundance, bear you likewise, in lessening these abuses, their anguish and bitterness. But that the public misfortunes should be perceivable neither in the splendour and pride of your equipages, nor in the sensuality of your repasts, nor in the magnificence of your palaces, nor in your rage for gaming and every criminal pleasure, but solely in your inhumanity toward the poor; that every thing abroad, the theatres, the profane assemblies of every description, the public festivals, should continue with the same vigour and animation, while charity alone shall

be chilled; that luxury should every day increase, while compassion alone shall diminish; that the world and Satan should lose nothing through the misery of the times, while Jesus Christ alone shall suffer in his afflicted members; that the rich, sheltered in their opulence, should see only from afar the anger of Heaven, while the poor and the innocent shall become its melancholy victims: great God! thou wouldst then overwhelm only the unfortunate in sending these scourges upon the earth! Thy sole intention then should be to complete the destruction of those miserable wretches, upon whom thy hand was already so heavy in bringing them forth to penury and want! The powerful of Egypt should alone be exempted by the exterminating angel, while thy whole wrath would fall upon the afflicted Israelite, upon his poor and unprovided roof, and even marked with the blood of the Lamb! Yes, my brethren, the public calamities are destined to punish only the rich and powerful, and the rich and the powerful are those who alone suffer not: on the contrary, the public evils, in multiplying the unfortunate, furnish an additional pretext toward dispensing themselves from the duty of compassion.

Last excuse of the disciples, founded on the great number of the people who had followed our Saviour into the desert: These people are so numerous, said they, that two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one may take a little. Last pretext which they oppose to the duty of charity—the multitude of the poor. Yes, my brethren, that which ought to excite and to animate charity, extinguishes it: the multitude of the unfortunate hardens you to their wants: the more the duty increases, the more do you think yourselves dispensed from its practice, and you become cruel by having too many occasions of being charitable.

But, in the first place, whence comes, I pray you, this multitude of poor, of which you so loudly complain? I know that the misfortune of the times may increase their number: but wars, pestilences, and irregularity of seasons, all of which we at present experience, have happened in all ages; the calamities we behold are not unexampled: our forefathers have witnessed them, and even much more melancholy and dreadful: civil dissensions, the father armed against the child, the brother against brother, countries ravaged and laid waste by their own inhabitants, the kingdom a prey to foreign enemies, no person in safety under his own roof: we see not these miseries; but have they seen what we witness—so many public and concealed miseries, so many families worn out, so many citizens, formerly distinguished, now low in the dust, and confounded with the meanest of the people? Arts become almost useless? The image of hunger and death spread over the cities and over the fields? What shall I say?—so many hidden iniquities brought every day to light, the dreadful consequences of despair and horrible

necessity? Whence come this, my brethren? Is it not from a luxury unknown to our fathers, and which engulfs every thing? From your expenses which know no bounds, and which necessarily drag along with them the extinction of charity?

Ah! was the primitive church not persecuted, desolated, and afflicted? Do the calamities of our age bear any comparison with the horrors of those times? Proscription of property, exilement and imprisonment were then daily; the most burdensome charges of the state fell upon those who were suspected of Christianity: in a word, so many calamities were never beheld; and, nevertheless, there was no poor among them, says St. Luke, nor any that lacked. Ah! it is, because riches of simplicity sprung up, even from their poverty itself, according to the expression of the apostle; it is, because they gave according to their means, and even beyond them; it is, because the most distant provinces, through the care of the apostolic ministers, flowed streams of charity, for the consolation of their afflicted brethren in Jerusalem, more exposed than the rest to the rage and hatred of the synagogue.

But more than all that; it is, because the most powerful of the primitive believers were adorned with modesty; and that our great riches are now scarcely sufficient to support that monstrous luxury, of which custom has made a law to us; it is, that their festivals were repasts of sobriety and charity; and that the holy abstinence itself, which we celebrated, cannot moderate among us the profusions and the excesses of the table, and of feasts; it is, that, having no fixed city here below, they did not exhaust themselves in forming brilliant establishments, in order to render their names illustrious, to exalt their posterity, and to ennoble their own obscurity and meanness; they thought only of securing to themselves a better establishment in the celestial country; and that at present no one is contented with his station; every one wishes to mount higher than his ancestors; and that their patrimony is only employed in buying titles and dignities, which may obliterate their name and the meanness of their origin: in a word, it is, because the frugality of these first believers constituted the whole wealth of their afflicted brethren, and that at present our profusions occasion all their poverty and want. It is our excesses, then, my brethren, and our hardness of heart toward them, which multiply the number of the unfortunate: excuse no more then, on that head, the failing of your charities; that would be making your guilt itself your excuse. Ah! you complain that the poor overburden you; but they would have reason in retorting the charge one day against you: do not then accuse them for your insensibility; and reproach them not with that, which they undoubtedly shall one day reproach to you before the tribunal of Jesus Christ.

If each of you were, according to the advice of the apostle, to appropriate a certain portion of your wealth toward the sub-

sistence of the poor; if, in the computation of your expenses and of your revenues, this article were to be always regarded as the most sacred and the most inviolable one, then should we quickly see the number of the afflicted to diminish: we should soon see renewed in the church that peace, that happiness, and that cheerful equality which reigned among the first Christians: we should no longer behold with sorrow that monstrous disproportion, which, elevating the one, places him on the pinnacle of prosperity and opulence, while the other crawls on the ground, and groans in the gulf of poverty and affliction: no longer should there be any unhappy except the impious among us; no secret miseries except those which sin operates in the soul; no tears except those of penitence; no sighs but for heaven; no poor, but those blessed disciples of the gospel, who renounce all to follow their Master. Our cities would be the abode of innocence and compassion; religion a commerce of charity; the earth the image of heaven, where, in different degrees of glory, each is equally happy; and the enemies of faith would again, as formerly, be forced to render glory to God, and to confess that there is something of divine in a religion which is capable of uniting men together in a manner so new.

But, in what the error here consists, is, that, in the practice, nobody considers charity as one of the most essential obligations of Christianity; consequently, they have no regulation on that point; if some bounty be bestowed, it is always arbitrary; and, however small it may be, they are equally satisfied with themselves, as if they had even gone beyond their duty.

Besides, when you pretend to excuse the scantiness of your charities, by saying that the number of the poor is endless; what do you believe to say? You say that your obligations, with respect to them, are become only more indispensable; that your compassion ought to increase in proportion as their wants increase; and that you contract new debts whenever any increase of the unfortunate takes place on the earth. It is then, my brethren, it is during these public calamities that you ought to retrench even from expenses which at any other period might be permitted, and which might even be proper; it is then that you ought to consider yourselves but as the principal poor, and to take as a charity whatever you take for yourselves; it is then that you are no longer either grandee, man in office, distinguished citizen, or woman of illustrious birth; you are simply believer, member of Jesus Christ, brother of every afflicted Christian.

And surely say,—while that cities and provinces are struck with every calamity; that men, created after the image of God, and redeemed with his whole blood, browse like the animal, and through their necessity go to search in the fields a food which nature has not intended for man, and which to them becomes a food of death; would you have the resolution to be the only one exempted from the general evil? While the face of a whole kingdom is changed,

and that cries and lamentations alone are heard around your superb dwelling; would you preserve, within, the same appearance of happiness, pomp, tranquillity, and opulence? And where, then, would be humanity, reason, religion? In a pagan republic,* you would be held as a bad citizen; in a society of sages and worldly, as a soul, vile, sordid, without nobility, without generosity, and without elevation; and, in the church of Jesus Christ, in what light, think you, can you be held? Oh! as a monster, unworthy of the name of Christian which you bear, of that faith in which you glorify yourself, of the sacrament which you approach, and even of entry into our temples where you come,—seeing all these are the sacred symbols of that union which ought to exist among believers.

Nevertheless, the hand of the Lord is extended over our people in the cities and in the provinces; you know it, and you lament it: Heaven is deaf to the cries of this afflicted kingdom; wretchedness, poverty, desolation, and death, walk every where before us. Now, do any of those excesses of charity, become at present a law of prudence and justice, escape you? Do you take upon yourselves any part of the calamities of your brethren? What shall I say? Do you not perhaps take advantage of the public misery? Do you not perhaps turn the general poverty into a barbarous profit? Do you not perhaps complete the stripping of the unfortunate in affecting to hold out to them an assisting hand? And are you unacquainted with the inhuman art of deriving individual profit even from the tears and the necessities of your brethren? Bowels of iron! when you shall be filled, you shall burst asunder; your felicity itself will constitute your punishment, and the Lord will shower down upon you his war and his wrath.

My brethren, how dreadful shall be the presence of the poor before the tribunal of Jesus Christ to the greatest part of the rich in this world! How powerful shall be these accusers! And how little shall remain for you to say, when they shall reproach to you the scantiness of the succour which was required to soften and to relieve their wants: that a single day cut off from your profusions, would have sufficed to remedy the indigence of one of their years; that it was their own property which you withheld, since whatever you had beyond a sufficiency belonged to them; that consequently you have not only been cruel, but also unjust in refusing it to them; but that, after all, your hard-heartedness has served only to exercise their patience and to render them more worthy of immortality, while you, for ever deprived of those riches which you were unwilling to lodge in safety in the bosom of the poor, shall receive for your portion only the curse prepared for those who shall have seen Jesus Christ suffering hunger, thirst, and nakedness in his

* “ This Discourse was pronounced in 1709, when France was almost desolated by war, pestilence, and famine.”

members, and shall not have relieved him. Such is the illusion of the pretexts employed to dispense themselves from the duty of charity: let us now determine the rules to be observed in fulfilling it; and, after having defended this obligation against all the vain excuses of avarice, let us endeavour to save it from even the defects of charity.

PART II.—Not to sound the trumpet in order to attract the public attention in the compassionate offices which we render to our brethren; to observe an order even of justice in charity, and not to prefer the wants of strangers to those with whom we are connected; to appear feeling for the unfortunate, and to know how to soothe the afflicted by our tenderness and affability, as well as by our bounty: in a word, to find out, by our vigilance and attention, the secret of their shame; behold the rules which the present example of our Saviour prescribes to us in the practice of compassion.

First. He went up into a desert and hidden place, says the gospel; he ascended a mountain, where he seated himself with his disciples. His design, according to the holy interpreters, was to conceal from the eyes of the neighbouring villages the miracle of multiplying the loaves, and to have no witnesses of his compassion except those who were to reap the fruits of it. First instruction, and first rule; the secrecy of charity.

Yes, my brethren, how many fruits of compassion are every day blasted in the sight of God, by the scorching wind of pride and of vain ostentation! How many charities lost for eternity! How many treasures, which were believed to have been safely lodged in the bosom of the poor, and which shall one day appear corrupted with vermin, and consumed with rust!

In truth, those gross and bare-faced hypocrites are rare which openly vaunt to the world the merit of their pious exertions: pride is more cunning, and it never altogether unmask itself: but, how diminutive is the number of those who, moved with the true zeal of charity, like our Saviour, seek out solitary and private places to bestow, and, at the same time, to conceal their holy gifts! We now see only that ostentatious zeal, which nothing but necessities of éclat can interest, and which piously wishes to make the public acquainted with every gift: they will sometimes, it is true, adopt measures to conceal them, but they are not sorry when an indiscretion betrays them; they will not perhaps court public attention, but they are delighted when the public attention surprises them, and they almost consider as lost any liberality which remains concealed.

Alas! our temples and our altars, are they not every where marked with the gifts and with the names of their benefactors; that is to say, are they not the public monuments of our forefathers and of our own vanity? If the invisible eye of the

heavenly Father alone was meant to have witnessed them, to what purpose all that vain ostentation? Are you afraid that the Lord forgets your offerings? If you wish only to please him, why expose your gifts to any other eye? Why these titles and these inscriptions which immortalize, on sacred walls, your gifts and your pride? Was it not sufficient that they were written, even by the hand of God, in the book of life? Why engrave on a perishable marble the merit of a deed which charity would have rendered immortal?

Solomon, after having completed the most superb and the most magnificent temple of which the earth could ever boast, engraved the awful name of the Lord alone upon it, without presuming to mingle any memorial of the grandeur of his race with those of the eternal majesty of the King of kings. We give an appellation of piety to this custom; it is thought that these public monuments excite the liberality of believers. But the Lord, hath he charged your vanity with the care of attracting gifts to his altars? And hath he permitted you to depart from modesty, in order to make your brethren more charitable? Alas! the most powerful among the primitive believers, carried humbly as the most obscure their patrimony to the feet of the apostles: they beheld with a holy joy their names and their wealth confounded among those of their brethren who had less than they to offer: they were not distinguished in the assembly of the faithful in proportion to their gifts: honours and precedency were not yet the price of gifts and offerings, and they knew better than to exchange the eternal recompense which they awaited from the Lord for any frivolous glory they could receive from men; and now the church has not privileges enough to satisfy the vanity of her benefactors: their places are marked out in the sanctuary; their tombs appear even under the altar, where only the ashes of martyrs should repose. Custom, it is true, authorizes this abuse; but custom does not always justify what it authorizes.

Charity, my brethren, is that sweet-smelling savour of Jesus Christ which vanishes and is extinguished from the moment that it is exposed. I mean not that public acts of compassion are to be refrained from: we owe the edification and example of them to our brethren: it is proper that they see our works; but we ought not ourselves to see them, and our left hand should be ignorant of what our right bestows: even those actions which duty renders the most shining, ought always to be hidden in the preparation of the heart: we ought to entertain a kind of jealousy of the public view on their account, and to believe their purity in safety only when they are exposed to the eyes of God alone. Yes, my brethren, those liberalities which have flowed mostly in secret, reach the bosom of God much more pure than others, which, even contrary to our wishes, having been exposed to the eyes of men, become troubled and defiled,

as I may say, in their course by the inevitable flatteries of self-love, and by the applauses of the beholders : like those rivers which have flowed mostly under ground, and which pour their streams into the ocean pure and undefiled ; while, on the contrary, those which have traversed plains and countries, exposed to the day, carry there, in general, only muddy waters, and drag along with them the wrecks, carcasses, and slime which they have amassed in their course. Behold, then, the first rule of charity which our Saviour here lays down—to shun show and ostentation in all works of compassion—to be unwilling to have your name mentioned in them, either on account of the rank which you may here hold, or from the glory of having been the first promoter, or from the noise which they may make in the world, and not to lose upon the earth that which charity had amassed only for heaven.

The second circumstance which I remark in our gospel, is, that no one, of all the multitude who present themselves to Jesus Christ, is rejected : all are indiscriminately relieved ; and we do not read that with regard to them our Saviour hath used any distinction or preference. Second rule : charity is universal ; it banishes those capricious liberalities which seem to open the heart to certain wants, only in order to shut it against all others. You find persons in the world, who, under the pretext of having stated charities and places destined to receive them, are callous to all other wants. In vain would you inform them that a family is on the brink of ruin, and that a very small assistance would extricate it ; that a young person hangs over a precipice, and must necessarily perish, if some friendly and assisting hand be not held out ; that a certain meritorious and useful establishment must fall, if not supported by a renewal of charity : these are not necessities after their taste ; and, in placing elsewhere some trifling bounties, they imagine to have purchased the right of viewing with a dry eye and an indifferent heart every other description of misery.

I know that charity hath its order and its measure ; that in its practice it ought to use a proper distinction ; that justice requires a preference to certain wants : but I would not have that methodical charity (if I may thus speak) which to a point knows where to stop,—which has its days, its places, its persons, and its limits,—which, beyond these, is cruel, and can settle with itself to be affected only in certain times and by certain wants. Ah ! are we thus masters of our hearts when we truly love our brethren ? Can we at our will mark out to ourselves the moments of warmth and of indifference ? Charity, that holy love, is it so regular when it truly inflames the heart ? Has it not, if I may so say, its transports and its excesses ? And do not occasions sometimes occur so truly affecting, that, did but a single spark of charity exist in your heart, it would show itself, and in the instant would open your bowels of compassion and your riches to your brethren.

I would not have that rigidly circumspect charity which is never done with its scrutiny, and which always mistrusts the truth of the necessities laid open to it. See if, in that multitude which our Saviour filleth, he apply himself to separate those whom idleness or the sole hope of corporeal nourishment had perhaps attracted to the desert, and who might still have had sufficient strength left to go and search for food in the neighbouring villages; no one is excepted from his divine bounty. Is the being reduced to feign wretchedness not a sufficient misery of itself? Is it not preferable to assist fictitious wants, rather than to run the risk of refusing aid to real and melancholy objects of compassion? When an impostor should even deceive your charity, where is the loss? Is it not always Jesus Christ who receives it from your hand? And is your recompense attached to the abuse which may be made of your bounty, or to the intention itself which bestows it?

From this rule there springs a third, laid down in the history of our gospel, at the same time with the other two: it is, that not only ought charity to be universal, but likewise mild, affable, and compassionate. Jesus Christ, beholding these people wandering and unprovided at the foot of the mountain, is touched with compassion; he is affected at the sight, and the wants of the multitude awaken his tenderness and pity. Third rule: the gentleness of charity.

We often accompany pity with so much asperity toward the unfortunate, while stretching out to them a helping hand,—we look upon them with so sour and so severe a countenance, that a simple denial had been less galling to them than a charity so harshly and so unfeelingly bestowed; for the pity which appears affected by our misfortunes, consoles them almost as much as the bounty which relieves them. We reproach to them their strength, their idleness, their wandering and vagabond manners; we accuse their own conduct for their indigence and wretchedness: and, in succouring, we purchase the right of insulting them. But, were the unhappy creature whom you outrage permitted to reply,—if the abjectness of his situation had not put the check of shame and respect upon his tongue, What do you reproach to me? would he say. An idle life, and useless, and vagabond manners. But what are the cares which in your opulence engross you? The cares of ambition, the anxieties of fortune, the impulses of the passions, the refinements of voluptuousness. I may be an unprofitable servant; but are you not yourself an unfaithful one? Ah! if the most culpable were always to be the poorest and the most unfortunate in this world, would your lot be superior to mine? You reproach me with a strength which I apply to no purpose; but to what use do you apply your own? Because I work not, I ought not to have food;

but are you dispensed yourself from that law? Are you rich merely that you may pass your life in a shameful effeminacy and sloth? Ah! the Lord will judge between you and me, and, before his awful tribunal, it shall be seen whether your voluptuousness and profusion were more allowable in you than the innocent artifice which I employ to attract assistance to my sufferings.

Yes, my brethren, let us at least offer to the unfortunate, hearts feeling for their wants. If the mediocrity of our fortune permit us not altogether to relieve our indigent fellow-creatures, let us, by our humanity, at least soften the yoke of poverty. Alas! we give tears to the chimerical adventures of a theatrical personage,—we honour fictitious misfortunes with real sensibility,—we depart from a representation with hearts still moved for the disasters of a fabulous hero,—and a member of Jesus Christ, an inheritor of heaven, and your brother, whom you encounter in your way from thence, perhaps sinking under disease and penury, and who wishes to inform you of the excess of his sufferings, finds you callous; and you turn your eyes with disgust from that spectacle, and deign not to listen to him; and you quit him even with a rudeness and brutality which tend to wring his heart with sorrow! Inhuman soul! have you, then, left all your sensibility on an infamous theatre? Doth the spectacle of Jesus Christ suffering in one of his members offer nothing worthy of your pity? And, that your heart may be touched, must the ambition, the revenge, the voluptuousness, and all the other horrors of the pagan ages be revived.

But, it is not enough that we offer hearts feeling for the distresses which present themselves to our view: charity goes farther: it does not indolently await those occasions which chance may throw in its way; it knows how to search them out, and even to anticipate them itself. Last rule: the vigilance of charity. Jesus Christ waits not till those poor people address themselves to him and lay open their wants: he is the first to discover them: scarcely has he found them out, when, with Philip, he searches the means of relieving them. That charity which is not vigilant, anxious after the calamities of which it is yet ignorant, ingenious in discovering those which endeavour to remain concealed, which require to be solicited, pressed, and even importuned, resembles not the charity of Jesus Christ. We must watch, and penetrate the obscurity which shame opposes to our bounties. This is not a simple advice: it is the consequence of the precept of charity. The pastors, who, according to faith, are the fathers of the people, are obliged to watch over their spiritual concerns; and that is one of the most essential functions of their ministry. The rich and the powerful are established by God the fathers and the pastors of the poor according to the body: they are bound, then, to watch continually over their necessities. If, through want of vigilance, they

escape their attention, they are guilty before God of all the consequences, which a small succour in time would have prevented.

It is not, that you are required to find out all the secret necessities of a city; but care and attention are exacted of you: it is required, that you, who, through your wealth or birth, hold the first rank in a department, shall not be surrounded, unknown to you, with thousands of unfortunate fellow-creatures, who pine in secret, and whose eyes are continually wounded with the pomp of your train, and who, besides their wretchedness, suffer again, as I may say, in your prosperity: it is required, that you, who, amid all the pleasures of the court, or of the city, see flowing into your hands the fruits of the sweat and of the labour of so many unfortunate people, who inhabit your lands and your fields; it is required that you be acquainted with those whom the toils of industry and of age have exhausted, and who, in their humble dwellings, drag on the wretched remains of dotage and poverty; those whom a languishing health renders incapable of labour, their only resource against indigence and want; those whom sex and age expose to seduction, and whose innocence you might have been enabled to preserve. Behold what is required, and what, with every right of justice, is exacted from you; behold the poor with whom the Lord hath charged you, and for whom you shall answer to him; the poor, whom he leaveth on the earth only for your sake, and to whom his providence hath assigned no other resource than your wealth and your bounty.

Now, are they even known to you? Do you charge their pastors to make them known to you? Are these the cares which occupy you, when you show yourself in the midst of your lands and possessions? Ah! it is with cruelty to screw your claims from the hands of these unfortunate people; it is to tear from their bowels the innocent price of their toil, without regard to their want, to the misery of the times which you allege to us, to their tears, and often to their despair:—what shall I say? It is perhaps to crush down their weakness, to be their tyrant, and not their lord and their father. O God! cursest thou not these cruel generations, and these riches of iniquity? Dost thou not stamp upon them the marks of misfortune and desolation, and which shall soon blast the source of their families; which wither the root of a proud posterity; which produce domestic discord, public disgraces, the fall and total extinction of houses? Alas! we are sometimes astonished to see fortunes apparently the best established, go to wreck in an instant; those ancient, and formerly so illustrious names fallen into obscurity, no longer to offer to our view but the melancholy wrecks of their ancient splendour; and their estates become the property of their rivals, or perhaps of their own servants. Ah! could we investigate the source of their misfortunes; if their ashes, and the pompous wrecks, which in the pride of their monuments remain to us of their glory, could speak,—

Do you see, they would say to us, these sad marks of our grandeur? It is the tears of the poor, whom we neglected, whom we oppressed, which have gradually sapped, and at last have totally overthrown them: their cries have drawn down the thunder of Heaven upon our palaces. The Lord hath blown upon our superb edifices, and upon our fortune, and hath dissipated them like dust. Let the name of the poor be honourable in your sight, if you wish that your names may never perish in the memory of men. Let compassion sustain your houses, if you wish that your posterity be not buried under their ruins. Become wise at our cost; and let our misfortunes, in teaching you our faults, teach you also to shun them.

And behold, my brethren, (that I may say something respecting it, before I conclude,) the first advantage of Christian charity; blessings even in this world. The bread, blessed by our Saviour, multiplies in the hands of the apostles who distribute it; five thousand are satisfied; and twelve baskets can hardly contain the remnants gathered up: that is to say, that the gifts of charity are riches of benediction, which multiply in proportion as they are distributed, and which bear along with them into our houses a source of happiness and abundance. Yes, my brethren, charity is a gain; it is a holy usury; it is a principle which returns, even here below, an hundred fold. You sometimes complain of a fatality in your affairs: nothing succeeds with you; men deceive you; rivals supplant you; masters neglect you; the elements conspire against you; the best-concerted schemes are blasted:—associate with you the poor; divide with them the increase of your fortune; in proportion as your prosperity augments, do you augment your benefactions; flourish for them as well as for yourself; and God himself shall then be interested in your success; you shall have found out the secret of engaging him in your fortune, and he will preserve,—what do I say?—he will bless, he will multiply riches, in which he sees blended the portion of his afflicted member.

This is a truth, confirmed by the experience of all ages: charitable families are continually seen to prosper; a watchful Providence presides over all their affairs; where others are ruined, they become rich: they are seen to flourish, but the secret canal is not perceived, which pours in upon them their property: they are the fleeces of Gideon, covered with the dew of heaven, while all around is barren and dry.

Such is the first advantage of compassion, I say nothing even of the pleasure, which we ought to feel in the delightful task of soothing those who suffer, in making a fellow-creature happy, in reigning over hearts, and in attracting upon ourselves the innocent tribute of their acclamations and their thanks. O! were we to reap but the pleasure of bestowing, would it not be an ample recompense to a worthy heart? What has even the majesty of the

throne more delicious than the power of dispensing favours? Would princes be much attached to their grandeur, and to their power, were they confined to a solitary enjoyment of them? No, my brethren, make your riches as subservient as you will, to your pleasures, to your profusions, and to your caprices; but never will you employ them in a way which shall leave a joy so pure, and so worthy of the heart, as in that of comforting the unfortunate.

What, indeed, can be more grateful to the heart, than the confidence that there is not a moment in the day in which some afflicted souls are not raising up their hands to heaven for us, and blessing the day which gave us birth? Hear that multitude whom Jesus Christ hath filled; the air resounds with their blessings and thanks: they say to themselves, This is a prophet; they wish to establish him their king. Ah! were men to choose their masters, it would neither be the most noble, nor the most valiant; it would be the most compassionate, the most humane, the most charitable, the most feeling: masters who, at the same time, would be their fathers.

Lastly, I need not add that Christian charity assists in expiating the crimes of abundance; and that it is almost the only mean of salvation which Providence hath provided for you, who are born to prosperity. Were charity insufficient to redeem our offences, we might certainly think ourselves entitled to complain, says a holy father; we might take it ill, that God had deprived men of so easy a mean of salvation; at least might we say that, could we but open the gates of heaven through the means of riches, and purchase with our whole wealth the glory of the holy, we then should be happy. Well, my brethren, continues the holy father, profit by this privilege, seeing it is granted to you; hasten, before your riches moulder away, to deposit them in the bosom of the poor, as the price of the kingdom of heaven. The malice of men might perhaps have deprived you of them; your passions might have perhaps swallowed them up; the turns of fortune might have transferred them to other hands; death, at last, would sooner or later have separated you from them: Ah! charity alone deposits them beyond the reach of all these accidents; it renders you their everlasting possessor; it lodges them in safety in the eternal tabernacles, and gives you the right of for ever enjoying them in the bosom of God himself.

Are you not happy in being able to assure to yourself admittance into heaven by means so easy;—in being able, by clothing the naked, to efface from the book of divine justice the obscenities, the luxury, and the irregularities of your younger years;—in being able, by filling the hungry, to repair all the sensualities of your life;—lastly, in being able, by sheltering innocence in the asylums of compassion, to blot out from the remembrance of God the ruin

of so many souls, to whom you have been a stumbling-block? Great God! what goodness to man, to consider as meritorious a virtue which costs so little to the heart; to number in our favour feelings of humanity of which we could never divest ourselves, without being, at the same time, divested of our nature; to be willing to accept, as the price of an eternal kingdom, frail riches, which we even enjoy only through thy bounty, which we could never continue to possess, and from which, after a momentary and fleeting enjoyment, we must at last be separated! Nevertheless, mercy is promised to him who shall have shown it; a sinner, still feeling to the calamities of his brethren, will not continue long insensible to the inspirations of Heaven; grace still reserves claims upon a heart in which charity has not altogether lost its influence; a good heart cannot long continue a hardened one; that principle of humanity alone, which operates in rendering the heart feeling for the wants of others, is a preparation, as it were, for penitence and salvation; and while charity still acts in the heart, a happy conversion is never to be despaired of. Love, then, the poor as your brethren; cherish them as your offspring; respect them as Jesus Christ himself, in order that he say to you on the great day, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; I was naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me: for, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

SERMON XII.

ON AFFLICTIONS.

"And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me."—MATTHEW xi. 6.

IT is a blessing, and a rare blessing, then, not to be offended in Jesus Christ. But what was there, or what could there be in him, who is the wisdom itself, and the glory of the Father, the substantial image of all perfection, which could give subject of scandal to men? His cross, my dearest brethren, which was formerly the shame of the Jews, and is, and shall be, to the end

of ages, the shame of the greatest part of Christians. But, when I say that the cross of the Saviour is the shame of the most of Christians, I mean not only the cross that he bore, I mean more especially that which we are obliged, from his example, to bear; without which, he rejects us as his disciples, and denies us any participation of that glory into which he has entered, through the cross alone.

Behold what displeases us, and what we find to complain of in our divine Saviour. We would wish, that, since he was to suffer, his sufferings had been a title, as it were, of exemption, which had merited to us the privilege of not suffering with him. Let us dispel this error, my dearest brethren: the only thing which depends on us, is that of rendering our sufferings meritorious; but to suffer, or not to suffer, is not left to our choice. Providence has so wisely dispensed the good and evil of this life, that each in his station, however happy his lot may appear, finds crosses and afflictions, which always counterbalance the pleasures of it. There is no perfect happiness on the earth; for it is not here the time of consolations, but the time of suffrance. Grandeur hath its subjections and its disquiets; obscurity, its humiliations and its scorns; the world, its cares and its caprices; retirement, its sadness and weariness; marriage, its antipathies and its frenzies; friendship, its losses or its perfidies; piety itself, its repugnances and its disgusts. In a word, by a destiny inevitable to the children of Adam, each one finds his own path strewed with brambles and thorns. The apparently happiest condition hath its secret sorrows, which empoison all its felicity. The throne is the seat of chagrins equally as the lowest place; superb palaces conceal the most cruel discontents, equally as the hut of the poor and of the humble labourer; and, lest our place of exile should become endeared to us, we always feel, in a thousand different ways, that something is yet wanting to our happiness.

Nevertheless, destined to suffer, we cannot love the sufferances; continually stricken with some affliction, we are unable to make a merit of our pains; never happy, our crosses, become necessary, cannot at least become useful to us. We are ingenious in depriving ourselves of the merit of all our sufferances. One while we seek, in the weakness of our own heart, the excuse of our peevishness and of our murmurings; another, in the excess or in the nature of our afflictions; and again, in the obstacles which they seem to us to cast in the way of our salvation; that is to say, one while we complain of being too weak to bear our sufferings with patience; another, that they are too excessive; and lastly, that it is impossible in that situation to pay attention to salvation.

Such are the three pretexts continually opposed in the world to the Christian use of affliction: the pretext of self-weakness; the pretext of the excess or the nature of our afflictions; the pretext of the obstacles which they seem to place in the way of our

salvation. These are the pretexts we have now to overthrow, by opposing to them the rules of faith. Attend, then, be whom ye may, and learn that the cause of condemnation to most men is not pleasures alone;—alas! they are so rare on the earth, and so narrowly followed by disgust;—it is likewise the unchristian use they make of afflictions.

PART I.—The language most common to the souls afflicted by the Lord, is that of alleging their own weakness in order to justify the unchristian use they make of their afflictions. They complain that they are not endowed with a force of mind sufficient to preserve under them a submissive and a patient heart; that nothing is more conducive to happiness than the want of feeling; that this character saves us endless vexations and chagrins inevitable in life; but that we cannot fashion to ourselves a heart according to our own wishes; that religion doth not render unfeeling and stoical those who are born with the tender feelings of humanity, and that the Lord is too just to make a crime to us even of our misfortunes.

But, to overthrow an illusion so common and so unworthy of piety, remark, in the first place, that when Jesus Christ hath commanded to all believers to bear with submission and with love the crosses proposed for us by his goodness, he hath not added that an order so just, so consoling, so conformable to his examples, should concern only the unfeeling and impatient souls. He hath not distinguished among his disciples those whom nature, pride, or reflection had rendered firmer and more constant, from those whom tenderness and humanity had endowed with more feeling, in order to make a duty to the first of a patience and an insensibility which cost them almost nothing, and to excuse the others to whom they become more difficult.

On the contrary, his divine precepts are cures; and the more we are inimical to them through the character of our heart, the more are they proper for, and become necessary to us. It is because you are weak, and that the least contradictions always excite you so much against sufferances, that the Lord must purify you by tribulations and sorrows: for it is not the strong who have occasion to be tried, it is the weak.

In effect, what is it to be weak and repining? It is an excessive self-love; it is to give all to nature, and nothing to faith; it is to give way to every impulse of inclination, and to live solely for ease and self-enjoyment, as constituting the chief happiness of man.

Now, in this situation, and with this excessive fund of love for the world and for yourself, if the Lord were not to provide afflictions for your weakness; if he did not strike your body with an habitual languor which renders the world insipid to you; if he did not send losses and vexations, which force you, through decency, to regularity and retirement; if he did not overthrow certain pro-

jects, which, leaving your fortune more obscure, remove you from the great dangers; if he did not place you in certain situations where irksome and inevitable duties employ your best days; in a word, if he did not place between your weakness and you a barrier which checks and stops you, alas! your innocence would soon be wrecked; you would soon make an improper and fatal use of peace and prosperity,—you who find no security even amid afflictions and troubles. And seeing that, afflicted and separated from the world and from pleasures, you cannot return to God, what would it be did a more happy situation leave you no other check to your desires than yourself? The same weakness and the same load of self-love which render us so feeling to sorrow and affliction, would render us still more so to the dangerous impressions of pleasures and of human prosperities.

Thus, it is no excuse for our despondency and murmurs, to confess that we are weak and little calculated to support the strokes with which we are afflicted by God. The weakness of our heart proceeds only from the weakness of our faith; a Christian soul ought to be a valiant soul, superior, says the apostle, to persecution, disgrace, infirmities, and even death. He may be oppressed, continues the apostle, but he cannot be vanquished; he may be despoiled of his wealth, reputation, ease, and even life, but he cannot be robbed of that treasure of faith and of grace which he has locked up in his heart, and which amply consoles him for all these fleeting and frivolous losses. He may be brought to shed tears of sensibility and of sorrow, for religion does not extinguish the feelings of nature; but his heart immediately disavows its weakness, and turns its carnal tears into tears of penitence and of piety.

What do I say? A Christian soul even delights in tribulations; he considers them as proofs of the tender watchfulness of God over him, as the precious pledge of the promises to come, as the blessed features of resemblance to Jesus Christ, and which give him an assured right to share after this life in his immortal glory. To be weak and rebellious against the order of God under sufferance, is to have lost faith, and to be no longer Christian.

I confess that there are hearts more tender and more feeling to sorrow than others; but that sensibility is left to them only to increase the merit of their sufferings, and not to excuse their impatience and murmurings. It is not the feeling, it is the immoderate use, of sorrow which the gospel condemns. In proportion as we are born feeling for our afflictions, so ought we to be so to the consolations of faith. The same sensibility which renders our heart susceptible of chagrin, should open it to grace which soothes and supports it. A good heart has many more resources against afflictions, in consequence of grace finding easier access to it. Immoderate grief is rather the consequence of passion than of the goodness of the heart; and to be unable to submit to God, or to

taste consolation in our troubles, is to be, not tender and feeling, but intractable and desperate.

Moreover, all the precepts of the gospel require strength, and if you have not enough to support with submission the crosses with which the Lord pleaseth to afflict you, you must equally want sufficient for the observance of the other duties prescribed to you by the doctrine of Jesus Christ. It requires strength of mind to forgive an injury; to speak well of those who traduce us; to conceal the faults of those who wish to dishonour even our virtues. It requires fortitude to be enabled to fly from a world which is agreeable to us; to tear ourselves from pleasures toward which we are impelled by all our inclinations; to resist examples authorized by the multitude, and of which custom has now almost established a law. Strength of mind is required to make a Christian use of prosperity; to be humble in exaltation, mortified in abundance, poor of heart amidst perishable riches, detached from all when possessed of all, and filled with desires for heaven amidst all the pleasures and felicities of the earth. It is required to be able to conquer ourselves; to repress a rising desire; to stifle an agreeable feeling; to recall to order a heart which is incessantly straying from it. Lastly, among all the precepts of the gospel, there is not one which does not suppose a firm and noble soul; every where self-denial is required; every where the kingdom of God is a field to be brought into cultivation, a vineyard where toil and the heat of the day must be endured, a career in which continual and valiant combating is required; in a word, the disciples of Jesus Christ can never be weak without being overcome; and every thing, even to the smallest obligations of faith, requires exertion, and bears the mark of the cross, which is its ruling spirit; and if you fail but for an instant in fortitude, you are lost. To say then that we are weak, is to say that the entire gospel is not made for us, and that we are incapable of being not only submissive and patient, but likewise of being chaste, humble, disinterested, mortified, gentle, and charitable.

But however weak we may be, we ought to have this confidence in the goodness of God, that we are never tried, afflicted, or tempted beyond our strength; that the Lord always proportioneth the afflictions to our weakness; that he dealeth out his chastisements like his favours, by weight and measure; that in striking he meaneth not to destroy, but to purify and to save us; that he himself aideth us to bear the crosses which he imposeth; that he chastiseth us as a father, and not as a judge; that the same hand which strikes sustains us; that the same rod which makes the wound bears the oil and the honey to soften its pain. He knoweth the nature of our hearts, and how far our weakness goes; and as his intention in afflicting us is to sanctify and not to destroy us, he knoweth what degree of weight to give to his hand in order to diminish nothing from

our merit, if too light, and, on the other side, not to lose it altogether, if beyond our strength.

Ah! what other intention could he have in shedding sorrows through our life? Is he a cruel God, who delighteth only in the misery of his creatures? Is he a barbarous tyrant, who finds his greatness and his security only in the blood and in the tears of the subjects who worship him? Is he an envious and morose master, who can taste of no happiness while sharing it with his slaves? Is it necessary that we should suffer, groan, and perish, in order to render him happy? It is on our own account alone, therefore, that he punisheth and chastiseth us: his tenderness suffers, as I may say, for our evils; but as his love is a just and enlightened love, he preferreth to leave us to suffer, because he foresees that, in terminating our pains, he would augment our wretchedness. He is, says a holy father, like a tender physician, who pities, it is true, the cries and the sufferings of his patient, but who, in spite of his cries, cuts, even to the quick, the corrupted part of his wound. He is never more gentle and more compassionate than when he appears most severe; and afflictions must indeed be useful and necessary to us, since a God so merciful and so good can prevail upon himself to afflict us.

It is written, that Joseph, exalted to the first office in Egypt, could hardly retain his tears, and felt his bowels yearn toward his brethren in the very time that he affected to speak most harshly to them, and that he feigned not to know them. It is in this manner that Jesus Christ chastiseth us. He affects, if it be permitted to speak in this manner, not to acknowledge in us his co-heirs and his brethren; he strikes, and treats us harshly, as strangers: but his love suffers for this constraint. He is unable long to maintain this character of severity, which is so foreign to him. His favours soon come to soften his blows: he soon shows himself such as he is; and his love never fails to betray these appearances of rigour and anger. Judge, then, if the blows which come from so kind and so friendly a hand can be otherwise than proportioned to your weakness.

Let us accuse then only the corruption and not the weakness of our heart, for our impatience and murmurs. Have not weak young women formerly defied all the barbarity of tyrants? Have not children, before they had learned to support even the ordinary toils of life, run with joy to brave all the rigours of the most frightful death? Have not old men, already sinking under the weight of their own body, felt, like the eagle, their youth renewed amidst the torments of a long martyrdom? You are weak; but it is that very weakness which is glorious to faith and to the religion of Jesus Christ: it is even on that account that the Lord hath chosen you to display in your instance how much more powerful grace is than nature. If you were born with more fortitude and strength, you would do less honour to the power of grace: to man would be attributed a pa-

tience which should be a gift of God. Thus, the weaker you are, the fitter instrument you become for the designs and for the glory of God. When his hand hath been heavy, he hath chosen only the weak, that man might attribute nothing to himself, and to overthrow, by the example of their constancy, the vain fortitude of sages and of philosophers. His disciples were only weak lambs, when he dispersed them through the universe, and exposed them amidst the wolves. They rendered glory in their weakness to the power of grace, and to the truth of his doctrine. They are those earthen vessels which the Lord taketh delight in breaking, like those of Gideon, to make the light and the power of faith shine forth in them with greater magnificence; and if you entered into the designs of his wisdom and of his mercy, your weakness, which in your opinion justifies your murmurs, would constitute the sweetest consolation of your sufferings.

Lord, would you say to him, I ask not that proud reason which seeks in the glory of suffering with constancy the whole consolation of its pains: I ask not from thee that insensibility of heart, which either feels not, or contemns its misfortunes. Leave me, O Lord, that weak and timid reason, that tender and feeling heart, which seems so little fitted to sustain its tribulations and sufferings; only increase thy consolations and favours. The more I shall appear weak in the sight of men, the greater wilt thou appear in my weakness: the more shall the children of the age admire the power of faith, which alone can exalt the weakest and most timid souls to that point of constancy and firmness to which all philosophy hath never been able to attain. First pretext, taken in the weakness of man, confuted, we have now to expose the illusion of the second, which is founded on the excess or the nature of the afflictions themselves.

PART II.—Nothing is more usual with persons afflicted by God, than to justify their complaints and their murmurs by the excess or the nature of their afflictions. We always wish our crosses to have no resemblance to those of others; and, lest the example of their fortitude and of their faith condemn us, we seek out differences in our grievances, in order to justify that of our dispositions and of our conduct. We persuade ourselves that we could bear with resignation crosses of any other description; but that those with which we are overwhelmed by the Lord, are of such a nature as to preclude consolation: that the more we examine the lot of others, the more do we find our own misfortunes singular, and our situation unexampled: and that it is impossible to preserve patience and serenity in a state where chance seems to have collected, solely for us, a thousand afflicting circumstances which never before had happened to others.

But, to take from self-love a defence so weak and so unworthy of faith, I would have only forthwith to answer you, that the

more extraordinary our afflictions appear, the less ought we to believe them the effects of chance; the more evidently ought we to see in them the secret and inscrutable arrangements of a God singularly watchful over our destiny; the more should we presume that, under events so new, he doubtless concealeth new views, and singular designs of mercy upon our soul; the more should we say to ourselves, that he consequently meaneth us not to perish with the multitude, which is the party of the reprobate, seeing that he leadeth us by ways so uncommon and so little trodden. This singularity of misfortunes ought, in the eyes of our faith, to be a soothing distinction. He hath always conducted his chosen, in matters of affliction as well as in other things, by new and extraordinary ways. What melancholy and surprising adventures in the life of a Noah, a Lot, a Joseph, a Moses, and a Job! Trace, from age to age, the history of the just, and you will always find, in their various vicissitudes, something, I know not what, of singular and incredible, which has staggered even the belief of the subsequent ages. Thus, the less your afflictions resemble those of others, the more should you consider them as the afflictions of God's chosen: they are stamped with the mark of the just: they enter into that tradition of singular calamities which, from the beginning of ages, forms their history. Battles lost, when victory seemed certain; cities, looked upon as impregnable, fallen at the sole approach of the enemy; a kingdom, once the most flourishing in Europe, stricken with every evil which the Lord in his wrath can pour upon the people; the court filled with mourning, and all the royal race almost extinct. Such, Sire, is what the Lord in his mercy reserved for your piety; and such are the unprecedented misfortunes which he prepared for you, to purify the prosperities of a reign the most brilliant in our annals. The singularity of the unfortunate events with which God afflicteth you, is intended for the sole purpose of rendering you equally pious as a Christian, as you have been great as a King. It would seem, that every thing was to be singular in your reign, the prosperities as the misfortunes, in order that, after your glory before men, nothing should be wanting to your piety before God. It is a striking example, prepared by his goodness for our age.

And behold, my dear hearer, a striking instance, both to instruct and confute you, when you complain of the excess of your misfortunes and of your sufferings. The more God afflicteth, the greater is his love and his watchfulness over you. More common misfortunes might have appeared to you as the consequences merely of natural causes; and though all events are conducted by the secret springs of his providence, you might perhaps have had room to suppose that the Lord had no particular design upon you, in providing for you only certain afflictions which happen every day to the rest

of men. But, in the grievous and singular situation in which he placeth you, you can no longer hide from yourself that his regards are fixed on you alone, and that you are the special object of his merciful designs.

Now, what more consoling in our sufferings! God seeth me; he numbereth my sighs; he weigheth mine afflictions; he beholdeth my tears to flow; he maketh them subservient to mine eternal sanctification. Since his hand hath weighed so heavily, and in so singular a way, upon me, and since no earthly resource seems now to be left me, I consider myself as having at last become an object more worthy of his cares and of his regards. Ah! if I still enjoyed a serene and happy situation, his looks would no longer be upon me; he would neglect me, and I should be blended before him with so many others who are the prosperous of the earth. Beloved sufferings, which, in depriving me of all human aids, restore me to my God, and render him mine only resource in all my sorrows! Precious afflictions, which in turning me aside from all creatures, are the cause that I now become the continual object of the remembrance and of the mercies of my Lord!

I might reply to you, in the second place, that common and momentary afflictions would have aroused our faith but for an instant. We would soon have found, in every thing around us, a thousand resources to obliterate the remembrance of that slight misfortune. Pleasures, human consolations, the new events which the world is continually offering to our sight, would soon have beguiled our sorrow, and restored our relish for the world, and for its vain amusements; and our heart, always in concert with all the objects which flatter it, would soon have been tired of its sights and of its sorrows. But the Lord, in sending afflictions in which religion alone can become our resource, hath meant to preclude all return toward the world, and to place between our weakness and us a barrier which can never be shaken by either time or accidents: he hath anticipated our inconstancy, in rendering precautions necessary to us, which might not perhaps have always appeared equally useful. He read, in the character of our heart, that our fidelity in flying the dangers of, and separating ourselves from the world, would not extend beyond our sorrow; that the same moment which beheld us consoled would witness our change; that, in forgetting our chagrins, we would soon have forgotten our pious resolutions; and that short-lived afflictions would have made us only short-lived righteous. He hath therefore established the continuance of our piety upon that of our sufferings; he hath lodged fixed and constant afflictions as sureties for the constancy of our faith: and lest, in leaving our soul in our own power, we should again restore it to the world, he hath resolved to render it safe,

by attaching it for ever to the foot of the cross. We are thoroughly sensible ourselves that a great blow was required to rouse us from our lethargy; that we had been little benefited by the slight afflictions with which the Lord hath hitherto been pleased to visit us; and that scarcely had he stricken us, when we had forgotten the hand that had inflicted so salutary a wound. Of what, then, O my God, should I complain? That excess which I find in my troubles, is an excess of thy mercies. I do not consider that the less thou sparest the patient, the more thou hastenest his cure, and that all the utility and all the security of our sufferings consist in the rigour of thy blows. My sweetest consolation in the afflicting state in which thy providence, O Lord, hath been pleased to place me, shall then be, in future, to reflect, that at least thou sparest me not; that thou measurest thy rigours and thy remedies upon my wants, and not upon my desires; and that thou hast more regard to the security of my salvation than to the injustice of my complaints.

I might still reply to you: Enter into judgment with the Lord, you who complain of the excess of your sufferings; place in a balance, on the one side your crimes, and on the other your afflictions; measure the rigour of his chastisements upon the enormity of your offences; compare that which you suffer with that which you ought to suffer; see if your afflictions go the same length as your senseless pleasures have done; if the keenness and the continuance of your sorrows correspond with those of your profane debaucheries; if the state of restraint in which you live equals the licentiousness and the depravity of your former manners; and should your afflictions be found to overbalance your iniquities, then boldly reproach the Lord for his injustice. You judge of your sufferings by your inclinations, but judge of them by your crimes. What! not a single moment of your worldly life but what has perhaps made you deserving of an eternal misery, and you murmur against the godness of a God who commuteth these everlasting torments, so often merited, into a few rapid and momentary afflictions, and even against which the consolations of faith hold out so many resources!

What injustice! what ingratitude! Ah! have a care, unfaithful soul, lest the Lord listen to thee in his wrath; have a care lest he punish thy passions, by providing for thee, here below, whatever is favourable to them; lest thou be not found worthy in his sight of these temporal afflictions; lest he reserve thee for the time of his justice and of his vengeance, and that he treat thee like those unfortunate victims who are ornamented with flowers, who are nursed and fattened with so much care, only because they are destined for the sacrifice, and that the knife which is to stab, and the pile which is to consume them, are in readiness upon the altar. He is terrible in his gifts as in his wrath; and seeing that guilt must be punished either with fleeting punishments here below, or

with eternal pains after this life, nothing ought to appear more fearful in the eyes of faith, than to be a sinner and yet prosperous on the earth.

Great God! let it be here then for me the time of thy vengeance; and since my crimes cannot go unpunished, hasten, O Lord, to satisfy thy justice. The more I am spared here, the more shalt thou appear to me as a terrible God, who refuseth to let me go for some fleeting afflictions, and whose wrath can be appeased by nothing but mine eternal misery. Lend not thine ear to the cries of my grief, nor to the lamentations of a corrupted heart, which knows not its true interests. I disown, Lord, these too human sighs which the sadness of my state still continually forces from me; these carnal tears which affliction so often maketh me to shed, in thy presence. Listen not to the intreaties which I have hitherto made to obtain an end to my sufferings; complete rather thy vengeance upon me here below; reserve nothing for that dreadful eternity, where thy chastisement shall be without end and without measure. I ask thee only to sustain my weakness; and, in shedding sorrows through my life, shed likewise upon it thy grace, which consoles and recompenses with such usury an afflicted heart.

To all these truths, so consoling for an afflicted soul, I might still add, that our sufferings appear excessive only through the excess of the corruption of our heart; that the keenness of our afflictions springs solely from that of our passions; that it is the impropriety of our attachments to the objects lost, which renders their loss so grievous; that we are keenly afflicted only when we had been keenly attached; and that the excess of our afflictions is always the punishment of the excess of our iniquitous loves. I might add, that we always magnify whatever regards ourselves; that the very idea of singularity in our misfortunes flatters our vanity, at the same time that it authorizes our murmurs; that we never wish to resemble others; that we feel a secret pleasure in persuading ourselves that we are single of our kind; we wish all the world to be occupied with our misfortunes alone, as if we were the only unfortunate of the earth. Yes, my brethren, the evils of others are nothing in our eyes: we see not that all around us are, perhaps, more unhappy than we; that we have a thousand resources in our afflictions, which are denied to others; that we derive a thousand consolations in our infirmities, from wealth, and the number of persons watchful over our smallest wants; that, in the loss of a person dear to us, a thousand means of softening its bitterness still remain from the situation in which Providence hath placed us; that, in domestic divisions, we find comforts in the tenderness and in the confidence of our friends, which we had been unable to procure among our relatives; lastly, that we find a thousand human indemnifications to our misfortunes, and that, were we to place in a balance, on the one side our consolations, and on the other our sufferings, we should find, that there are still remaining in

our state more comforts capable of corrupting us, than crosses calculated to sanctify us.

Thus, it is almost solely the great and the prosperous of the world who complain of the excess of their misfortunes and sufferings. The unfortunate majority of the earth, who are born to, and live in, penury and distress, pass in silence, and almost in the neglect of their sufferings, their wretched days. The smallest gleam of comfort and ease restores serenity and cheerfulness to their heart: the slightest consolations obliterate their troubles: a moment of pleasure makes up for a whole year of sufferance; while those fortunate and sensual souls, amidst all their abundance, are seen to reckon, as an unheard-of misfortune, the disappointment of a single desire. We view them turning into a martyrdom for themselves, the weariness and even the satiety of pleasures; drawing from imaginary evils the source of a thousand real vexations; feeling ten-fold more anguish for the failure of a single acquisition, than pleasure in the possession of all they enjoy: in a word, considering as the greatest misfortune the least interruption, however trifling, to their sensual happiness.

Yes, my brethren, it is the great and powerful alone who complain; who continually imagine themselves the only unhappy; who never have enough of comforters; who, on the slightest reverse, see assembled around them, not only those worldly friends whom their rank and fortune procure, but likewise all the pious and enlightened ministers of the gospel, distinguished by the public esteem, and whose holy instructions would, in general, be much better bestowed on so many other unfortunate individuals who are destitute of every worldly resource and religious assistance, and to whom they would likewise be so much more beneficial. But, before the tribunal of Jesus Christ, your afflictions shall be weighed with those of so many of your unfortunate fellow-creatures, and whose misfortunes are so much the more dreadful as they are more hidden and more neglected. It will then be demanded of you, if it belonged to you to complain and to murmur. It will be demanded, if you were entitled to lay such stress upon calamities which would have been consolations to so many others: if it was your business to murmur so highly against a God who treated you with such indulgence, while his hand was so heavy on such an infinity of unhappy fellow-creatures: if they had less right to the riches and to the pleasures of the earth than you: if their soul was less noble, and less precious before God, than yours: in a word, if they were either more criminal, or of another nature, than you?

Alas! it is not only our own self-love, but it is likewise our hardness toward our brethren, which magnifies to us our own misfortunes. Let us enter those poor, unprovided dwellings, where shame conceals such bitter and affecting poverty; let us

view those asylums of public compassion where every calamity seems to reign : it is there that we shall learn to appreciate our own afflictions : it is there that, touched to the heart with the excess of so many evils, we shall blush to give even a name to the slightness of ours : it is there that our murmurs against Heaven shall be changed into thanksgivings, and that, less taken up with the slight crosses sent us by the Lord, than with so many others from which he spareth us, we shall begin to dread his indulgence, far from complaining of his severity. My God ! how awful shall be the judgment of the great and the mighty, since, besides the inevitable abuse of their prosperity, the afflictions, which ought to have sanctified its use and expiated its abuses, shall become themselves their greatest crimes !

But how employ afflictions in sanctifying the dangers of their station, or in working out salvation, since they seem to cast such invincible obstacles in their way ? This is the last pretext drawn from the incompatibility which afflictions seem to have with our salvation.

• PART III.—It is very surprising, that the corruption of the human heart finds, even in sufferances, obstacles to salvation, and that Christians continually justify their murmurs against the wisdom and the goodness of God, by accusing him of sending crosses incompatible with their eternal salvation. Nothing is more common, however, in the world, than this iniquitous language ; and when we exhort the souls afflicted by God to convert these fleeting afflictions into the price of heaven and of eternity, they reply, that, in this state of distress, they are incapable of every thing ; that the obstacles and vexations which they are continually encountering, far from recalling them to order and to duty, serve only to irritate the mind, and to harden the heart ; and that tranquillity must be restored before they can turn their thoughts toward God.

Now, I say, that, of all the pretexts employed in justification of the unchristian use made of afflictions, this is the most absurd and the most culpable. The most culpable, for it is blaspheming Providence to pretend, that it places you in situations incompatible with your salvation. Whatever it doth or permitteth here below, it only doth or permitteth in order to facilitate to men the ways of eternal life : every event, prosperous or unprosperous, in the measure of our lot, is meant by it as a mean of salvation, and of sanctification ; all its designs upon us tend to that sole purpose ; whatever we are, even in the order of nature, our birth, our fortune, our talents, our age, our dignities, our protectors, our subjects, our masters !—all this, in its views of mercy upon us, enters into the impenetrable designs of our eternal sanctification. All this visible world itself is made only for the age to come ; whatever passeth, hath its secret connexions with that eternal age, where things shall pass no more ; what-

ever we see, is only the image and trust of the invisible things. The world is worthy of the cares of a wise and merciful God, only inasmuch as, by secret and adorable relations, its diverse revolutions are to form that heavenly church, that immortal assembly of chosen, where he shall for ever be glorified. To pretend, then, that he placeth us in situations, which not only have no relation to, but are even incompatible with our eternal interests, is to make a temporal God of him, and to blaspheme his adorable wisdom.

But, not only nothing is more culpable than this pretext,—I say, likewise, that nothing is more foolish: for, it is only by detaching itself from this miserable world, that a soul returns to God; and nothing, says St. Augustine, so effectually detaches from this miserable world, as when the Lord sheddeth salutary sorrows over its dangerous pleasures. “Lord,” said a holy king of Judah, “I had neglected thee in prosperity and in abundance; the pleasures of royalty, and the splendour of a long and glorious reign, had corrupted my heart; the flatteries and the deceitful words of the wicked had lulled me into a profound and a fatal sleep; but thine hand hath been upon me, in pouring out upon my people all the scourges of thy wrath, in raising up against me mine own children and subjects, whom I had loaded with favours; and I awoke. Thou hast humbled me, and I have had recourse to thee; thou hast afflicted me, and I have sought thee, and I have found out that I ought not to have my trust in men; that prosperity is a dream; glory a mistake; the talents which men admire, vices concealed under the brilliant outsides of human virtues; the whole world a deception, which feeds us with only vain phantoms, and leaves nothing solid in the heart; and that thou alone art worthy to be served, for thou alone forsakest not those who serve thee.”

Behold the most natural effect of afflictions; they facilitate all the duties of religion; hatred of the world in rendering it more disagreeable to us; indifference toward all creatures, by giving us experience, either of their perfidy by infidelities, or of their frailty by unexpected losses; privation of pleasures, by placing obstacles in their way; the desire of eternal riches, and consoling returns toward God, by leaving us almost no consolation among men; lastly, all the obligations of faith become more easy to the afflicted soul; his good desires find fewer obstacles, his weakness fewer rocks, his faith more aids, his lukewarmness more resources, his passions more checks, and even his virtue more meritorious opportunities.

Thus the church was never more fervent and purer than when she was afflicted; the ages of her sufferings and persecutions were the ages of her splendour and of her zeal. Tranquillity afterward corrupted her manners; her days became less pure and less innocent as soon as they became more fortunate and powerful; her glory ended almost with her misfortunes; and her peace, as the

prophet said, was more bitter, through the licentiousness of her children, than even her troubles had ever been through the barbarity of her enemies.

Even you who complain that the crosses with which the Lord afflicteth you discourage you, and check any desire of labouring toward your salvation; you well know that happier days have not been for you more holy and more faithful; you well know that then, intoxicated with the world and its pleasures, you lived in a total neglect of your God, and that the comforts of your situation were only the spurs of your corruption, and the instruments of your iniquitous desires.

But such is the perpetual illusion of our self-love. When fortunate, when every thing answers to our wishes, and the world smiles upon us, then we allege the dangers of our state to justify the errors of our worldly manners: we say that it is very difficult, at a certain age and in a certain situation, when a rank is to be supported, and appearances to be kept up with the world, to condemn ourselves to solitude, to prayer, to flight from pleasures, and to all the duties of a gloomy and a Christian life. But, on the other side, when under affliction; when the body is struck with lassitude, and fortune forsakes us; when our friends deceive, and our masters neglect us; when our enemies overpower, and our relations become our persecutors; we complain that every thing estranges us from God in this state of bitterness and sorrow; that the mind is not sufficiently tranquil to devote any thoughts to salvation; that the heart is too exasperated to feel any thing but its own misfortunes; that amusements and pleasures, now become necessary, must be sought to lull its grief, and to prevent the total loss of reason, in giving way to all the horrors of a profound melancholy. It is thus, O my God! that by our eternal contradictions we justify the adorable ways of thy wisdom upon the lots of men, and that we provide for thy justice powerful reasons to overthrow one day the illusion and the falsity of our pretexts.

For, besides, be our sufferings what they may, the history of religion holds out righteous characters to our example, who, in the same situation as we are, have held their soul in patience, and turned their afflictions into a resource of salvation. Do you weep the loss of a person dear to your heart? Judith in a similar affliction found the increase of her piety and faith, and changed the tears of her widowhood into those of retirement and penitence. If a pining health render life more gloomy and bitter than even death itself, Job found in the wrecks of an ulcerated body, motives of compunction, longings for eternity, and the hopes of an immortal resurrection. If your character in the world be stained by calumnies, Susanna held out an unshaken soul under the blackest aspersions; and knowing that she had the Lord in testimony of her innocence, she left to him the care of avenging her upon the injustice of men.

If your fortune be the victim of treachery, David, dethroned, considered the humiliation of his new state as the just punishment of the abuse he had made of his past prosperity. If an unfortunate union become your daily cross, Esther found, in the caprices and frenzies of a faithless husband, the proof of her virtue, and the merit of her meekness and patience. In a word, place yourself in the most dismal situations, and you will find righteous men, who have wrought out their salvation, in the same; and, without applying to former ages for examples, look around, (the hand of the Lord is not yet shortened,) and you will see souls, who, loaded with the same crosses as you, make a very different use of them, and find means of salvation in the very same events where you find only a rock to your innocence or a pretext for your murmurs. What do I say?—you will see souls whom the mercy of God hath recalled from their errors, by pouring out salutary sorrows upon their life; by overturning an established fortune; by chilling an envied favour; by sapping a health apparently unalterable; by terminating a profane connexion through a glaring inconstancy. You yourself, then, a witness of their change and of their conversion, have lessened the merit of it, from the facilities provided by chagrin and afflictions; you have placed little confidence in a virtue which misfortunes had rendered as if necessary; you have said that it required little exertion to forsake a world which was become tired of us; that at the first gleam of good fortune, pleasures would soon be seen to succeed to all this great show of devotion, and that they had devoted themselves to God only because they had nothing better to do. Unjust that you are! and at present, when there is question of returning to him in your affliction, you say that it is not possible; that a heart pressed and bowed down with sorrow is incapable of paying attention to any thing but its grief, and that we are more hardened than touched in this state of distress and misfortune; and after having censured and cast a stain upon the piety of afflicted souls, as a measure too easy, and to which little merit is attached, as it required almost no exertion, you excuse yourself from adopting it in your affliction, and from making a Christian use of it, because you pretend that it is not possible in it to pay attention to any thing but to your sorrow. Answer, or rather tremble, lest you find the rock of your salvation in a situation which ought to be its surest resource. After having abused prosperity, tremble lest you now make your misfortunes the fatal instruments of your destruction, and lest you shut upon yourself all the ways of goodness which God might open to you in order to recall you to him.

When, O my God! will the time come that my soul, exalting itself through faith above all creatures, shall no longer worship but thee in them; shall no longer attribute events to them of which thou alone art the author; shall recognize, in the diverse situations in

which thou placest it, the adorable arrangements of thy providence; and, even amid all its crosses, shall taste that unalterable peace which the world, with all its pleasures, can never bestow?

How melancholy, in effect, my brethren, when visited and afflicted of God, to seek for consolation in rising up against the hand which strikes us; in murmuring against his justice; in casting ourselves off from him, as it were in a frenzy of rage, despair, and revenge, and to seek consolation in our own madness! What a horrible situation is that of a foolish soul whom God afflicteth, and who for consolation flies in the face of his God; seeks to ease his troubles in multiplying his trespasses; yields himself up to debauchery, in order to drown his sorrows; and makes the overwhelming sadness of guilt a horrible resource against the sadness of his afflictions!

No, my brethren, religion alone can truly console us in our misfortunes. Philosophy checked complaints, but it did not soften the anguish. The world lulls cares, but it does not cure them: and, amidst all its senseless pleasures, the secret sting of sadness always remains buried in the heart. God alone can comfort our afflictions; and is another necessary to a faithful soul? Weak creatures! You may easily, by vain speeches, and by that customary language of compassion and tenderness, make yourselves to be understood by the ears of the body; but there is none but the God of all consolation who can speak to the heart: in the excess of my pains, I have vainly sought consolation among ye: I have sharpened my sufferings, while thinking to soften them, and thy vain consolations have been to me only fresh sorrows.

Great God! it is at thy feet, that I mean henceforth to pour out all the bitterness of mine heart. It is with thee alone, that I mean to forget all my grievances, all my sufferings, all creatures. Hitherto I have given way to chagrins and to sadness altogether human; a thousand times have I wished that thy wisdom were regulated by the mad projects of my heart: my thoughts have wandered; my mind hath formed a thousand delusive dreams; my heart hath pursued these vain phantoms. I have longed for a higher birth, more fortune, talents, fame, and health. I have lulled myself in these ideas of an imaginary happiness. Fool that I am! as if I were capable of altering at my pleasure the immutable order of thy Providence! As if I had been wiser or more enlightened than thee, O my God, upon my true interests! I have never entered into thine eternal designs upon me. I have never considered the sorrows of my situation as entering into the order of my eternal destination; and, even to this day, my joys and my sorrows have depended upon the created alone; consequently my joys have never been tranquil, and my sorrows have always been without resource. But henceforth, O my God! thou shalt be my only comforter, and I will seek, in the meditation of thy

holy law, and in my submission to thine eternal decrees, those solid consolations which I have never found in the world, and which, in softening our afflictions here below, secure to us, at the same time, their immortal reward hereafter.

SERMON XIII.

ON PRAYER.

“ Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David.”—MATT. xv. 22.

SUCH is the lamentation of a soul touched with its wretchedness, and which addresses itself to the sovereign Physician, in whose compassion alone it hopes to find relief. This was formerly the prayer of a woman of Canaan, who wished to obtain from the Son of David the recovery of her daughter. Persuaded of his power, and expecting every thing from his usual goodness to the unfortunate, she knew no surer way of rendering him propitious, than the cry of her affliction, and the simple tale of her misfortune. And this is the model which the church now proposes to us, in order to animate and to instruct us how to pray; that is to say, in order to render more pleasing, and more familiar to us, this most essential duty of Christian piety.

For, my brethren, to pray is the condition of man; it is the first duty of man; it is the sole resource of man; it is the whole consolation of man; and, to speak in the language of the Holy Spirit, it is the whole man.

Yes, if the entire world, in the midst of which we live, be but one continued temptation; if all the situations in which we may be, and all the objects which environ us, seem united with our corruption, for the purpose of either weakening or seducing us; if riches corrupt, and poverty exasperate; if prosperity exalt, and affliction depress; if business prey upon, and ease render effeminate; if the sciences inflate, and ignorance lead us into error; if mutual intercourse trivially engage us too much, and solitude leave us too much to ourselves; if pleasure seduce, and pious works excite our pride; if health arouse the passions, and sickness nourish either lukewarmness or murmurings; in a word, if, since the fall of nature, every thing in, or around us, be a fresh danger to be dreaded; in a situation so deplorable, what hope of salvation, O, my God! could there be still remaining to man, if, from the bot-

tom of his wretchedness, he had it not in his power to make his lamentations to be continually mounting toward the throne of thy mercy, in order to prevail that thou thyself may come to his aid; that thou may interfere to put a check upon his passions, to clear up his errors, to sustain his weakness, to lessen his temptations, to abridge his hours of trials, and to save him from his backslidings?

The Christian is therefore a man of prayer; his origin, his situation, his nature, his wants, his place of abode, all inform him that prayer is necessary. The church herself, in which he is incorporated through the grace of regeneration, a stranger here below, is always plaintive and full of lamentation; she recognizes her children only through their sighs, which they direct toward their country; and the Christian who does not pray, cuts himself off from the assembly of the holy, and is worse than an unbeliever.

How comes it then, my brethren, that a duty not only so essential, but even so consoling for man, is at present so much neglected? How comes it that it is considered either as a gloomy and tiresome duty, or as appropriated solely for retired souls; insomuch, that our instructions upon prayer scarcely interest those who listen to us, who seem as if persuaded that they are more adapted to the cloister than to the court?

Whence comes this abuse, and this universal neglect in the world of prayer? From two pretexts, which I now mean to overthrow. First, they do not pray, because they know not, say they, how to pray; and, consequently, that it is lost time. Secondly, they do not pray, because they complain that they find nothing in prayer but wanderings of the mind, which render it both insipid and disagreeable. First pretext, drawn from their ignorance of the manner in which they ought to pray. Second pretext, founded on the disgusts and the difficulties of prayer. You must be taught, therefore, how to pray, since you know it not. And, secondly, the habit of prayer must be rendered easy to you, since you find it so troublesome and difficult.

PART I.—“The commandments which I command you,” said formerly the Lord to his people, “are neither above your strength nor the reach of your mind; they are not hidden from you, nor far off, that you should say, Who shall go up for us to heaven and bring them unto us, that we may hear them and do them? Nor are they beyond the sea, that you should say, Who shall go over the sea for us and bring them unto us, that we may hear them and do them? But the word is very nigh unto you, in your mouth, and in your heart, that you may do it.”

Now, what the Lord said in general of all the precepts of the law, that we have no occasion to seek beyond ourselves for the knowledge of them, but that they may be all accomplished in our heart and in our mouth, may more particularly be said of

the precept of prayer, which is, as if the first and the most essential of all.

Nevertheless, what they commonly oppose in the world against this duty is, that, when they come to prayer, they know not what to say to God, and that praying is a secret of which they have never as yet been able to comprehend any thing. I say, then, that the source of this pretext springs from three iniquitous dispositions: the first is, that they are mistaken in the idea which they form of prayer; the second is, that they are not sufficiently sensible of their own wretchedness and wants; and the third is, that they do not love their God.

First. I say that they are mistaken in the idea which they form of prayer. In effect, prayer is not an exertion of the mind, an arrangement of ideas, a profound knowledge of the mysteries and counsels of God; it is a simple emotion of the heart; it is a lamentation of the soul, deeply affected at the sight of its own wretchedness; it is a keen and inward feeling of our wants and of our weakness, and a humble confidence which it lays before its Lord, in order to obtain relief and deliverance from them. Prayer supposes, in the soul which prays, neither great lights, uncommon knowledge, nor a mind more cultivated and exalted than that of the rest of men; it supposes only more faith, more contrition, and a warmer desire of deliverance from its temptations and from its wretchedness. Prayer is neither a secret nor a science which we learn from men; nor is it an art, or private method, upon which it is necessary to consult skilful teachers, in order to be master of its rules and precepts. The methods and the maxims thereupon, pretended to be laid down to us in our days, are either singular ways which are not to be followed, or the vain speculations of an idle mind, or a fanaticism which may stop at nothing, and which, far from edifying the church, hath merited her censures, and hath furnished to the impious matter of derision against her, and to the world fresh pretences of contempt for, and disgusts at, prayer. Prayer is a duty upon which we are all born instructed: the rules of this divine science are written solely in our hearts; and the Spirit of God is the sole master to teach it.

A holy and innocent soul, who is penetrated with the greatness of God, struck with the terror of his judgments, touched with his infinite mercies, who only knows to humble himself before him, to acknowledge, in the simplicity of his heart, his goodness and wonders, to adore the orders of his providence upon him, to accept before him of the crosses and afflictions imposed upon him by the wisdom of his councils; who knows no prayer more sublime than to be sensible before God of all the corruption of his heart; to groan over his own hardness of heart, and opposition to all good; to intreat of him, with fervent faith, to change him, to destroy in him the man of sin, which, in spite of his firmest resolves, conti-

nally forces him to make so many false steps in the ways of God : a soul of this description is a thousand times more instructed in the knowledge of prayer than all the teachers themselves, and may say, with the prophet, "I have more understanding than all my teachers." He speaks to his God as a friend to a friend ; he is sorry for having offended him ; he upbraids himself for not having, as yet, sufficient force to renounce all to please him ; he takes no pride in the sublimity of his thoughts ; he leaves his heart to speak, and gives way to all its tenderness before the only object of his love. Even when his mind wanders, his heart watches and speaks for him : his very disgusts become a prayer, through the feelings which are then excited in his heart : he is tenderly affected, he sighs, he is displeased with, and a burden to, himself : he feels the weight of his bonds, he exerts himself as if to break and throw them off ; he a thousand times renews his protestations of fidelity ; he blushes and is ashamed at always promising, and yet being continually faithless : such is the whole secret and the whole science of prayer. And what is there in all this beyond the reach of every believing soul ?

Who had instructed the poor woman of Canaan in prayer ? A stranger, and a daughter of Tyre and Sidon, who was unacquainted with the wonders of the law and the oracles of the prophets ; who had not yet heard from the mouth of the Saviour the words of eternal life ; who was still under the shadows of ignorance and of death : she prays, however ; her love, her confidence, the desire of being granted, teach her to pray ; her heart being touched, constitutes the whole merit and the whole sublimity of her prayer.

And surely, if, in order to pray, it were requisite to rise to those sublime states of prayer to which God exalteth some holy souls ; if it were necessary to be wrapped in ecstasy, and transported even up to heaven, like Paul, there to hear those ineffable secrets which God exposeth not to man, and which it is not permitted, even to man himself, to reveal ; or, like Moses upon the holy mountain, to be placed upon a cloud of glory, and, face to face, to see God ; that is to say, if it were necessary to have attained to that degree of intimate union with the Lord, in which the soul, as if already freed from its body, springs up even into the bosom of its God ; contemplates at leisure his infinite perfections ; forgets, as I may say, its members which are still upon the earth ; is no longer disturbed, nor even diverted by the phantoms of the senses ; is fixed, and as if absorbed in the contemplation of the wonders and the grandeur of God ; and already participating in his eternity, could count a whole age passed in that blessed state, as only a short and rapid moment ; if, I say, it were necessary, in order to pray, to be favoured with these rare and excellent gifts of the Holy Spirit,

you might tell us, like those new believers of whom St. Paul makes mention, that you have not yet received them, and that you know not what is even that Spirit which communicates them.

But prayer is not a special gift set apart for privileged souls alone; it is a common duty imposed upon every believer; it is not solely a virtue of perfection, and reserved for certain purer and more holy souls; it is, like charity, an indispensable virtue, requisite to the perfect as to the imperfect, within the capacity of the illiterate equally as of the learned, commanded to the simple as to the most enlightened: it is the virtue of all men; it is the science of every believer; it is the perfection of every creature. Whoever has a heart, and is capable of loving the Author of his being,— whoever has a reason capable of knowing the nothingness of the creature, and the greatness of God, must know how to adore, to return him thanks, and to have recourse to him, to appease him when offended, to call upon him when turned away, to thank him when favourable, to humble himself when he strikes, to lay his wants before him, or to entreat his countenance and protection.

Thus, when the disciples ask of Jesus Christ to teach them to pray, he doth not unfold to them the height, the sublimity, the depth of the mysteries of God; he solely informs them, that, in order to pray, it is necessary to consider God as a tender, bountiful, and careful father; to address themselves to him with a respectful familiarity, and with a confidence blended with fear and love; to speak to him the language of our weakness and of our wretchedness; to borrow no expressions but from our heart; to make no attempt of rising to him, but rather to draw him nearer to us: to lay our wants before him, and to implore his aid; to wish that all men bless and worship him; that his reign be established in all hearts; that his will be done, as in heaven, so in earth; that sinners return to the paths of righteousness; that believers attain to the knowledge of the truth; that he forgive us our sins; that he preserve us from temptation; that he assist our weakness; that he deliver us from our miseries. All is simple, but all is grand in this divine prayer; it recalls man to himself, and, in order to adopt it as a model, nothing more is required than to feel our wants, and to wish deliverance from them.

And behold, why I have said that the second iniquitous disposition, from whence the pretext, founded upon not knowing how to pray proceeded, is, that they do not sufficiently feel the infinite wants of their soul: for, I ask you, my brethren, is it necessary to teach a sick person to entreat relief? Is a man pressed with hunger difficulted how to solicit food? Is an unfortunate person, beaten with the tempest, and on the point of perishing, at a loss how to implore assistance? Alas! doth the urgent necessity alone not amply furnish expressions? In the sole sense of our evils, do we not find that animated eloquence, those persuasive emotions,

those pressing remonstrances which solicit their cure? Has a suffering heart occasion for any master to teach it to complain? In it every thing speaks, every thing expresses its affliction, every thing announces its sufferings, and every thing solicits relief: even its silence is eloquent.

You yourself, who complain that you know not what method to take in praying, in your temporal afflictions, from the instant that a dangerous malady threatens your life, that an unlooked-for event endangers your property and fortune, that an approaching death is on the point of snatching from you a person either dear or necessary, then you raise your hands to heaven; then you send up your lamentations and prayers; you address yourself to the God who strikes and who relieves; you then know how to pray; you have no need of going beyond your own heart for lessons and rules to lay your afflictions before him, nor do you consult able teachers in order to know what is necessary to say to him; you have occasion for nothing but your grief, your evils alone have found out the method of instructing you.

Ah! my brethren, if we felt the wants of our soul as we feel those of our body,—if our eternal salvation interested us as much as a fortune of dirt, or a weak and perishable health, we would soon be skilful in the divine art of prayer; we would not complain that we had nothing to say in the presence of a God of whom we have so much to ask; the mind would be little difficulted in finding wherewith to entertain him; our evils alone would speak; in spite of ourselves, our heart would burst forth in holy effusions, like that of Samuel's mother before the ark of the Lord; we would no longer be master of our sorrows and tears; and the most certain mark of our want of faith, and that we know ourselves not, is, that of not knowing what to say to the Lord in the space of a short prayer.

And after all, is it possible that, in the miserable condition of this human life, surrounded as we are with so many dangers; made up ourselves of so many weaknesses; on the point, every moment, of being led astray by the objects of vanity, corrupted by the illusions of the senses, and dragged away by the force of example; a continual prey to the tyranny of our inclinations, to the dominion of our flesh, to the inconstancy of our heart, to the inequalities of our reason, to the caprices of our imagination, to the eternal variations of our temper; depressed by loss of favour, elated by prosperity, enervated by abundance, soured by poverty, led away by custom, shaken by accidents, flattered with praise, irritated by contempt; continually wavering between our passions and our duties, between ourselves and the law of God; is it possible, I say, that, in a situation so deplorable, we can be difficulted what to ask of the Lord, or what to say to him, when we appear in his presence? O my God! why then is man not

less miserable? Or why is he not better acquainted with his wants?

Ah! if you told us, my dear hearer, that you know not where to begin in prayer; that your wants are so infinite, your miseries and your passions so multiplied, that, were you to pretend to expose them all to the Lord, you would never have done: if you said to us, that the more you search into your heart, the more your wounds unfold, the more corruption and disorders do you discover in yourself, and that, despairing of being able to relate to the Lord the endless detail of your weaknesses, you present your heart wholly to him, you leave your evils to speak for you, you ground your whole art of prayer on your confusion, your humiliation, and your silence; and that, in consequence of having too much to say to him, you say nothing; if you spoke in this manner, you would speak the language of faith, and that of a penitent king, who, contemplating his repeated relapses, and no longer daring to speak to his God in prayer, said, "Lord, I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long; for mine iniquities are gone over my head; as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My heart panteth, my strength faileth me; for I will declare mine iniquity, I will be sorry for my sin. Forsake me not, O Lord: O my God! be not far from me. Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation." Such is the silence of compunction which forms before God the true prayer.

But to complain that you have no longer any thing to say, when you wish to pray: alas! my dear hearer, when you present yourself before God, do your past crimes hold out nothing for you to dread from his judgments, or to ask from his mercy? What! your whole life has perhaps been only a sink of debaucheries; you have perverted every thing, grace, your talents, your reason, your wealth, your dignities, all creatures; you have passed the best part of your days in the neglect of your God, and in all the delusions of the world and of the passions; you have vilified your heart by iniquitous attachments, defiled your body, disordered your imagination, weakened your lights, and even extinguished every happy disposition which nature had placed in your soul; and the recollection of all this furnishes you with nothing in the presence of God? And it inspires you with no idea of the method you ought to adopt, in having recourse to him, in order to obtain his forgiveness of such accumulated crimes? And you have nothing to say to a God whom you have so long offended? O man! thy salvation, then, must either be without resource, or thou must have other means of accomplishing it than those of the divine clemency and mercy.

But, my dear hearer, I go farther. If you lead a Christian life; if, returned from the world and from pleasures, you are at last entered into the ways of salvation, you are still more unjust in

complaining that you find nothing to say to the Lord in your prayers. What! the singular grace of having opened your eyes, of undeceiving you with regard to the world; and withdrawing you from the bottom of the abyss; this blessing so rare, and denied to so many sinners, doth it give rise to no grateful feeling in your heart, when at his feet? Can this recollection leave you cold and insensible? Is nothing tender awakened by the presence of your benefactor, you who pride yourself upon having never forgotten a benefit, and who so pompously display the feeling and the excess of your gratitude toward the creatures?

Besides, if you feel those endless tendencies, which, in spite of your change of life, still rise up within you against the law of God; that difficulty which you still have in doing well; that unfortunate inclination which you still find within you toward evil; those desires of a more perfect virtue, which always turn out vain; those resolutions to which you are always faithless; those opportunities in which you always find yourself the same; those duties which always meet the same repugnance in your heart: in a word, if you feel that inexhaustible fund of weakness and of corruption which remains with you after your conversion, and which alarms so much your virtue, you will not only have ample matter to address the Lord in prayer, but your whole life will be one continual prayer. All the dangers which shall threaten your weakness, all the accidents which shall shake your faith, all the objects which shall open afresh the former wounds of your heart, all the inward emotions which shall prove that the man of sin lives always within you, will lead you to look upwards to Him from whom alone you expect deliverance from them. As the apostle said, every place will be to you a place of prayer; every thing will direct your attention to God, because every thing will furnish you with Christian reflections upon yourself.

Besides, my dear hearer, even granting that your own necessities should not be sufficient to fill the void of your prayer, employ a portion of it with the evils of the church; with the dissensions of the pastors; with that spirit of schism and revolt which seems to be forming in the sanctuary; with the relaxation of believers; with the depravity of manners; with the sad progress of unbelief, and the diminution of faith among men. Lament over the scandals of which you are a continual witness; complain to the Lord, with the prophet, that all have forsaken him; that every one seeks his own interest; that even the salt of the earth hath become tasteless, and that piety is become a traffic. Entreat of the Lord the consummation of his elect, and the fulfilment of his designs upon his church; religious princes, faithful pastors, humble and enlightened teachers, knowing and disinterested guides; peace to the churches; the extinction of error, and the return of all who have gone astray.

What more shall I add? Entreat the conversion of your relations, friends, enemies, protectors, and masters; the conversion of those souls to whom you have been a stumbling-block; of those whom you have formerly estranged from piety through your derisions and censures; of those who perhaps owe their irreligion and freethinking solely to the impiety of your past discourses; of those of whom your examples or solicitations have formerly either perverted the virtue or seduced the weakness. Is it possible that these great objects, at once so sad and so interesting, cannot furnish a moment's attention to your mind, or some feeling to your heart? Every thing which surrounds you teaches you to pray; every object, every accident which you see around you, provides you with fresh opportunities of raising yourself to God; the world, retirement, the court, the righteous, the sinful, the public and domestic occurrences, the misfortunes of some, and the prosperity of others; every thing, in a word, which meets your eyes, supplies you with subject of lamentation, of prayer, of thanksgiving. Every thing instructs your faith; every thing excites your zeal; all grieves your piety, and calls forth your gratitude; and, amid so many subjects of prayer, you cannot supply a single instant of prayer! Surrounded with so many opportunities of raising yourself to God, you have nothing to say to him when you come to appear in his presence? Ah! my brethren, how far removed must God be from a heart which finds it such a punishment to hold converse with him, and how little must that master and friend be loved, to whom they never wish to speak!

And behold the last and the principal cause of our incapacity in prayer. They know not how to pray and to speak to their God, because they do not love him. When the heart loves, it soon finds out how to communicate its feelings, and to affect the object of its love; it soon knows what it ought to say: alas! it cannot express all that it feels. Let us establish regularity once more in our hearts, my brethren; let us substitute God in place of the world; then shall our heart be no longer a stranger before God. It is the irregularity of our affections which is the sole cause of our incapacity in prayer; eternal riches can never be fervently asked when they are not loved; truths can never be well meditated upon when they are not relished; and little can be said to a God who is hardly known: favours which are not desired, and freedom from passions which are not hated, can never be very urgently solicited; in a word, prayer is the language of love; and we know not how to pray, because we know not how to love.

But, as you will say, doth an inclination for prayer depend upon us? And how is it possible to pray, with disgusts and wanderings of the mind, which are not to be conquered, and which render it insupportable? Second pretext, drawn from the disgusts and the difficulties of prayer.

PART II.—One of the greatest excesses of sin is undoubtedly that backwardness, and, I may say, that natural dislike which we have to prayer. Man, innocent, would have founded his whole delight in holding converse with God. All creatures would have been as an open book, where he would have incessantly meditated upon his works and his wonders; the impressions of the senses, under the command of reason, would never have been able to turn him aside, in spite of himself, from the delight and the familiarity of his presence; his whole life would have been one continued contemplation of the truth, and his whole happiness in his innocence would have been founded on his continual communications with the Lord, and the certainty that he would never forsake him.

Man must therefore be highly corrupted, and sin must have made strange alterations in us, to turn into a punishment what ought to be our happiness. It is however only too true, that we almost all bear in our nature this backwardness and this dislike to prayer; and upon these is founded the most universal pretext which is opposed to the discharge of this duty, so essential to Christian piety. Even persons, to whom the habit of prayer ought to be rendered more pleasing and more familiar, by the practice of virtue, continually complain of the disgusts and of the constant wanderings which they experience in this holy exercise; insomuch, that, looking upon it either as a wearisome duty, or as a lost trouble, they abridge its length, and think themselves happily quit of a yoke and of a slavery, when this moment of weariness and restraint is over.

Now, I say, that nothing is more unrighteous than to estrange ourselves from prayer, on account of the disgusts and wanderings of the mind, which render it painful and disagreeable to us; for these disgusts and wanderings originate,—first, from our lukewarmness and our infidelities,—or, secondly, in our being little accustomed to prayer,—or, thirdly, in the wisdom even of God, who tries us, and who wishes to purify our heart, by withholding for a time the sensible consolations of prayer.

Yes, my brethren, the first and the most common source of the disgusts and the dryness of our prayers, is the lukewarmness and the infidelity of our life. It is, in effect, an injustice to pretend that we can bring to prayer a serene and tranquil mind; a cool imagination, free from all the vain phantoms by which it is agitated; a heart affected with, and disposed to relish the presence of its God,—while our whole life, though otherwise virtuous in the eyes of man, shall be one continual dissipation; while we shall continue to live among objects the most calculated to move the imagination, and to make those lively impressions on us which are never done away; in a word, while we shall preserve a thousand iniquitous attachments in our heart, which, though not absolutely criminal in our eyes, yet trouble, divide, and occupy

us, and which weaken in us, or even totally deprive us of any relish for God and the things of heaven.

Alas! my brethren, if the most retired and the most holy souls; if the most recluse penitents, purified by long retreat, and by a life altogether devoted to Heaven, still found, in the sole remembrance of their past manners, disagreeable images, which force their way even into their solitude, to disturb the comfort and the tranquillity of their prayers; do we expect that in a life, regular I confess, but full of agitations, of occasions by which we are led away, of objects which unsettle us, of temptations which disquiet, of pleasures which enervate, of fears and hopes which agitate us, we shall find ourselves, in prayer, all of a sudden new men, purified from all those images which sully our mind, freed from all those attachments which come to divide and perhaps to corrupt our heart, in tranquillity from all those agitations which continually make such violent and such dangerous impressions upon our soul; and that, forgetting for a moment the entire world, and all those vain objects which we have so lately quitted, and which we still bear in our remembrance and in our heart, we shall, all of a sudden, find ourselves raised, before God, to the meditation of heavenly things, penetrated with love for eternal riches, filled with compunction for innumerable infidelities which we still love, and with a tranquillity of mind and of heart, which the profoundest retirement, and the most rigorous seclusion from the world frequently do not bestow? Ah! my brethren, how unjust we are, and into what terrible reproaches against ourselves shall the continual complaints made by us against the duties of piety one day be turned!

And, to go farther into this truth, and to enter into a detail which renders it more evident to you, you complain, in the first place, that your mind, incapable of a moment's attention in prayer, wanders from it, and flies off in spite of yourself. But how can it be otherwise; or how can you find it attentive and collected, if every thing you do takes off its attention and unsettles it; if, in the detail of conduct, you never recollect yourself; if you never accustom yourself to that mental reflection, to that life of faith, which, even amid the dissipations of the world, find ample sources of holy reflection? To have a collected mind in prayer, you must bring it along with you; it is necessary that even your intercourse with sinners, when obliged to live among them, the sight of their passions, of their anxieties, fears, hopes, joys, chagrins, and wretchedness, supply your faith with reflections, and turn your views toward God, who alone bestows collectedness of mind and the tranquillity of prayer. Then, even on quitting the world and those worldly conversations, where duty alone shall have engaged your presence, you will find no difficulty in going to recollect yourself before God, and in forgetting at his feet those vain agitations which you have so lately witnessed. On

the contrary, the desigus of faith which you shall there have preserved; the blindness of the worldly, which you shall there have inwardly deplored,—will cause you to find new comforts at the feet of Jesus Christ; you will there, with consolation, recreate yourself from the weariness of dissipation and of worldly nothings; you will lament, with increased satisfaction, over the folly of men who so madly pursue after a vapour, a chimerical happiness, which eludes their grasp, and which it is impossible ever to attain, for the world in which they seek it cannot bestow it; you will there more warmly thank the Lord for having, with so much goodness, and notwithstanding your crimes, enlightened and separated you from that multitude which must perish; you will there see, as in a new light, the happiness of those souls who serve him, and whose eyes, being opened upon vanity, no longer live but for the truth.

Secondly. You complain that your heart, insensible in prayer, feels nothing fervent for its God, but, on the contrary, a disgust which renders it insupportable. But how is it possible that your heart, wholly engrossed with the things of the earth, filled with iniquitous attachments, inclination for the world, love of yourself, schemes for exalting your station, and desires perhaps of pleasing; how is it possible, I say, that your heart, compounded with so many earthly affections, should still have any feeling for the things of heaven? It is wholly filled with the creatures; where then should God find his place in it? We cannot love both God and the world. Thus, when the Israelites had passed the Jordan, and had eaten of the fruits of the earth, “the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land, neither had the children of Israel manna any more;” as if to show, that they could not enjoy at the same time both the heavenly nourishment and that of the earth.

Love of the world, said St. Augustine, like a dangerous fever, sheds a universal bitterness through the heart, which renders the invisible and eternal riches insipid and disgusting to us. Thus, you never come to prayer but with an insurmountable disgust. Ah! it is a proof that your heart is diseased; that a secret fever, and perhaps unknown to yourself, causes it to languish, saps and disgusts it; that it is engrossed by a foreign love. Mount to the source of your disgusts toward God, and every thing connected with him, and see if they shall not be found in the iniquitous attachments of your heart; see if you are not still a slave to yourself, to the vain cares of dress, to frivolous friendships, to dangerous animosities, to secret envies, to desires of rank, to every thing around you. These are the source of the evil: apply the remedy to it; take something every day upon yourself; labour seriously toward purifying your heart; you will then taste the comforts and the consolations of prayer; then the world no longer engrossing your affections, you will find

your God more worthy of being loved : we soon ardently love the only object of our love.

And, after all, render glory here to the truth. Is it not true, that the days in which you have been more guarded upon yourself,—the days in which you have made some sacrifices, to the Lord, of your inclinations, of your indolence, of your temper, of your aversions ; is it not true, that, in these days, you have addressed your prayers to the Lord with more peace, more consolation, and more delight ? We encounter, with double pleasure, the eyes of a master to whom we have lately given some striking proof of fidelity ; on the contrary, we are in pain before him when we feel that he has cause of a thousand just reproaches against us : we are then anxious and under restraint ; we endeavour to hide ourselves from his view, like the first sinner : we no longer address him with that overflowing heart, and that confidence, which a conscience pure and void of offence inspires ; and the moments when we are under the necessity of supporting his divine presence are anxiously counted.

Thus, when Jesus Christ commands us to pray, he begins with ordering us to watch. He thereby means us to understand that vigilance is the only preparation to prayer ; that to love to pray, it is necessary to watch ; and that fondness for, and consolation in prayer, are granted only to the recollection and to the sacrifices of vigilance. I know, that, if you do not pray, you can never watch over yourself and live holily ; but I likewise know, that, if you exert not that vigilance which causes to live holily, you can never pray with comfort and with consolation. Prayer, it is true, obtains for us the grace of vigilance ; but it is yet more true, that vigilance alone can draw down upon us the gift and the usage of the prayer.

And, from thence, it is easy to conclude, that a life of the world, even granting it to be the most innocent, that is to say, a life of pleasure, continual gaming, dissipation, and theatrical amusement, which you call so innocent, when attended with no other harm than that of disqualifying you for prayer ; when this worldly life, which you so strongly justify, should contain nothing more criminal than that of disgusting you at prayer, of drying up your heart, of unsettling your imagination, of weakening your faith, and of filling your mind with anxiety and trouble ; when we should judge of the security of this state merely from what you continually tell us, that you are incapable of arranging yourself for prayer, and that, on your part, it is always attended with an insupportable disgust and weariness ; I say, that, for these reasons alone, the most innocent worldly life is a life of sin and reprobation ; a life for which there is no salvation : for salvation is promised solely to prayer ; salvation is not attainable but through the aid of prayer ; salvation is granted only to perseverance in prayer ; consequently, every life which places an invincible obstacle in the way of prayer, can have

no pretensions to salvation. Now, you are fully sensible yourselves, my brethren, that a life of dissipation, of gaming, of pleasure, and of public places, puts an essential obstacle in the way of prayer; that it places in your heart, in your imagination, in your senses, an invincible disgust at prayer, an unsettledness incompatible with the spirit of prayer: you continually complain of this; you even make use of it as a pretext not to pray; and from thence be assured that there is no salvation for the worldly life, even the most innocent; for, wherever prayer is impossible, salvation must likewise be so. First reason of the disgusts and of the wanderings of our prayers—the lukewarmness and the infidelity of our life.

The second is our little usage of prayer. We pray with disgust, because we seldom pray. For, first, it is the practice alone of prayer which will gradually calm your mind, which will insensibly banish from it the images of the world and of vanity, which will disperse all those clouds which produce all the disgusts and the wanderings of your prayers. Secondly, you must ask for a long time before you can obtain; you must press, solicit, and even importune; the sweets and the consolations of prayer are the fruit and the reward of prayer itself. Thirdly, there must be familiarity in order to find pleasure in it. If you seldom pray, the Lord will be a strange and unknown God to you, as I may say, before whom you will feel yourself embarrassed, and under a kind of restraint; with whom you will never experience those overflowings of heart, that sweet confidence, that holy freedom, which familiarity alone bestows, and which constitute the whole pleasure of the divine intercourse. God requires to be known, in order to be loved. The world loses by being examined; the surface, and the first glance of it, are alone smiling. Search deeper, and it is no longer but emptiness, vanity, anxious care, agitation, and misery. But the Lord must be tasted, says the prophet, in order to feel how good he is. The more you know, the more you love him: the more you unite yourself to him, the more do you feel that there is no true happiness on the earth but that of knowing and of loving him.

It is the use, therefore, of prayer, which alone can render prayer pleasing. Thus we see that the generality of persons who complain of the disgusts and of the wanderings of their prayers, seldom pray; think this important duty fulfilled when they have bestowed upon the Lord a few hasty moments of thoughtlessness and restraint; forsake it on the first symptom of disgust; make no exertion to reduce and familiarize their mind to it; and far from considering prayer as being rendered only more necessary to them, by their invincible repugnance to it, they regard that very repugnance as a legal excuse, which dispenses them altogether from it.

But how find time in the world, you will say, to make so long and so frequent a use of prayer? You, my dear hearer, not find time to pray? But wherefore is time given to you, but to intreat

of God to forget your crimes, to look upon you with eyes of compassion, and to place you one day among the number of his holy? You have not time to pray? But you have not time, then, to be a Christian: for, a man who prays not, is a man who has no God, no worship, and no hope. You have not time to pray? But prayer is the beginning of all good; and if you do not pray, you have not yet performed a single work for eternal life. Ah! my brethren, is time ever wanting to solicit the favours of the earth, to importune the master, to besiege those who are in place, to bestow upon pleasures, or upon idleness? What useless moments! What languid and tiresome days, through the mere gloom which ever accompanies idleness! What time lost in vain ceremonies, in idle conversations, in boundless gaming, in fruitless subjections, in grasping at chimeras which move farther and farther from us! Great God! and time is wanted to ask heaven of thee, to appease thy wrath, and to supplicate thine eternal mercies! How humbly, O my God, must salvation be estimated, when time is wanted to entreat of thy mercy to save us! And how much are we to be deplored, to find so many moments for the world, and to be unable to find a single one for eternity! Second cause of the disgusts and of the wanderings of your prayers—the little use of prayer itself.

It is true, my brethren, that this reason is not so general but that souls, the most faithful to prayer, are often seen to experience all those disgusts and those wanderings of which I speak; but, I say, that these disgusts proceed from the wisdom of God, who means to purify them, and who leads them by that path, only in order to fulfil his eternal designs of mercy upon them. Last reason—that consequently, far from being repulsed by what they find gloomy and disagreeable in prayer, they ought to persevere in it with even more fidelity than if the Lord had shed upon them the most abundant and the most sensible consolations.

First. Because you ought to consider these disgusts as the just punishment of your past infidelities. Is it not reasonable that God make you expiate the criminal voluptuousness of your worldly life by the disgusts and the sorrows of piety? Weakness of temperament does not perhaps permit you to punish, by corporeal sufferings, the licentiousness of your past manners: is it not just that God supply that, by the punishment, and the inward afflictions of the mind? Would you pretend to pass in an instant from the pleasures of the world to those of grace; from the viands of Egypt to the milk and honey of the land of promise, without the Lord having first made you to undergo the barrenness and the fatigues of the desert; and, in a word, that he should not chastise the delights, if I may venture to say so, of guilt, but by those of virtue?

Secondly. You have so long refused yourself to God, in spite of the most lively inspirations of his grace, which recalled you to the truth and to the light; you have so long suffered him to knock at

the gate of your heart before you opened it to him; you have disputed, struggled against, wavered, deferred so much, before you gave yourself to him; is it not just that he leave you to solicit for some time before he give himself to you with all the consolations of his grace? The delays and the tarryings of the Lord are the just punishment of your own.

But, even admitting these reasons to be less weighty, how do you know if the Lord thereby mean not to render this exilement and this separation in which we live from him, more hateful to you, and to increase the fervency of your longings for that immortal country where truth, seen in open day, will always appear lovely, because we shall see it as it is? How do you know if he thereby mean not to inspire you with new compunction for your past crimes, by making you sensible, at every moment, of the contrariety and disgust which they have left in your heart to the truth and to righteousness? Lastly, how do you know, if the Lord mean not, by these disgusts, to perfect the purification of what may as yet be too human in your piety;—if he mean not to establish your virtue upon that truth which is always the same, and not upon inclination and fancy, which incessantly change; upon rules which are eternal, and not upon consolations which are transitory; upon faith which never fails to sacrifice the visible for the invisible riches, and not upon feeling, which leaves to the world almost the same empire that grace hath over your heart? A piety wholly of fancy goes a short way, if not sustained and confirmed by the truth. It is dangerous to let our fidelity depend upon the feeling dispositions of a heart which is never an instant the same, and upon which every object makes new impressions. The duties which only please when they console, do not please long; and that virtue which is solely founded on fancy can never sustain itself, because it rests only upon ourselves.

For, after all, if you seek only the Lord in your prayers, provided that the way by which he leads you conduct to him, it ought to matter little to you whether it be by that of disgusts or of consolations, for, being the surest, it ought always to appear preferable to all others. If you pray only to attract more aids from heaven in relief of your wants, or in support of your weakness, faith teaching you that prayer, even when accompanied with those disgusts and those drynesses, obtains the same favours, produces the same effects, and is equally acceptable to God as that in which sensible consolations are found. What do I say?—that it may become even more agreeable to the Lord, through your acceptance of the difficulties which you there encounter; faith teaching you this, you ought to be equally faithful to prayer as if it held out the most sensible attractions, otherwise it would not be God whom you sought, but yourselves; it would not be eternal riches, but vain and fleeting consolations; it would not be the remedies of faith, but the supports of your self-love.

Thus, be whom you may who now listen to me, imitate the woman of Canaan; be faithful to prayer, and, in the fulfilment of this duty, you will find all the rest sustained and rendered easy. If a sinner, pray: it was through prayer alone that the publican and the sinful woman of the gospel obtained feelings of compunction and the grace of a thorough penitence; and prayer is the only source and the only path of righteousness. If righteous, still pray: perseverance in faith and in piety is promised only to prayer; and by that it was that Job, that David, that Tobias, persevered to the end. If you live amid sinners, and your duty does not permit you to withdraw yourself from the sight of their irregularities and examples, pray: the greater the dangers, the more necessary does prayer become; and the three children in the flames, and Jonah in the belly of a monster, found safety only through prayer. If the engagements of your birth, or of your station, attach you to the court of kings, pray: Esther, in the court of Ahasuerus, Daniel in that of Darius, the prophets in the palaces of the kings of Israel, were solely indebted to prayer for their life and salvation. If you live in retirement, pray: solitude itself becomes a rock, if a continual intercourse with God does not defend us against ourselves; and Judith, in the secrecy of her house, and the widow Anna in the temple, and the Anthonies in the desert, found the fruit and the security of their retreat in prayer alone. If established in the church for the instruction of the people, pray: all the power and all the success of your ministry must depend upon your prayers; and the apostles converted the universe solely because they had appropriated nothing to themselves but prayer and the preaching of the gospel. Lastly, be whom you may, I again repeat it, in prosperity or in indigence, in joy or in affliction, in trouble or in peace, in fervency or in despondency, in lust or in the ways of righteousness, advanced in virtue, or still in the first steps of penitence, pray. Prayer is the safety of all stations, the consolation of all sorrows, the duty of all conditions, the soul of piety, the support of faith, the grand foundation of religion, and all religion itself. O my God! shed, then, upon us that spirit of grace and of prayer which was to be the distinguishing mark of thy church, and the portion of a new people; and purify our hearts and our lips, that we may be enabled to offer up to thee pure homages, fervent sighs, and prayers worthy of the eternal riches which thou hast so often promised to those who shall have well intreated them.

SERMON XIV.

FORGIVENESS OF INJURIES.

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies.”—MATT. v. 43.

It is commonly believed that a degree of indulgence and caution had been used by the legislator of the Jews, in publishing the law on forgiveness of injuries, that obliged to accommodate it, in some respect, to the weakness of a carnal people, and otherwise persuaded that of all virtues, that of loving an enemy was the most difficult to the heart of man, he was satisfied with regulating and prescribing bounds for revenge. It was only in order to prevent great excesses, says St. Augustine, that he meant to give authority to smaller ones. That law, like all the others, had its sanctity, its goodness, its justice; but it was rather an establishment of polity than a rule of piety. It was calculated to maintain the internal tranquillity of the state; but it neither touched the heart nor struck at the root of hatreds and revenge. The only effect proposed, was either to restrain the aggressor, by threatening him with the same punishment with which he had grieved his brother, or to put a check upon the irritation of the offended, by letting him see, that, if he exceeded in the satisfaction required, he exposed himself to undergo all the surplus of his revenge.

Philosophers, in their morality, had also placed the forgiveness of injuries among the number of virtues; but that was a pretext of vanity rather than a rule of discipline. It is because revenge seemed to them to carry along with it something, I know not what, of mean and passionate, which would have disfigured the portrait and the tranquillity of their ideal sage, that it appeared disgraceful to them to be unable to rise superior to an injury. The forgiveness of their enemies was solely founded, therefore, upon the contempt in which they held them. They avenged themselves by disdain-ing revenge; and pride readily gave up the pleasure of hurting those who have injured us, for the pleasure which was found in despising them.

But the law of the gospel, upon loving our enemies, neither flatters pride, nor spares self-love. In the forgiveness of injuries, nothing ought to indemnify the Christian but the consolation of imitating Jesus Christ, and of obeying him; but the claims

which, in an enemy, prove to him a brother; but the hope of meeting, before the Eternal Judge, with the same indulgence which he shall have used toward men. Nothing ought to limit him in his charity, but charity itself, which hath no bounds, which excepts neither places, times, nor persons, which ought never to be extinguished. And, should the religion of Christians have no other proof against unbelief than the sublime elevation of this maxim, it would always have this pre-eminence in sanctity, and consequently in apparent truth, over all the sects which have ever appeared upon the earth.

Let us unfold, therefore, the motives and the rules of this essential point of the law: the motives, by establishing the equity of the precept through the very pretexts which seem to oppose it; the rules, by laying open the illusions under which every one justifies to himself their infractions; that is to say, the injustice of our hatreds, and the falsity of our reconciliations.

PART I.—The three principles which usually bind men to each other, and by which are formed all human unions and friendships, are fancy, cupidity, and vanity. Fancy—We follow a certain propensity of nature, which, being the cause of our finding, in some persons, a greater similarity to our own inclinations, perhaps also greater allowances for our faults, binds us to them, and occasions us to find, in their society, a comfort which becomes weariness in that of the rest of men. Cupidity—We seek out useful friends; from the moment that they are necessary to our pleasure or to our fortune, they become worthy of our friendship. Interest is a grand charm to the majority of hearts; the titles which render us powerful, are quickly transmuted into qualities which render us apparently amiable, and friends are never wanting when we can pay the friendship of those who love us. Lastly, Vanity—Friends who do us honour are always dear to us. It would seem that, in loving them, we enter, as it were, into partnership with them in that distinction which they enjoy in the world; we seek to deck ourselves, as I may say, with their reputation; and, being unable to reach their merit, we pride ourselves in their society, in order to have it supposed that, at least, there is not much between us, and that like loves like.

These are the three great ties of human society. Religion and charity unite almost nobody; and from thence it is, that, from the moment men offend our fancy, that they are unfavourable to our interests, or that they wound our reputation and our vanity, the human and brittle ties which united us to them are broken asunder; our heart withdraws from them, and no longer finds in itself, with respect to them, but animosity and bitterness. And behold the three most general sources of those hatreds which men nourish against each other; which change all the sweets of society into

endless inveteracies; which empoison all the delight of conversations, and all the innocency of mutual intercourse; and which, attacking religion in the heart, nevertheless present themselves to us under appearances of equity which justify them in our eyes and strengthen us in them.

I say, from the moment that men offend our fancy; and this is the first pretext, and the first source of our withdrawing from, and of our hatreds against, our brethren. You say, that you cannot accord with such a person; that every thing in him offends and displeases you; that it is an antipathy which you cannot conquer; that all his manners seem fashioned to irritate you; that to see him would answer the sole purpose of augmenting the natural aversion which you have to him; and that nature hath placed within us hatreds and likings, conformities and aversions, for which she alone is to be answerable.

To this I might at once answer, by establishing the foundations of the Christian doctrine upon loving our brethren. Is that man, in consequence of displeasing, and being disagreeable to your fancy, less your brother, child of God, citizen of heaven, member of Jesus Christ, and inheritor of the eternal promises? Doth his humour, his character, whatever it may be, efface any one of those august traits which he hath received upon the sacred font, which unite him to you by divine and immortal ties, and which ought to render him dear and respectable to you? When Jesus Christ commands us to love our brethren as ourselves, doth he mean to make a precept which costs nothing to the heart, and in the fulfilment of which we found neither difficulty nor hardship? Ah! what occasion hath he to command us to love our brethren, if, in virtue of that commandment, we were obliged to love only those for whom we feel a natural fancy and inclination. The heart hath no occasion, on this point, for precept; it is its own law. The precept then supposes a difficulty on our part: Jesus Christ hath, therefore, foreseen that it would be hard upon us to love our brethren; that we should find within us antipathies and dislikes which would withdraw us from them; and behold why he hath attached so much merit to the observance of this single point, and hath so often declared to us, that, to observe it, was to observe the whole law. Aversion to our brethren, far, then, from justifying our estrangement from them, renders to us, on the contrary, the obligation of loving them more precise, and places us personally in the case of the precept.

But besides, ought a Christian to be regulated by fancy and humour, or by the principles of reason, of faith, of religion, and of grace? And since when is the natural fancy, which we are commanded by the gospel to oppose, become a privilege which dispenses us from its rules? If the repugnance felt for duties were a title of exemption, where is the believer who would not be quit of the whole law, and who would not find his justification

and his innocency, in proportion as he felt a greater degree of corruption in his heart? Are our fancies our law? Is religion only the support, and not the remedy of nature? Is it not a weakness, even in the eyes of the world, to regulate our steps and our sentiments, our hatreds and our love toward men, merely upon the caprices of a fancy for which we can give no reason ourselves? Do men of this description do great credit, I do not say to religion, but to humanity? And are they not, even to the world itself, a spectacle of contempt, of derision, and of censure? What a chaos would society be, if fancy alone were to decide upon our duties, and upon reciprocal attentions, and if men were to be united by no other law! Now, if the rules, even of society, exact, that fancy alone be not the sole principle of our conduct toward the rest of men, should the gospel be more indulgent on that point?—the gospel, which preaches only self-denial; which every where commands us to do violence upon ourselves, and to strive against our fancies and our affections; which demands that we act through views superior to flesh and blood, and that we hesitate not to sacrifice to the sanctity of faith, and to the sublimity of its rules, not only our caprices, but our most legal inclinations?

It is therefore absurd to allege to us an aversion to your brother, which is itself your guilt. I might farther say: you complain that your brother is displeasing to you, and that it is not possible for you to bear, or to be in agreement, with him: but, do you suppose that you yourself are displeasing to none? Can you guarantee to us, that you are universally liked, and that every one applauds and approves you? Now, if you exact, that every thing offensive in your manners be excused, upon the goodness of your heart, and on account of those essential qualities upon which you pride yourself; if to you it appear unreasonable to be offended at nothings, and by certain sallies which we cannot always command; if you insist upon being judged by the consequence, by the groundwork, by the rectitude of your sentiments and conduct, and not in consequence of those humours which sometimes involuntarily escape you, and upon which it is very difficult to be always guarded against one's self; have the same equity for your brother; apply the same rule to yourself; bear with him as you have occasion to be borne with yourself; and do not justify, by your estrangement from him, the unjust aversions which may be had to yourself. And this rule is so much the more equitable as that you have only to cast your eyes upon what is continually passing in the world, to be convinced that those who are loudest in trumpeting forth the faults of their brethren, are the very persons with whom nobody can agree, who are the pest of societies, and a grievance to the rest of men.

And I might here demand of you, my dear hearer, if this principle of contrariety, which renders your brother so insup-

portable to you, be not more in yourself; that is to say, in your pride, in the capriciousness of your temper, in the contrariety of your character, than in his;—demand of you, if all the world see in him what you believe to see yourself; if his friends, his relations, his intimates, look upon him with the same eyes that you do? What do I know, I might demand of you, if that which displeases you in him be not perhaps his good qualities: if his talents, his reputation, his credit, and his fortune, have not perhaps a greater share in your aversion than his faults; and, if it be not his merit or his rank which have hitherto in your sight constituted his whole crime? We are so easily deceived in this point! Envy is a passion so masked, and so artful in disguising itself! As there is something mean and odious in it, and as it is a secret confession made to ourselves of our own mediocrity, it always shows itself to us under foreign outsides, which completely conceal it from us; but fathom your heart, and you will see that all those, who either surpass, or who shine with too much lustre near you, have the misfortune to displease you; that you find amiable only those who have nothing to contest with you; that all who rise above, or are even equal to you, constrain and hurt you; and that, to have a claim to your friendship, it is necessary to have none either to your pretensions or expectancies.

But I go still farther, and I entreat you to listen to me. I admit your brother to have more faults than even you accuse him of having. Alas! you are so gentle and so friendly toward those from whom you expect your fortune and your establishment, and whose temper, haughtiness, and manners shock you. You bear with all their pride, their repulses, their scorns; you swallow all their inequalities and caprices: you are never disheartened; your patience is always greater than your antipathy and your repugnance, and you neglect nothing to please. Ah! if you regarded your brother, as he upon whom depends your eternal salvation, as he to whom you are to be indebted, not for a fortune of dross, and an uncertain establishment, but for the fortune even of your eternity, would you follow, with regard to him, the caprice of your fancy? Would you not conquer the unjust antipathy which estranges you from him? Would you suffer so much in putting your inclinations in unison with your eternal interests, and in doing upon yourself so useful and so necessary a violence? You bear with every thing for the world and for vanity; and you cry out, how hard! from the moment that a single painful proceeding is exacted of you for eternity.

And say not that there are caprices of nature, of which no account can be given, and that we are not the masters of our fancies and likings. I grant this to a certain point; but there is a love of reason and of religion, which ought always to gain ascendancy over that of nature. The gospel exacts not that you

have a fancy for your brother, it exacts that you love him; that is to say, that you bear with him, that you excuse him, that you conceal his faults, that you serve him; in a word, that you do for him whatever you would wish to have done for yourself. Charity is not a blind and capricious fancy, a natural liking, a sympathy of temper and disposition;—it is a just, enlightened, and reasonable duty; a love which takes its rise in the impulses of grace, and in the views of faith. It is not rightly loving our brethren, to love them only through fancy; it is loving one's self. Charity alone enables us to love them as we ought, and it alone can form real and steadfast friends. For fancy is continually changing, and charity never dieth; fancy seeks only itself, and charity seeketh not its own interest, but the interest of whom it loves; fancy is not a proof against every thing, a loss, a proceeding, a disgrace,—and charity riseth superior to death: fancy loves only its own conveniency; and charity findeth nothing amiss, and suffereth every thing for whom it loveth: fancy is blind, and often renders even the vices of our brethren amiable to us; and charity never giveth praise to iniquity, and in others loveth only the truth. The friends of grace are therefore much more to be relied on than those of nature. The same fancy which unites the manners, is often, a moment after, the cause of separating them; but the ties formed by charity eternally endure.

Such is the first source of our likings and of our hatreds, the injustices and the capriciousness of our fancy. Interest is the second; for nothing is more common than to hear you justifying your animosities, by telling us that such a man hath neglected nothing to ruin you; that he has been the mean of blasting your fortune; that he continually excites vexatious matters against you; that you find him an insuperable impediment in your way, and that it is difficult to love an enemy so bent on injuring you.

But, granting that you speak the truth, I answer to you: to all the other ills which your brother hath caused to you, why should you add that of hating him, which is the greatest of all, since all the others have tended to ravish from you only fleeting and frivolous riches, while this is the cause of ruin to your soul, and deprives you for ever of your claim to an immortal kingdom? In hating him, you injure yourself much more than all his malignity with respect to you could ever do. He hath usurped the patrimony of your fathers: it may be so; and, in order to avenge yourself, you renounce the inheritance of the heavenly Father, and the eternal patrimony of Jesus Christ. You take your revenge then upon yourself; and, in order to console yourself for the ills done to you by your brother, you provide for yourself one without end and without measure.

And, moreover, does your hatred toward your brother restore

any of those advantages which he hath snatched from you? Does it ameliorate your condition? What do you reap from your animosity and your rancour? In hating him, you say that you console yourself; and this is the only consolation left to you. What a consolation, great God! is that of hatred; that is to say, of a gloomy and furious passion, which gnaws the heart, sheds anguish and sorrow through ourselves, and begins by punishing and rendering us miserable! What a cruel pleasure is that of hating, that is to say, of bearing on the heart a load of rancour, which empoisons every other moment of life! What a barbarous method of consoling one's self! And are you not worthy of pity, to seek a resource in your evils, which answers no purpose but that of eternising, by hatred, a transitory injury?

But let us cease this human language, and speak that of the gospel, to which our mouths are consecrated. If you were Christian, my dear hearer; if you had not lost faith, far from hating those whom God hath made instrumental in blasting your hopes and your projects of fortune, you would regard them as the instruments of God's mercies upon your soul, as the ministers of your sanctification, and the blessed rocks which have been the means of saving you from shipwreck. You would have been lost in credit and in elevation; you would then have neglected your God; your ambition would have increased with your fortune, and death would have surprised you in the vortex of the world of passions and of human expectancies. But, in order to save your soul, the Lord, in his great mercy, hath raised up obstacles which have stopped your course. He hath employed an envious person, a rival to supplant you, to keep you at a distance from favours, and to place himself between you and the precipice, into which you was running headlong, for ever to perish: he hath seconded, as I may say, his ambition; he hath favoured his designs; and, through an incomprehensible excess of goodness toward you, he hath crossed your worldly schemes: he hath raised up your enemy in time, in order to save you in eternity. You ought, therefore, to adore the eternal designs of his justice and of his mercy upon men; to consider your brother as the blessed cause of your salvation; to entreat of God, that, seeing his ambition or his bad intentions have been employed to save you, he may inspire him with sincere repentance, and that the person who hath been the instrument of your salvation be not permitted to perish himself.

Yes, my brethren, our hatreds proceed entirely from our want of faith. Alas! if we regarded every thing which passes, as a vapour without substance; if we were thoroughly convinced that all this is nothing, that salvation is the great and important affair, and that our treasure and our true riches are only in eternity, where, in the twinkling of an eye, we shall be; if we were convinced of it, alas! we would consider men,

who passionately quarrel and dispute with each other for the dignities of the earth, as children who fall out among themselves for the playthings which amuse their eye, whose childish hatreds and animosities turn upon nothings, which infancy alone, and the feeble state of reason, magnify in their eyes. Tranquil on the greatest and most important events, on the loss of the patrimony of their fathers, and the fall of their family, and keen even to excess when deprived of any of the little trifling objects which delight their infancy,—thus, O my God, foolish and puerile men feel not the loss of their heavenly inheritance, of that immortal patrimony bequeathed to them by Jesus Christ, and which their brethren are already enjoying in heaven. They unconcernedly see the kingdom of God, and the only true riches, pass away from them; and, like children, they are inflamed with rage, and mutually arm against each other, from the instant that their frivolous possessions are encroached upon, or that any attempt is made to deprive them of those childish playthings, the only value or importance of which is that of serving to deceive their feeble reason, and to amuse their childhood.

For a Christian, interest is therefore an unworthy and criminal pretext for his hatred toward his brethren; but vanity, which is their last resource, is still less excusable.

For, my brethren, we wish to be approved, and to have our faults as well as our virtues applauded; and, although we feel our own weaknesses, yet we are so unreasonable as to exact that others see them not, and that they even give credit to us for certain qualities which we inwardly reproach to ourselves as vices. We would wish that all mouths were filled solely with our praises; and that the world, which forgives nothing, which spares not even its masters, should admire in us what it censures in others.

In effect, you complain that your enemy hath both privately and publicly decried you; that he hath added calumny to slander; that he hath attacked you in the tenderest and most feeling quarter, and that he hath neglected nothing to blast your honour and your reputation in the opinion of men.

But, before replying to this, I might first say to you, mistrust the reports which have been made to you of your brother: the most innocent speeches reach us so impoisoned, through the malignity of the tongues which have conveyed them; there are so many mean flatterers, who seek to be agreeable at the expense of those who are not so; there are so many dark and wicked minds, whose only pleasure is in finding out evil where none is meant, and in sowing dissension among men; there are so many volatile and imprudent characters, who unseasonably, and with an envenomed air, repeat what at first had been only said with the most innocent intentions; there are so many men, naturally given to the hyperbole, and in whose mouth every thing is magnified, and departs

from the natural and simple truth. I here appeal to yourself: Has it never happened to you, that your most innocent sayings have been poisoned, and circumstances added to your recitals, which you had never even thought of? Have you not then exclaimed against the injustice and the malignity of the repeaters? Why might not you, in your turn, have been deceived? And if every thing which passes through a variety of channels, be in general adulterated, and never reach us in its original purity, why should you suppose that discourses which relate to you alone, were exempted from the same lot, and were entitled to more attention and belief?

You will no doubt reply, that these general maxims are not the point in question, and that the actions of which you complain are not doubtful, but positive. I admit it; and I ask, if your brother have not, on his side, the same reproaches to make to you; if you have always been very lenient and very charitable to his faults; if you have always rendered justice even to his good qualities; if you never permitted him to be reviled in your presence; if you have not aided the malignity of such discourses by an affected moderation, which hath only tended to blow up the fire of detraction, and to supply new traits against your brother?—I ask you, if you are even circumspect toward the rest of men; if you readily forgive the weakness of others; if your tongue be not, in general, dipt in wormwood and gall; if the best established reputation be not always in danger in your hands; and, if the saddest and most private histories do not speedily become matter of notoriety, through your malignity and imprudence? O man! thou pushest delicacy and sensibility to such lengths upon whatever regards thyself! We have occasion for all the terror of our ministry, and for all the other most weighty inducements of religion, to bring thee to forgive to thy brother a single speech, frequently a word, which imprudence, which chance, which circumstances, which perhaps a just resentment hath forced from him; and the licentiousness of thy discourses toward others knows neither the bounds of politeness nor of that decency which the world itself prescribes.

But, granting that you have nothing to reproach yourself on the part of moderation toward your brother, what do you gain by hating him? Do you thereby efface the fatal impressions which his discourses may have left on the minds of men? On the contrary, you inflict a fresh wound upon your heart; you give yourself a stab which carries death to your soul; you wrench the sword from his hands, if I may speak in this manner, in order to plunge it into yourself. By the innocency of your manners, and the integrity of your conduct, you make the injustice of his discourses evident; destroy, by a life free from reproach, the prejudices to which he may have given rise against you; make the meanness and the iniquity of his calumnies revert upon himself, by the practice of those vir-

tues exactly opposite to the faults which he imputes to you : such is the just and legal manner of revenging yourself. Triumph over his malice by your manners and by your silence : you will heap living coals upon his head ; you will gain the public on your side ; you will leave nothing to your enemy but the infamy of his passion and of his impositions. But hating him is the revenge of the weak, and the sad consolation of the guilty ; in a word, it is the only refuge of those who can find none in virtue and in innocence.

But let us now quit all these reasonings, and come to the essential point. You are commanded to love those who spitefully use and calumniate you ; to pray for them, to entreat their conversion to God, that he change their rancorous heart, that he inspire them with sentiments of peace and of charity, and that he place them among the number of his holy. You are commanded to consider them as already citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, with whom you shall form only one voice in singing the immortal praises of grace. You are commanded to look upon injuries as blessings, as the punishment of your hidden crimes, for which you have so often merited to be covered with confusion before men ; as the price of the kingdom of God, which is promised to those alone who with piety bear with persecution and calumny.

For, after all, it must come to this. Self-love alone would make us love those who love us, who praise us, who publish our virtues, false or true ; such was the whole virtue of the Pagans ; for, said Jesus Christ, if ye love those that love you, what reward have ye ; do not even the publicans so ? But religion goes farther : it requires us to love those who hate and persecute us : it fixes at that price the mercies of God upon us, and declares to us that no forgiveness is to be expected for ourselves, if we grant it not to our brethren.

And, candidly, would you have God to forget the crimes and the horrors of your whole life, to be insensible to his own glory, which you have so often insulted, while you cannot prevail upon yourself to forget a word ; while you are so warm, so delicate, and so passionate upon the interests of your glory ; you who perhaps enjoy a reputation which you have never merited ; you, who, were you to be known such as you are, would be covered with eternal shame and confusion ; you, in a word, of whom the most injurious discourses only imperfectly represent the secret wretchedness, and of which God alone knoweth the extent ? Great God ! how little shall sinners have to say for themselves when thou wilt pronounce against them the sentence of their eternal condemnation !

You will probably tell us that you perfectly agree to the duties which religion hereupon imposes, but that the laws of honour have prevailed over those of religion ; that if discourses and proceedings of a certain description be tranquilly submitted to, lasting dishonour and infamy in the sight of men must necessarily follow ; that

to forgive through motives of religion, is nevertheless a stain of cowardice, which the world never pardons, and that on this point, honour acknowledges neither exception nor privilege.

What is this honour, my brethren, which is to be bought only at the price of our souls and of our eternal salvation? And how worthy of pity, if guilt alone can save from ignominy! I know that it is here that the false laws of the world seem to prevail over those of religion; and that the wisest themselves, who execrate this abuse, are, however, of opinion that it must be submitted to. But I speak before a prince, who, wiser than the world, and filled with a just indignation against a madness so contrary to the maxims of the gospel, as well as to the interests of the state, hath shown to his subjects what is the true honour, and who, in forcing criminal arms out of their hands, hath marked with lasting infamy those barbarous modes of revenge to which the public error had attached a deplorable glory.

What, my brethren, an abominable maxim, which the barbarity of the first manners of our ancestors alone hath consecrated, and handed down to us, should prevail over all the rules of Christianity, and all the most inviolable rules of the state! It should be no dishonour to bathe your hands in your brother's blood, while it would be one to obey God, and the prince who holds his place in the world! Glory would no longer then be but a madness, and cowardice but a noble respect for religion, and for our master. You dread passing for a coward! Show your valour, then, by shedding your blood in the defence of your country; go and brave dangers at the head of our armies, and there seek glory in the discharge of your duty; establish your reputation by actions worthy of being ranked among the memorable events of a reign so glorious; such is that valour which the state requires, and which religion authorizes. Then despise these brutal and personal vengeance; look upon them as a childish ostentation of valour, which is often used as a cover to actual cowardice; as the vile and vulgar refuge of those who have nothing signal to establish their character; as a forced and an equivocal proof of courage, which the world wrests from us, and against which the heart often revolts. Far from imputing shame to you, the world itself will make it a fresh title of honour to you; you will be still more exalted in its opinion; and you will teach your equals that misplaced valour is nothing but a brutal fear; that wisdom and moderation ever attend true glory; that whatever dishonours humanity can never do honour to men; and that the gospel, which inculcates and commands forgiveness, hath made more heroes than the world itself, which preaches up revenge.

You will perhaps say that these maxims do not regard you; that you have forgotten all the subjects of complaint which you had against your brother; and that a reconciliation hath put an

end to the eclat of your misunderstandings and of your quarrel. Now, I say, that it is more especially on this point that you are grossly deceived; and, after having shown to you the injustice of our hatreds, it is my duty now to prove to you the falsity of our reconciliations.

PART II.—There is not a precept in the law which leaves less room for doubt or for mistake, than that which obliges us to love our brethren; and, nevertheless, there is none upon which more illusions and false maxims are founded. In effect, there is not almost a person who doth not say, that he hath heartily forgiven his brother, and that his conscience is perfectly tranquil on that head; and, nevertheless, nothing is more rare than sincere forgiveness, and there are few instances of a reconciliation which changes the heart, and which is not merely a false appearance of renewed amity, whether it be considered in its principle, or whether the proceedings and consequences of it be examined.

I say, in its principle; for, my brethren, in order that a reconciliation be sincere and real, it is necessary that it take its source in charity, and in a Christian love of our brother. Now, human motives engross, in general, a work which can be the work of grace alone. A reconciliation takes place, in order not to persist against the pressing intreaties of friends; in order to avoid a certain disagreeable eclat, which would necessarily follow an open hostility, and which might revert upon ourselves; in order not to exclude ourselves from certain societies, from which we would be under the necessity of banishing ourselves were we obstinately to persist in being irreconcilable to our brother. A reconciliation takes place through deference to the great, who exact of us that compliance, in order to acquire a reputation for moderation and greatness of soul; in order to avoid giving transactions to the public which would not correspond with that idea which we would wish it to have of us; in order, at once, to cut short the continual complaints and the insulting discourses of an enemy, who knows us perhaps only too well, and who has once been too deep in our confidence, not to merit some caution and deference on our part, and that, by a reconciliation, we should endeavour to silence him. What more shall I say? We are reconciled perhaps like Saul, in order more securely to ruin our enemy, and to lull his vigilance and precautions.

Such are, in general, the motives of those reconciliations which every day take place in the world, and what I say here is so true, that sinners who show no sign of piety on any other occasion, are, however, reconciled to their brethren in daily instances; and they who cannot prevail over themselves in the easiest duties of a Christian life, appear as heroes in the accomplishment of this one, which, of all others, is the most difficult. Ah! it is because they

are heroes of vanity and not of charity : it is that they leave that part of the reconciliation which alone is heroical and arduous in the sight of God, namely, an oblivion upon the past injury, and a total revolution of our heart toward our brother ; and they retain of it only that part which is glorious in the sight of men, namely, an appearance of moderation, and a promptitude toward amity, which the world itself praises and admires.

But, if the greatest part of reconciliations turn out to be false when these motives are examined, they are not less so if we consider them in their proceedings. Yes, my brethren, what measures and negotiations ! what formalities and solitudes in concluding them ! what attentions to bestow, and cautions to observe ! what interests to conciliate, obstacles to remove, and steps to accomplish ! Thus your reconciliation is not the work of charity, but of the wisdom and skill of your friends : it is a worldly affair ; it is not a religious step : it is a treaty happily concluded ; it is not a duty of faith fulfilled : it is the work of man, but it is not the deed of God : in a word, it is a peace which comes from the earth, it is not the peace of heaven.

For, candidly, have men been able, through their arrangements and the ingenuity of their measures, in reconciling you with your brother, to revive that charity which was extinguished in your heart ? Have they been able to restore that treasure to you which you had lost ? They have succeeded, indeed, in terminating the scandal of declared enmity, and establishing between you and your brother the outward duties of society ; but they have not changed your heart, which God alone can do ; they have not extinguished that hatred, which grace alone can extinguish. You are therefore reconciled, but you still love not your brother ; and, in effect, if you sincerely loved him, would so many mediators have been required to reconcile you ? Love is its own mediator and interpreter. Charity is that brief word which would have saved to your friends all those endless toils which they have been obliged to employ in order to reclaim you ; it is not so measured ; it frankly confesses what it sincerely feels. Now, before giving way, you have insisted upon a thousand conditions ; you have disputed every step ; you have been resolute in not going beyond a certain point ; you have exacted that your brother should make the first advances toward meeting you. Charity knows nothing of all these rules ; it hath only one, and that is, oblivion upon the injury, and to love our brother as ourself.

I grant that certain prudential measures are to be observed, and that too hasty or ill-timed advances might often be not only unsuccessful, but even the means of hardening your brother still more against you. But I say that charity ought to regulate these measures, and not vanity ; I say, and I repeat it, that all these reconciliations which are with such difficulty concluded, where both

parties are resolute in yielding only to a certain point, and even that with precautions so strict and so precise ; where so many expedients and so much mystery are necessary,—are the fruits of fleshly prudence: they correct the manners, but they affect not the heart; they bring the persons, but not the affections, nearer; they re-establish civilities, but leave the same sentiments; in a word, they terminate the scandal of hatred, but not the sin. Thus Jesus Christ plainly commands us to go our way and be reconciled to our brother. He says not to us, do not go too far, lest your brother take advantage by it; be first convinced that he will meet you half-way; seek not after him, lest he consider your proceeding as an apology for his complaints, as a tacit acknowledgment of your blame, and a sentence pronounced against yourself. Jesus Christ plainly tells us,—go thy way, and be reconciled to thy brother. He desires that the reconciliation take place through charity alone; he supposes, that, in order to love our brother, we have no occasion for mediators, and that our heart should be fully capable of every thing required without any foreign interference.

Such are the steps of reconciliations; thence, the motives being almost always human, the proceedings faulty, their consequences can be only vain and of no effect. I say, the consequences; for, my brethren, in what do the far greater part of those reconciliations, which every day take place in the world, terminate? What is the fruit of them? What is it which is commonly called a reconciliation with our enemy? I shall explain it to you.

You say, in the first place, that you are reconciled to your brother, and that you have heartily forgiven him; but that you have taken your resolution to see him no more, and from henceforth to have no farther intercourse with him. And upon this footing, you live tranquil; you believe that nothing more is prescribed by the gospel, and that a confessor hath no title to demand more. Now I declare that you have not forgiven your brother, and that you are still, with respect to him, in hatred, in death, and in sin.

For I demand of you,—do we dread the sight of those we love? And if your enemy be now your brother, what can there be so hateful and so disagreeable to you in his presence? You say, that you have forgiven, and that you love him; but, in order to avoid all accidents, and that his presence may not arouse vexatious ideas, you find it more proper to exclude yourself from it. But what is that kind of love which the sole presence of the beloved object irritates against it, and inflames with hatred and wrath? You love him! that is to say, that perhaps you would not wish to injure, or to destroy him. But that is not enough; religion commands you likewise to love him: for honour, indolence, moderation, fear, and want of opportunity, are sufficient induce-

ments to prevent you from injuring him; but you must be Christian to love him; and that is precisely what you are not willing to be.

And, candidly, would you that God loved you, upon the condition that he should never see you? Would you be satisfied with his goodness, and with his mercy, were he for ever to banish you from his presence? For you well know that he will treat you, as you shall have treated your brother. Would you think yourself much in favour with the prince, were he to forbid you ever to present yourself before him? You constantly say, that a man is in disgrace, when he is no longer permitted to appear before the master; and you pretend to persuade us that you love your brother, and that no rancour remains in your heart against him, while his sole presence displeases and irritates you.

And what less equivocal mark can be given of animosity against your brother, than that of being unable to endure his presence? It is the very extreme of hatred and of rancour. For many settled hatreds exist, which yet are kept under a kind of check; are, as far as possible, concealed, and even borrow the outward semblance of friendship and of decency; and, though unable to reconcile the heart to duty, yet have sufficient command over themselves, to preserve appearances to the world. But your hatred is beyond all restraint; it knows neither prudence, caution, nor decency; and you pretend to persuade us that it is now no more! you still show the most violent proofs of animosity, and even these you would have us to consider as the indubitable signs of a Christian and sincere love!

But, besides, are Christians made to live estranged, and unconnected with each other? Christians! the members of one body, the children of the same Father, the disciples of the same Master, the inheritors of the same kingdom, the stones of the same building, the particles of the same mass! Christians! the participation of one same spirit, of one same redemption, of one same righteousness! Christians! sprung from one bosom, regenerated in the same water, incorporated in the same church, redeemed by one ransom,—are they made to fly each other, to make a punishment of seeing each other, and to be unable to endure each other? All religion binds, unites us together; the sacraments in which we join, the public prayers and thanksgivings which we sing, the ceremonies of that worship in which we pride ourselves, the assembly of believers at which we assist; all these externals are only symbols of that union which ties us together. All religion itself is but one holy society, a divine communication of prayers, of sacrifices, of works, and of well-doings. Every thing connects and unites us, every thing tends to make, of our brethren and of us, only one family, one body, one heart, and one soul; and you believe that you love your brother, and that you preserve, with

respect to him, all the most sacred ties of religion, while you break through even those of society, and that you cannot endure even his presence ?

I say much more : how shall you indulge the same hope with him ? For, by that common hope, you are eternally to live with him, to make his happiness your own, to be happy with him, to be reunited with him in the bosom of God, and with him to sing the eternal praises of grace. Ah ! how could the hope of being for ever united with him be the sweetest consolation of your life, if it appear so desirable to live in separation from him, and if you find even his presence a punishment ? Renounce, then, the promises and all the hopes of faith ; separate yourself as an accursed from the communion of believers ; interdict to yourself the altar and the awful mysteries ; banish yourself from the assembly of the holy ; no longer come there to offer up your gifts and your prayers, since all these religious duties, supposing you in union with your brother, become derisions if you be not so ; depose against you in the face of the altars ; and command you to quit the holy assembly as a publican and a sinner.

Perhaps, alarmed at these holy truths, you will finally tell us, that you will so far conquer yourself as to see your brother and to live on good terms with him ; that you will not be wanting in civilities ; but that, for the rest, you know where to stop, and that he need not reckon much upon your friendship.

You will not be wanting in civilities ! And that, my dear hearer, you believe, is to pardon and to be reconciled with your brother, and to love him as yourself ? But that charity which the gospel commands is in the heart ; it is not a simple decorum, a vain outside, a useless ceremony ; it is real feeling, and an active love ; it is a sincere tenderness, ever ready to manifest itself in actions. You love as a Jew and as a Pharisee, but you love not as a Christian and as a disciple of Jesus Christ. The law of charity is the law of the heart ; it regulates the feelings, changes the inclinations, and pours the oil of peace and of lenity over the wounds of an angry and wounded will ; and you turn it into a law wholly external, a pharisaical and superficial law, which regulates only the outside, which settles only the manners, and is fulfilled by vain appearances.

But you are not commanded that you shall merely refrain from wounding the rules of courtesy, and that you shall pay to your brother all those duties which society naturally imposes ; it is the world which prescribes this law ; these are its rules and customs : but Jesus Christ commands you to love him ; and, while your heart is estranged from him, it is of little importance that you keep up the vain externals of courtesy. You refuse to religion the essential part ; and the only difference between you and

those sinners who persist in not seeing their brethren, is, that you know how to constrain yourself for the world, and you know not how to thwart yourself for salvation.

And surely, my brethren, if men were united together by the sole ties of society, they no doubt would discharge their duty, by keeping up all the externals of politeness, and by maintaining that mutual commerce of cares, attentions, and courtesies, which constitute, as it were, the whole harmony of the body politic. But we are united together by the sacred and close ties of faith, of hope, of charity, and of religion. In the midst of the world we form a society wholly internal and holy, of which charity is the invisible bond, and altogether distinct from that civil society which legislators have established. Consequently, by fulfilling, with regard to your brethren, the external courtesies, you satisfy the claims which civil society hath upon you, but you do not satisfy those of religion; you disturb not the political order, but you overturn the order of charity; you are a peaceable citizen, but you are not a citizen of heaven; you are a man of the age, but you are not a man of the age to come; the world may acquit you, and demand no more, but what you do is a blank in the sight of God, because you are not in charity; and your condemnation is certain. Come and tell us, after this, that you will not be wanting in decorum, and that religion exacts no more of us. It exacts then only dissimulation, outsides, and vain appearances! It exacts, then, nothing true, nothing real, nothing which changes the heart! And the great precept of charity, which alone gives reality to all our works, would no longer then be but a false pretence and a vain hypocrisy!

And trust not solely to us on this point; consult the public itself. See if, in spite of all the appearances which you still keep up with your brother, it be not an established opinion in the world, that you love him not; and if the world do not act in consequence of that persuasion. See if your creatures, if all who approach and who are attached to you, do not affect to keep at a distance from your brother. See if all those who hate him, or who are in interests opposite to his, do not court your friendship and form closer ties with you, and if all those who are inimical to your brother do not profess themselves your friends. See if those who have favours to expect from you do not begin by forsaking him, and that if they do not think that in so doing they are paying court to you. You see that the world knows you better than you know yourself; that it is not mistaken in your real sentiments; and that, in spite of all these vain shows toward your brother, you are actually in hatred and in death, and that in this respect the world itself is of our opinion; that world which, on every other occasion, we have constantly to combat.

Behold in what terminate the greatest part of the reconciliations

which are every day made in the world. They once more see each other, but they are not reunited; they promise a mutual friendship, but it is never given; their persons meet, but their hearts are always estranged; and I had reason to say, that the hatreds are unchangeable, and that almost all the reconciliations are mere pretences; that the injury may be forgiven, but that the offender is never loved; that they may cease to treat their brother as an enemy, but that they never regard him as a brother.

And, behold what takes place every day before our eyes. In the world are to be seen public characters, families of illustrious names, who still preserve with each other certain measures of decency, which, indeed, they cannot break through without scandal; yet, nevertheless, live in different interests, in public and avowed sentiments of envy, of jealousy, and of mutual animosity; thwart and do every thing in their power to ruin each other, view each other with the most jealous eyes, and make all their creatures partisans in their resentments and aversions; divide the world, the court, and the city; interest the public in their quarrel, and establish in the world the opinion and the scandal that they hate each other; that they would mutually destroy each other; that they still, it is true, keep up appearances; but that, at bottom, their interests and affections are for ever estranged. Yet, notwithstanding all this, each party lives in a reputation of piety, and of the practice of good works; they have distinguished and highly esteemed confessors; in mutually discharging to each other certain duties, yet living otherwise in a public and avowed hostility, they frequent the sacraments, they are continually in the intercourse of holy things, they coolly approach the altar, they frequently and without scruple present themselves at the penitential tribunal, where, far from confessing their hatred before the Lord, and weeping over the scandal with which it afflicts the people, they make fresh complaints against their enemy; they accuse him, in place of accusing themselves; they make a boast of the vain external duties which they pay to him, and allege them as marks of the heart not being rancorous. What shall I say? And the very ministers of penitence, who should have been the judges of our hatred, frequently become its apologists, adopt a party with the public, enter into all the animosity and prejudices of their penitents, proclaim the justice of their quarrel, and are the cause that the only remedy destined to strike at the root of the evil, answers no other purpose than that of decorating it with the appearance of godliness, and of rendering it more incurable.

Great God! thou alone canst close the wounds which a proud sensibility hath made in my heart, by nourishing unreasonable and iniquitous hatreds which have corrupted it in thy sight. Enable me to forget fleeting and momentary injuries,

in order that thou mayest forget the crimes of my whole life. Is it for me, O my God! to be so feeling and so inexorable to the slightest insults, I who have such necessity for thy mercy and indulgence? Are the injuries of which I complain to be compared with those with which I have a thousand times dishonoured thy supreme grandeur? Must the worm of the earth be irritated and inflamed at the smallest marks of disdain, while thy Sovereign Majesty hath so long, and with so much goodness, endured his rebellions and his offences?

Who am I, to be so keen upon the interests of my glory; I who dare not in thy presence cast mine eyes upon my secret ignominy; I who deserve to be the reproach of men, and the outcast of my people; I who have nothing praiseworthy, according even to the world, but the good fortune of having concealed from it my infamies and my weaknesses; I to whom the most biting reproaches would still be too gentle, and would treat me with too much indulgence; I, in a word, who have no salvation now to hope, if thou forget not thine own glory, which I have so often insulted?

But no, great God! thy glory is in pardoning the sinner, and mine shall be in forgiving my brother. Accept, O Lord, this sacrifice which I make to thee of my resentments. Estimate not its value by the puerility and the slightness of the injuries which I forget, but by that pride which had magnified them, and had rendered me so feeling to them. And seeing thou hast promised to forgive us our trespasses whenever we shall have forgiven the trespasses of our brethren, fulfil, O Lord, thy promises. It is in this hope that I presume to reckon upon thine eternal mercies.

SERMON XV.

THE WOMAN WHO WAS A SINNER.

“And behold a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster-box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.”—LUKE vii. 37, 38.

FROM such abundant tears, so sincere a confusion, and a proceeding so humiliating and uncommon, it may easily be com-

prehended how great must once have been the influence of the passions over the heart of this sinner, and what grace now operateth within her. Palestine had long beheld her as the shame and the reproach of the city; the Pharisee's household views her to-day as the glory of grace and a model of patience. What a change, and what a spectacle!

This soul, fettered, but a moment ago, with the most shameful and the most indissoluble chains, finds nothing now capable of stopping her; and, without hesitation, she flies to seek, at the feet of Jesus Christ, her salvation and deliverance: this soul, hitherto plunged in the senses, and living totally for voluptuousness, in a moment sacrifices their liveliest charms and their dearest ties: this soul, lastly, impatient till then of every yoke, and whose heart had never acknowledged other rule than the caprice of its inclinations, commences her penitence by the most humiliating proceedings and the most melancholy subjections. How admirable, O my God, are the works of thy grace! and how near to its cure is the most hopeless wretchedness, when once it becomes the object of thine infinite mercies! And how rapid and shortened are the ways by which thou conductest thy chosen.

But whence comes it, my brethren, that such grand examples make so trifling an impression upon us? From two prejudices, apparently the most opposite to each other, yet, nevertheless, which proceed from the same principle, and lead to the same error.

The first is, that we figure to ourselves that conversion of the heart required by God as merely a cessation of guilt, the abstaining from certain excessive irregularities, which even decency itself holds out as improper. And as we are at last brought to that, either by age, new situations, or even our own inclinations, which time alone has changed, we never think of going farther; we believe that all is completed, and we listen to the history of the most affecting conversions, held out to us by the church, as to lessons which no longer, in any degree, regard us.

The second goes to another extreme: we represent Christian penitence to ourselves as a horrible situation, and the despair of human weakness; a state without comfort or consolation, and attended by a thousand duties, every one more disgusting than another to the heart; and, repulsed through the error of that gloomy image, the examples of a change find us little disposed to be affected, because they always find us discouraged.

Now, the conversion of our sinner confutes these two prejudices, so dangerous to salvation. First, her penitence not only terminates her errors, it likewise expiates and makes reparation for them. Secondly, her penitence begins, it is true, her tears and sorrow; but it is likewise the commencement to her of new pleasures. Whatever she had despoiled Jesus Christ of in her errors, she restores to him in her penitence: behold their reparation! But

with Jesus Christ she finds in her penitence, that peace and those comforts which she had never experienced in her errors : behold their consolations ! The reparations, and the consolations of her penitence are the whole history of her conversion, and the subject of this Discourse.

PART I.—The office of penitence, says St. Augustine, is that of establishing order wherever sin hath introduced corruption. It is false, if it be not universal ; for order solely results from a perfect subordination of all desires and emotions which spring up in our hearts : every thing must be in its place, in order that that divine harmony, which sin had disturbed, may be restored ; and, while the smallest particular there remains deranged, in vain do you labour to repair the rest ; you only rear up an edifice, which, being improperly arranged, is continually giving way in some of its parts, and confusion and disorder prevail through the whole.

Now, behold the important instruction held out to us in the conversion of this sinner ! Her sin comprised several disorders : first, an iniquitous use of her heart, which had never been taken up but with creatures : secondly, a criminal abuse of all natural gifts, which she had made the instruments of her passions : thirdly, a shameful abasement of her senses, which she had always made to contribute to her voluptuousness and ignominy : lastly, a universal scandal in the notoriety of her errors. Her penitence makes reparation for all these disorders : all, consequently, are forgiven ; for nothing is neglected in the repentance.

I say, first, an iniquitous use of her heart. Yes, my brethren, every love, which has for its object only the creatures, degrades our heart : it is a disorder, to love for itself that which can neither be our happiness nor our perfection, nor, consequently, our ease ; for to love, is to seek our felicity in that which we love ; it is the hope of finding, in the object beloved, whatever is wanting to our heart ; it is the calling it in aid against that shocking void which we feel within ourselves, in the confidence that they shall be able to fill it : to love, is to look upon the object beloved as our resource against all our wants, the cure of all our evils, and the author of all our good. Now, as it is in God alone that we can find all these advantages, it is a disorder, and a debasement of the heart, to seek for them in a vile creature.

And, at bottom, we feel sensibly the injustice of that love : however passionate it be, we quickly discover, in the creatures which inspire it, weaknesses and defects which render them unworthy of it : we soon find them out to be unjust, fanciful, false, vain, and inconstant : the deeper we examine them, the more we say to ourselves, that our heart has been deceived, and that this is not the object which it sought. Our reason inwardly blushes at the weakness of our passion ; we no longer submit to our chains,

but with pain; our passion becomes our burden and our punishment. But, punished without being undeceived in our error, we seek, in a change, a remedy for our mistake: we wander from object to object, and if some one at last chance to fix us, it is not that we are satisfied with our choice, it is that we are tired of our inconstancy.

Our sinner hath wandered in these ways: iniquitous loves had been the cause of all her misfortunes and of all her crimes; and, born to love God alone, he alone it was whom she had never loved. But scarcely hath she known him, says the gospel, when, blushing at the meanness of her former passions, she no longer acknowledges but him alone to be worthy of her heart; all in the creature appears to her empty, false, and disgusting: far from finding those charms, from which her heart had formerly with such difficulty defended itself, she no longer sees in them but their frivolity, their danger, and their vanity.—The Lord alone, in her sight, appears good, real, faithful, constant to his promises, magnificent in his gifts, true in his affection, indulgent even in his anger, alone sufficiently great to fill the whole immensity of our heart; alone sufficiently powerful to satisfy all its desires; alone sufficiently generous to soften all its distresses; alone immortal, and who shall for ever be loved: lastly, to love whom can be followed by the sole repentance of having loved him too late.

It is love, therefore, my brethren, which makes true penitence: for penitence is only a changing of the heart; and the heart does not change but in changing its love: penitence is only the re-establishment of order in man; and man is only in order when he loves the Lord, for whom he is made: penitence is only a reconciliation with God; and your reconciliation is fictitious, if you do not restore to him your heart: in a word, penitence obtains the remission of sins, and sins are remitted only in proportion to our love.

Tell us no more, then, my brethren, when we hold out these grand examples for your imitation, that you do not feel yourselves born for devotion, and that your heart is of such a nature that every thing which is denominated piety is disagreeable to it. What! my dear hearer, your heart is not made for loving its God? Your heart is not made for the Creator who hath given it to you? What! you are born then for vanity and falsehood? Your heart, so grand, so exalted, and which nothing here below can satisfy, has been bestowed on you solely for pleasures which weary you, creatures which deceive you, honours which embarrass you, a world which tires or disgusts you? God alone, for whom you are made, and who hath made you what you are, should find nothing for himself in the principle of your being. Ah! you are unjust toward your own heart: you know not yourself, and you take your corruption for yourself. And, in effect, if not born for virtue, what then is the

melancholy mystery of your lot? For what are you born? What chimera then are you among men? You are born then only for remorse and gloomy care? The Author of your being hath drawn you from nonentity, only to render you miserable? You are gifted then with a heart only to pursue a happiness which either is visionary or which flies from you, and to be a continual burden to yourself?

O man! open here thine eyes; fathom to the bottom the destiny of thy heart, and thou wilt acknowledge that these turbulent passions, which fill thee with such repugnances to virtue, are foreign to thy nature; that such is not the natural state of thy heart; that the Author of nature and of grace hath bestowed on thee a more sublime lot; that thou wert born for order, for righteousness, and for innocence; that thou hast corrupted a happy nature, by turning it toward iniquitous passions; and that, if not born for virtue, we know not what thou art, and thou becomest incomprehensible to thyself.

But you are mistaken, when you consider, as inclinations incompatible with piety, those warm propensities toward pleasure which are born with you. From the instant that grace shall have sanctified them, they will become dispositions favourable for salvation. The more you are animated in the pursuit of the world and its false pleasures, the more eager shall you be for the Lord, and for true riches: the more you have been found tender and feeling by creatures, the easier shall be the access of grace to your heart: in proportion as your nature is haughty, proud, and aspiring, the more shall you serve the Lord, without fear, without disguise, without meanness: the more your character now appears easy, light, and inconstant, the easier it will be for you to detach yourself from your criminal attachments, and to return to your God. Lastly, your passions themselves, if I may venture to speak in this manner, will become the means of facilitating your penitence. Whatever had been the occasion of your destruction, you will render it conducive toward your salvation; you will see and acknowledge, that to have received a tender, faithful, and generous heart, is to have been born for piety, and that a heart which creatures have been able to touch, holds out great and favourable dispositions toward grace.

Peruse what remains to us of the history of the just, and you will see that those who have at the first been dragged away by mad passions, who were born with every talent calculated for the world, with the warmest propensities toward pleasures, and the most opposite to every thing pious, have been those in whom grace hath operated the most wonderful change. And, without mentioning the sinner of our gospel, the Augustines, the Pelagiuses, the Fabioleses, those worldly and dissipated souls, so obstinate and rooted in their debaucheries, and so diametri-

cally opposite, it would seem, to piety, what progress have they not since made in the ways of God! And their former propensities have, as I may say, only paved the way for their penitence. The same soil which nourishes and produces great passions, gives birth likewise to the greatest virtues, when it pleases the Lord to change the heart. My God! thou hast made us all for thee; and in the incomprehensible arrangement of thy providence, and of thy mercy toward man, even our weaknesses are to conduce toward our sanctification. It is thus that our sinner made reparation for the iniquitous use which she had made of her heart.

But, secondly, the love which she had for Jesus Christ was not one of those vain and indolent sensibilities which are rather the natural emotions of an easily affected heart than real impressions of grace, and which never produce any thing in us farther than that of rendering us satisfied with ourselves, and persuading us that our heart is changed: the sacrifices, and not the feelings, prove the reality of love.

Thus, the second disorder of her sin having been the criminal and almost universal abuse of all creatures; the second reparation of her penitence, is the rigorously abstaining from all those things which she had abused in her errors. Her hair, her perfumes, the gifts of body and of nature, had been the instruments of her pleasures; for none is ignorant of the use to which a deplorable passion can apply them; this is the first step of her penitence: the perfumes are abandoned, and even consecrated to a holy ministry: her hair is neglected, and no longer serves but to wipe the feet of her deliverer; beauty, and every attention to the body are neglected, and her eyes are blinded with tears. Such are the first sacrifices of her love: she is not contented with giving up cares visibly criminal, she even sacrifices such as might have been looked upon as innocent, and thinks, that the most proper way of punishing the abuse she had formerly made of them, is by depriving herself of the liberty she might still have had of employing them.

In effect, by having once abused them, the sinner loses the right he had over them: what is permitted to an innocent soul, is no longer so to him who has been so unhappy as to deviate from the right path. Sin renders us, as it were, anathematized to all creatures around us, and which the Lord had destined to our use. Thus, there are rules for an unfaithful soul, not made for other men: he no longer enjoys, as I may say, the common right, and he must no more judge of his duties by the general maxims, but by the personal exceptions which concern him.

Now, upon this principle, you are continually demanding of us, if the use of such and such an artifice in dress be a crime? If such and such public pleasures be forbidden? I mean not here to

decide for others ; but I ask of you who maintain their innocency, whether you have never made a bad use of them ? Have you never made these cares of the body, these amusements, and these artifices, instrumental toward iniquitous passions ? Have you never employed them in corrupting hearts, or in nourishing the corruption of your own ? What ! your entire life has perhaps been one continued and deplorable chain of passions and evils ; you have abused every thing around you, and have made them instrumental to your irregular appetites ; you have called them all in aid to that unfortunate tendency of your heart ; your intentions have even exceeded your evil ; your eye hath never been single, and you would willingly never have had that of others to have been so with regard to you ; all your cares for your person have been crimes ; and when there is question of returning to your God, and of making reparation for a whole life of corruption and debauchery, you pretend to dispute with him for vanities, of which you have always made so infamous a use ? You pretend to maintain the innocency of a thousand abuses, which, though permitted to the rest of men, would be forbidden to you ? You enter into contestation, when it is intended to restrict you from the criminal pomps of the world ; you, to whom the most innocent, if such there be, are forbidden in future, and whose only dress ought henceforth to be sackcloth and ashes ? Can you still pretend to justify cares which are your inward shame, and which have so often covered you with confusion at the feet of the sacred tribunal ? And should so much contestation and so many explanations be required, where your own shame alone should amply suffice ?

Besides, the holy sadness of piety no longer looks upon, but with horror, that which has once been a stumbling-block to us. The contrite soul examines not whether he may innocently indulge in it ; it suffices for him to know, that it has a thousand times been the rock upon which he has seen his innocence split. Whatever has been instrumental in leading him to his evils, becomes equally odious in his sight as the evils themselves ; whatever has been assisting to his passions, he equally detests as the passions themselves ; whatever, in a word, has been favourable to his crimes, becomes criminal in his eyes. Should it even happen that he might be disposed to accord it to his weakness, ah ! his zeal, his compunction, would reject the indulgence, and would adopt the interests of God's righteousness against men ; he could not prevail upon himself to permit abuses, which would be the means of recalling to him his past disorders ; he would always entertain a dread that the same manner of acting might recall the same dispositions, and that, engrossed by the same cares, his heart would find itself the same ; the sole image of his past infidelities disturbs and alarms him ; and, far from bearing about with him their sad remains, he would wish to have it in his power to remove even

from the spots, and to tear himself from the occupations, which renew their remembrance. And, surely, what kind of a penitence must that be which still permits us to love all those things which have been the occasion of our greatest crimes? And, while yet dripping from a shipwreck, can we too strenuously form the resolution of for ever shunning those rocks upon which we had so lately split?

Lastly, true penitence causes us to find every where matter of a thousand invisible sacrifices. It does not confine itself to certain essential privations; every thing which flatters the passions, every thing which nourishes the life of the senses, every superfluity which tends solely to the gratification of self-love, all these become the subject of its sacrifices; and, like a sharp and grievous sword, it every where makes divisions and separations painful to the heart, and cuts even to the quick, whatever in the smallest degree approached too near to the corruption of our propensities. The grace of compunction at once leads the contrite soul to this point; it renders him ingenuous in punishing himself, and arranges matters so well that every thing serves in expiation of his crimes; that duties, social intercourse, honours, prosperity, and the cares attendant upon his station, become opportunities of proving his merit; and that even his pleasures, through the circumspection and faith with which they are accompanied, become praiseworthy and virtuous actions.

Behold the divine secret of penitence! As it officiates here below toward the criminal soul, says Tertullian, as the justice of God; and as the justice of God shall one day punish guilt by the eternal privation of all creatures which the sinner hath abused, penitence anticipates that terrible judgment; it every where imposes on itself the most rigorous privations; and if the miserable condition of human life render the use of present things still requisite, it employs them much less to flatter than to punish the senses, by the sober and austere manner in which it applies them.

You have only to calculate thereupon the truth of your penitence. In vain do you appear to have left off the brutal gratification of the passions, if the same pomp and splendour are requisite toward satisfying that natural inclination which courts distinction through a vain magnificence; the same profusions, in consequence of not having the courage to deprive self-love of accustomed superfluities; the same pleasures of the world, in consequence of being unable to do without it; the same advantages on the part of fortune, in consequence of the continual desire of rising superior to others: in a word, if you can part with nothing; you exclude yourself from nothing; even admitting that all those attachments which you still preserve should not be absolute crimes, your heart is not penitent; your manners are apparently different, but all your passions are still the same; you are apparently changed, but you are not converted. How rare, my brethren, are true penitents!

How common are vain and superficial conversions! And how many souls, changed in the eyes of the world, shall one day find themselves the same before God!

But it is not enough to have attained to that degree of self-denial which keeps us without the circle of attraction of the allurements of guilt; those laborious atonements must likewise be added, which wash out its stains. Thus, in the third place, the sinner of our gospel is not contented with having sacrificed her hair and her perfumes to Jesus Christ; she prostrates herself at his feet, she washes them with her tears, she wipes, she kisses them: and, as the third disorder of her sin had been a shameful subjection of her senses, she begins the reparation of these criminal lewdnesses, by the humiliation and disgust of these lowly services.

New instruction:—it is not sufficient to remove from the passions those allurements which incite them; it is likewise necessary that laborious exertions of such virtues as are most opposite to them, insensibly repress, and recall them to duty and order. You were fond of gaming, pleasures, amusements, and every thing which composes a worldly life; it is doing little to cut off from these pleasures that portion which may still conduct to guilt; if you wish that the love of the world be extinguished in your heart, it is necessary that prayer, retirement, silence, and acts of charity, succeed to these dissolute manners; and that, not satisfied with shunning the crimes of the world, you likewise fly from the world itself. By giving yourself up to boundless and shameful passions, you have fortified the empire of the senses and of the flesh; it is necessary that fasting, watching, the yoke of mortification, gradually extinguish these impure fires, weaken these tendencies, become ungovernable through a long indulgence of voluptuousness, and not only remove guilt from you, but operate, as I may say, to dry up its source in your heart. Otherwise, by sparing, you only render yourself more miserable: the old attachments which you shall have broken without having weakened, and, as it were, rooted them from your heart by mortification, will incessantly be renewing their attacks; your passions, become more violent and impetuous by being checked and suspended, without your having weakened and overcome them, will make you undergo agitations and storms, such as you had never experienced even in guilt: you will behold yourself on the point, every moment, of a melancholy shipwreck; you will never taste of peace in this new life. You will find yourself more weak, more exhausted, more animated for pleasure, more easy to be shaken, and more disgusted with the service of God, in this state of imperfect penitence, than you had even been formerly in the midst of dissipation; every thing will become a rock to you; you will be a continual temptation to yourself; you will be astonished to find within you a still greater repugnance to

duties; and, as it is hardly possible to stand out long against yourself, you will soon become disgusted with a virtue by which you suffer so much; and, in consequence of your having wished to be only a tranquil and mitigated penitent, you will be an unhappy one, without consolation, without peace, and, consequently, without perseverance. To augment and multiply the sacrifices is to abridge the sufferings in virtue; and whatever we are induced to spare to the passions, becomes rather the punishment and the disgust, than the softening of our penitence.

The last disorder which had accompanied the sin of the woman of our gospel, was the publicity of the scandal attending the corruption of her conduct. The scandal of the law, which was dishonoured in the opinion of the Romans and of so many other Gentiles, spread throughout Palestine, and who, witnessing the ill-conduct of our sinner, took occasion, no doubt, from it, to blaspheme the name of the Lord, to despise the sanctity of his law, to harden themselves in their impious superstitions, and to look upon the hope of Israel and the wonders of God, as related in the holy books, as fictions invented to amuse a credulous people.

Scandal of place. Her ill-conduct had been conspicuous in the city, that is to say, in the capital of the country, from whence the report of such accidents was soon circulated throughout Judea. Now, behold the scandals for which her penitence makes reparation,—the scandal of the law, by renouncing the superstitious traditions of the Pharisees, who had adulterated their precepts; and by confessing Jesus Christ, who was the end and the fulfilment of them. For, too frequently, after having dishonoured religion in the minds of the impious, through our excesses and scandalous conduct, we again dishonour it through our pretended piety; we create for ourselves a kind of virtue altogether worldly, superficial, and pharisaical; we become superstitious without becoming penitent; we make the abuses of devotion succeed to those of the world; the only reparation we make for the scandal of our debaucheries, is that of a sensual piety; and we reflect more disgrace upon virtue, through the weaknesses and the illusions which we mingle with it, than we did by our open and avowed excesses. Thus the impious are more hardened in their iniquity, and more removed from conversion, by the example of our false penitence, than ever they had formerly been by the example even of our vices.

Lastly, the scandal of place. That same city which had been the theatre of her shame and of her crimes, becomes that of her penitence. She goes not into retired places to give vent to her sorrows and her tears; she takes no advantage, like Nicodemus, of the shades of night to come to Jesus Christ, nor waits the opportunity of his being in a retired corner of the city, in order to conceal from the eyes of the public the first steps of her conver-

sion. In the face of that great city which she had scandalized by her conduct, she enters into the house of the pharisee, and is not afraid of submitting to have, as spectators of her penitence, those who had been witnesses of her former crimes. For, often, after having despised the world's opinion in debauchery, it becomes dreaded in virtue: the eyes of the public did not appear formidable to us during our dissipation; they become so in our penitence: our vices are carelessly laid open to view; our virtues are backward and cautious: we dare not at first declare openly for Jesus Christ; we are ashamed to show ourselves in a light so new to us; we have gloried in vice as if it had been a virtue, and we blush for being virtuous, as though it were a shame.

As our fortunate sinner had not been timid in evil, so she is not timid in good; she bears, even with a holy insensibility, the reproaches of the pharisee, who recounts, in the presence of all the guests, the infamy of her past manners. For the world, typified by that pharisee, feels a gratification in the mean pleasure of recalling the former errors of those whom grace hath touched: far from reaping any edification from their present good conduct, it is continually dwelling upon their past irregularity; it tries to weaken the merit of what they now do, by renewing upon every occasion the remembrance of what they have done; it would appear that the errors which they lament authorize those which we love, and in which we still continue to live; and that it is more allowable for us to be sinners, since real and sincere penitents repent of having been so. It is thus, O my God! that every thing worketh out our destruction, and that, instead of blessing and praising the riches of thy mercy when thou withdrawest worldly and dissolute souls from the ways of perdition, and instead of being excited, by these grand examples, to have recourse to thy clemency, always so ready to receive the repentant sinner; insensible and blind to his penitence, we are occupied only in recalling his errors, as if we were entitled from thence to say to ourselves, that we have nothing to dread in debauchery; that one day or other we shall likewise become contrite; and that the sincerest penitents having once been perhaps still more deeply involved than we in mad passions, we need not despair of one day or other being able to quit them as well as they! O inexplicable blindness of man, that finds inducements to debauchery even in the examples of penitence!

Such were the reparations of our sinner. But, if it be an error to represent to ourselves a change of life as the simple cessation of our former debaucheries, without adding to that those expiations which wash them out; it is likewise another not less dangerous, the considering these expiations as involving you in a situation, gloomy, wretched, and hopeless. Thus, after having mentioned to you the reparations of her penitence, it is proper that I now lay before you the consolations.

PART II.—Come unto me, says Jesus Christ, all ye who are weary of the ways of iniquity; take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls; for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

This promise, addressed to all criminal souls, who are always miserable in debauchery, is completely fulfilled in the instance of the sinner of our gospel. In effect, every thing which had formerly been to her, in her dissipations, an inexhaustible fund of disgust, becomes now, in her penitence, a fruitful source of consolation; and with Jesus Christ she is happy, through the same means which, during her guilt, had occasioned all her miseries.

Yes, my brethren, an iniquitous love had been her first guilt, and the first source of all her distresses: the first consolation of her penitence is a holy dilection for Jesus Christ, and the wide difference between that divine and new love, and the profane love which had hitherto engrossed her heart. I say, the difference in the object, in the proceedings, and in the correspondence.

In the object: the depravity of her heart had attached her to men, corrupted, inconstant, deceitful, rather companions of her debauchery than real friends, less watchful to render her happy than attentive to the gratification of their own inordinate passions; to men, who always join contempt to a gratified passion; to Amnons, in whose eyes, from the moment that they have obtained their wishes, the unfortunate object of their love becomes vile and hateful; to men, whose weaknesses, artifices, transports, and defects, she well knew, and whom she inwardly acknowledged to be unworthy of her heart, and to whom she paid any attention, more through the unfortunate bias of passion, than the free choice of her reason; in a word, to men, who had never yet been able to fix the natural instability and love of change of her heart. Her penitence attaches her to Jesus Christ, the model of all virtue, the source of all grace, the principle of all light: the more she studies him, the more does she discover his greatness and sanctity; the more she loves him, the more does she find him worthy of being loved: to Jesus Christ, the faithful, immortal, and disinterested friend of her soul, who is concerned for her eternal interests alone; who is interested only in what may render her happy; who is even come to sacrifice his ease, his glory, and his life, in order to secure her immortal happiness; who has distinguished her from among so many women of Judah, by an overflowing of mercy, when she had rendered herself the most conspicuous of her sex, by the excess of her wretchedness; who expects nothing from her, but is willing to bestow on her far more than she could ever have hoped; lastly, to Jesus Christ, who has tranquillized her heart, by purifying it; who has fixed its inconstancy, and subdued the multiplicity of its desires; who has filled the whole extent of

her love; who has restored to her that internal peace which creatures had never been able to bestow.

O my soul! how long shalt thou continue to love, in creatures, what is but thine affliction and punishment? Wouldst thou suffer more by breaking asunder thy chains, than thou now dost in bearing them? Would virtue and innocence be more painful than those shameful passions which at present debase and rend thee? Ah! thou shalt find every thing light and easy, in comparison with the cruel agitations which render thee so unhappy in guilt.—
Difference in the object of her love.

Difference in the steps. The excess of passion had led her to a thousand steps, in opposition to her inclination, her glory, and her reason;—had led her to make a sacrifice to men of her quiet, her inclinations, her honour, and her liberty; to shameful condescensions and disagreeable submissions; to important sacrifices, for which the only return was their thinking themselves more entitled from thence to exact still more: for such is the ingratitude of men; the more you allow them to become masters of your heart, the more they erect themselves its tyrant: in their opinion, the excess of your attachment to them diminishes its merit; and they punish you for the fervour and the shame of your transports, by taking occasion, even from thence, to suffer all, even to their gratitude, to be cooled.

Behold the ungrateful returns experienced by our sinner in the ways of the passions! But in her penitence every thing is reckoned: the slightest step which she takes for Jesus Christ is noticed, is praised, is defended by Jesus Christ himself. The pharisee vainly endeavours to lessen her merit (for the world never studies but to diminish the value of the virtues of the just); the Saviour undertakes her defence: "Seest thou this woman?" said he to him; as if he thereby meant to say, Knowest thou all the merit of the sacrifices which she makes to me, and how far the strength and the excess of her love for me extend? She hath not ceased to wash my feet with tears, and to wipe them with the hairs of her head. He reckons, he observes every thing; a sigh, a tear, a simple movement of the heart: nothing is lost upon him of whatever is done for him; nothing escapes the exactness of his glances, and the tenderness of his heart; we are well assured that we serve no ungrateful master; he overvalues even the slightest sacrifices. "Seest thou this woman?" He would, it appears, that all men view her with the same eyes that he did: that all men should be as equitable estimators as himself of her love, and of her tears: he no longer sees her debaucheries; he forgets a whole life of error and guilt; he sees only her repentance and her tears.

Now, what consolation for a contrite soul to have it in her power to say to herself, Till now, I have lived only for error and vanity. My days, my years, my cares, my inquietudes, my

distresses, are all hitherto lost, and no longer exist, even in the memory of those men for whom alone I have lived, for whom alone I have sacrificed every thing. My rectitude, my attentions, my anxieties, have never been repaid but with ingratitude; but henceforth, whatever I do for Jesus Christ will receive its full estimation: my sufferings, my afflictions, the slightest sacrifices of my heart; my sighs, my tears, which I had so often shed in vain for creatures, all shall be written in immortal characters in the book of life: all these shall eternally exist in the remembrance of that faithful Master whom I serve; all these, in spite of the defects mingled with them by my weakness and my corruption, shall be excused, and even purified through the grace of my Redeemer, and he will crown his gifts by rewarding my feeble deserts. I no longer live but for eternity; I no longer labour in vain; my days are real, my life is no longer a dream. O, my brethren, what a blessed gain is piety; and how great are the consolations which a soul recalled to Jesus Christ receives, in compensation for the trifling losses which he sacrifices to him!

Lastly, difference in the certitude of the correspondence. That love of creatures which actuated our sinner, had always been attended with the most cruel uncertainties. One is always suspicious of an equal return of love: the heart is ingenious in rendering itself unhappy, and in tormenting itself with vain fears, suspicions, and jealousies; the more generous, true, and frank it is itself, the more doth it suffer; it is the martyr of its own distrusts. You know this well; and it does not belong to me to pretend to speak from this place the language of your extravagant passions.

But what a new destiny in the change of her love! Scarcely is her love of Jesus Christ commenced, when she is certain of being loved. She hears from his divine mouth the favourable sentence, which, in remitting her sins, confirms to her the love and the affection of him who remits them. Not only are her debaucheries forgotten, but she is urged to be convinced, in her own mind, that they are forgotten, pardoned, and washed out. All her fears are prevented, and ground is no more left for mistrust or uncertainty; nor can she longer suspect the love of Jesus Christ, without at the same time suspecting his power and the faithfulness of his promises.

Such is the lot of a contrite soul on quitting the tribunal where Jesus Christ, through the ministry of the priest, has remitted debaucheries, which he has washed out with his tears and his love. In spite of that uncertainty inseparable from the present state of life, whether he be worthy of love or hatred, an internal peace bears testimony in the bottom of his heart that he is restored to Jesus Christ: he experiences a calm and a joy in his conscience which can be the fruit of righteousness alone. Not that he is entirely delivered from alarm and apprehension on ac-

count of his past infidelities, and that, in certain moments, more forcibly struck with horror at his past errors, and the severity of God's judgments, he is not tempted to consider all as hopeless to him; but Jesus Christ, who himself excites these storms in his heart, has quickly calmed them; his voice still inwardly says to him, as formerly to Peter, alarmed upon the waves, "O thou of little faith, wherefore doubtest thou?" Have I not given thee sufficient proofs of my kindness and my protection? Reflect upon all that I have done in order to withdraw thee from the ways of iniquity. I seek not with such perseverance the sheep that I love not; I recall them not from so far, to let them perish before my eyes. Distrust, then, no more my affection; dread only thine own lukewarmness or inconstancy.—First consolation of her penitence;—the difference of her love.

The second is the sacrifice of her passions. She throws at the feet of Jesus Christ, her perfumes, her hair, all the attachments of her heart, all the deplorable instruments of her vanities and of her crimes; and do not suppose that in acting thus she sacrifices her pleasures; she sacrifices only her anxieties and her punishments.

In vain is it said that the cares of the passions constitute the felicity of those possessed by them; it is a language in which the world glories, but which experience belies. What punishment to a worldly soul, anxious to please, are the solicitous cares of a beauty which fades and decays every day! What attentions and constraints they must take upon themselves, upon their inclinations, upon their pleasures, upon their indolence! What inward vexations, when these cares have been unavailing, and when more fortunate charms have attracted the general attention! What tyranny is that of custom! It must, however, be submitted to, in spite of deranged affairs, a remonstrating husband, tradesmen who murmur, and who dearly sell the remissions perhaps required. I say nothing of the cares of ambition: what a life is that passed in designs, projects, fears, hopes, alarms, jealousies, subjection, and meannesses! I speak not of a profane connexion: what terrors lest the mystery be laid open,—what eyes to shun,—what spies to deceive,—what mortifying repulses to undergo from the very person for whom they have perhaps sacrificed their honour and their liberty, and of whom they dare not even complain! To all these, add those cruel moments when passion, less unruly, allows us leisure to inspect ourselves, and to feel the whole infamy of our situation; those moments in which the heart, born for more solid joys, wearies of its own idols, and finds ample punishment in its disgusts and in its own inconstancy. World profane! If such be the felicity thou vauntest so much, distinguish thy worshippers, and, by crowning them with such a happiness, punish them for the faith which they have so credulously given to thy promises.

Behold what our sinner casts at the feet of Jesus Christ!

Her bonds, her troubles, her slavery; in appearance, the instruments of her pleasures,—in truth, the source of all her afflictions. Now, granting that this were the only consolation of virtue, is it not a sufficiently grand one, that of deliverance from the keenest anxieties of the passions? To have your happiness no longer dependent upon the inconstancy, the perfidy, and the injustice of creatures; to have placed yourself beyond the reach of events; to possess in your own heart all that is wanting toward your happiness, or to suffice, as I may say, to yourself? What do you lose in sacrificing gloomy and anxious cares, in order to find peace and inward joy; and to lose all for Jesus Christ, is it not, as the apostle says, to have gained all? Thy faith hath made thee whole, said the Saviour to the woman; go in peace. Behold the treasure which she receives in return for the passions sacrificed to him; behold the reward and the consolation of her tears and of her repentance,—that peace of mind, which she had never as yet been able to find, and which the world had never bestowed. Fools! says a prophet; misery to you, then, who drag on the load of your passions, as the ox in labouring drags on the chains of the yoke which galls him, and who rush on to your destruction, by the way even of anguish, subjection, and constraint!

Lastly, by her sin she had been degraded in the eyes of men: they beheld with contempt the shame and the infamy of her conduct; she lived degraded from every right which a good reputation and a life free from reproach bestow; and the pharisee is even astonished that Jesus Christ should condescend to suffer her at his feet.

For the world, which authorizes whatever leads to dissipation, never fails to cover dissipation itself with infamy: it approves, it justifies the maxims, the habits, and the pleasures which corrupt the heart; and yet it insists, that innocency and regularity of manners be united with corruption of heart; it inspires all the passions, yet it always blames the consequences of them; it requires you to study the art of pleasing, and it despises you from the moment that you have succeeded; its lascivious theatres resound with extravagant praises of profane love, and its conversations consist only of biting satires upon those who yield themselves up to that unfortunate tendency; it praises the graces, the charms, the miserable talents which light up impure desires, and it loads you with everlasting shame and reproach from the moment that you appear inflamed with them. O, how infinitely above description wretched are those who drag on in a still beloved world, and which they find themselves incapable of doing without, the miserable wrecks of a reputation, either blasted or but feebly confirmed; and wherever they show themselves, to arouse the remembrance or the suspicion of their crimes!

Such had been the afflictions and the disgraces with which the

passions and the debaucheries of our sinner were followed ; but her penitence restores to her more honour and more glory than had been taken from her by the infamy of her crimes. This sinner, so despised in the world, whose name was never mentioned without a blush, is praised for the very things which even the world considers as most honourable, namely, kindness of heart, generosity of sentiments, and the fidelity of a holy love ; this sinner, with whom no comparison durst ever be made, and whose scandal was without example in the city, is exalted above the pharisee ; the truth, the sincerity of her faith, of her compunction, of her love, merits at once the preference over a superficial and pharisaical virtue : lastly, this sinner, whose name was concealed, as if unworthy of being pronounced, and whose only appellation is that of her crimes, is become the glory of Jesus Christ, the praise of grace, and an honour to the gospel. O matchless power of virtue !

Yes, my brethren, virtue renders us a spectacle, worthy of God, of angels, and of men : it once more exalts a fallen reputation : it renews our claim, even here below, to rights and honours which we had forfeited : it washes out stains, which the malignity of men would wish to be immortal : it rejoins us to the servants of Jesus Christ, and to the society of the just, of whose intercourse we were formerly unworthy : it calls forth in us a thousand laudable qualities, which the vortex of the passions had almost for ever ingulfed : lastly, it attracts more glory to us than our past manners had attached shame and contempt. While Jonah is rebellious to the will of God, he is the curse of heaven, and of the earth ; even idolaters are under the necessity of separating him from their society, and of casting him out, as a child of infamy and malediction ; and the belly of a monster is the only asylum in which he can conceal his reproach and shame. But, touched with contrition, scarcely hath he implored the eternal mercies of the God of his fathers, when he becomes the admiration of the proud Nineveh ; when the grandees and the people unite to render him honours till then unheard of ; when the prince himself, full of respect for his virtue, descends from the throne, and covers himself with sackcloth and ashes, in obedience to the man of God. Those passions which the world praises and inspires, had drawn upon us the contempt even of the world ; virtue, which the world censures and combats, attracts to us, however unwillingly on its part, its veneration and homages.

What, my dear hearer, prevents you then from terminating your shame, and your inquietudes, with your crimes ? Is it the reparations of penitence which alarm you ? But the longer you delay, the more they multiply, the more debts are contracted, the more you increase the necessity of new rigours to your weakness. Ah ! if the reparations discourage you at present, what shall it one day be, when, your crimes multiplied to infinity, almost no punishment whatever shall be capable of expi-

ating them? They shall then plunge you into despair; and you will adopt the miserable part of casting off all yoke, and of no longer reckoning upon your salvation; you will raise up to yourself new maxims and modes of reasoning, in order to tranquillize your mind in freethinking; you will consider as needless a penitence which will then appear to you impossible. When the embarrassments of the conscience come to a certain point, we feel a kind of gloomy satisfaction in persuading ourselves that no resource is left; we calm ourselves on the foundations of truths, when we see ourselves so far removed from what they prescribe; we fly to unbelief for a remedy, from the moment that we believe it is no longer to be found in faith; from the moment that the chaos becomes inexplicable to us, we have soon settled it in our minds that all is uncertain. And, besides, what should there be so melancholy and so rigorous in reparations, whose only merit ought to spring from love?

Unbelieving soul! you dread being unable to support the holy sadness of penitence; yet you have hitherto been able to bear up against the internal horrors of guilt: virtue in your eyes seems wearisome beyond sufferance; yet have you long dragged on under the stings of an ulcerated conscience, which no joy could enliven. Ah! since you have hitherto been able to bear up against all internal anguish, the bitternesses, the disgusts, the gloomy agitations of iniquity, no longer dread those of virtue: in the pains and sufferances inseparable from guilt, you have undergone trials far beyond what may be attached to virtue; and doubly so, because grace softens, and renders even pleasing, the sufferings of piety, while the only sweetener of guilt is the bitterness of guilt itself.

My God! is it possible, that, for so many years past, I have had strength to wander in such arduous and dreary ways, under the tyranny of the world and of the passions, and that I should be unable to live with thee, under all the tenderness of thy regards, under the wings of thy compassion, and under the protection of thy arm? Art thou then so cruel a master? The world, which knows thee not, believes that thou renderest miserable those who serve thee: but we, O Lord, we know that thou art the gentlest and best of masters, the tenderest of all fathers, the most faithful of all friends, the most munificent of all benefactors; and that thou givest a foretaste, by a thousand inward consolations with which thou indulgest thy servants here below, of that eternal felicity which thou preparest for them hereafter.

SERMON XVI.

THE WORD OF GOD.

“It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”—MATTHEW iv. 4.

NOTHING can give a better idea of the power and of the sublimity of the word of the gospel, than the images employed by Jesus Christ to foretell its effects. One while it is a sacred sword, which is to divide father from child, husband from wife, brother from sister, and man from himself; to bend all minds under the yoke of faith, to subjugate the Cæsars, to triumph over sages and the learned, and to exalt the standard of the cross upon the wrecks of idols and of empires: through that is represented to us its might, which the whole world hath been unable to resist.

One while it is a divine fire, spread in an instant throughout the earth, which goes to dissolve the mountains, to depopulate the cities, to people the forest, to reduce into ashes the profane temples, to inflame the minds of men, and to make them fly, like madmen, to death in the sight of nations; and under these parabolical traits are figured to us the promptitude of its operations and the rapidity of its victories.

One while it is a mysterious leaven, which joins and reunites the whole mass; which binds all its parts together, and impresses upon them one general efficacy and virtue; which overthrows the distinctions of Jew and Gentile, Greek and Barbarian, and gives to all the same name and the same being: and here you comprehend how great must be its sanctity and inward might, seeing it hath purified the whole universe, and of all nations hath made but one people.

Another time it is a seed, which at first appears lost in the earth, but afterward springs up, and multiplies an hundred fold. And behold the first cause of the fecundity! Not the husbandman who sows, but the invisible author who giveth the increase.

But at present Jesus Christ compares it to bread, which serves as the food of man; and he thereby means to inform us that the word of the gospel is a powerful and solid nourishment, often pernicious to such as receive it into a diseased and corrupted heart, and useful only to souls who, with a holy appetite, nourish themselves with it, and who bring to this place a heart prepared to listen to it.

To confine myself, then, to this idea, I shall say nothing of the

wonders which this word, announced by twelve poor and humble men, formerly wrought throughout the universe, I shall pass over in silence the sanctity of its doctrine, the sublimity of its counsels, the wisdom of its maxims; and, limiting myself to the instruction, and to that which may render the word of the gospel, which we announce, beneficial to you, I shall inform you, firstly, what are the dispositions which ought to accompany you to this holy place for the purpose of hearing it; and, secondly, in what mind you ought afterward to listen to it: two duties, not only neglected, but even unknown to the greatest part of the believers who run in crowds to the feet of these Christian pulpits, and which are the ordinary cause of our ministry being attended with so little fruit.

PART I.—It is not the body of external works, says St. Augustine, which distinguishes the just from the carnal Christian: it is the invisible spirit which animates them. Pious actions are frequently common to the good and to the wicked; it is the disposition of the heart which discriminates them. All run, says the apostle, but all reach not the goal, for it is not the same spirit which impels them.

Now, to apply this maxim to my subject: of all the duties of Christian piety, there is undoubtedly none of which the external is more equally fulfilled by the worldly, and by the pious, than that of coming to hear the word of the gospel. All run in crowds, like the Israelites formerly to the foot of the holy mountain, to hear the words of the law. Our temples are hardly sufficient to contain the multitude of believers: profane assemblies break up to swell the number of the holy assembly at the hours of instruction; and the ages which have seen the zeal of Christians so relaxed on every other duty of religion, have not, it would seem, witnessed it in this. Nevertheless, of all the ministries confided to the church for the consummation of the chosen, there is scarcely any so unprofitable as that of the word; and the most efficacious means which the church hath, in every age, employed for the conversion of men, is become, at present, its feeblest resource. You, my brethren, are yourselves a melancholy proof of this truth. Never were instructions more frequent than in our days, and never were conversions so rare.

It is of importance, therefore, to explain the causes of so common and so deplorable an abuse. Now, the first is undoubtedly the want of those dispositions which ought to accompany you to this holy place, in order to listen to the word of salvation. And, surely, if St. Paul formerly commanded all believers to purify themselves before coming to eat of the bread of life,—if he declared to them, that not to distinguish it from ordinary food was to render themselves guilty of the body of the Lord, we have no less reason to tell you that you ought to prove yourselves, and to prepare your soul before you come to participate in that spiritual food which we break to the people; and that not to distinguish it from the word

of men, in your manner of listening to it, is to render yourselves guilty even of the word of Jesus Christ.

The first disposition required of you by the sanctity of this word, when you come to hear it, is a sincere desire that it may be useful to you. Before coming to our temples, you ought privately, in your own house, to address yourself to the Father of Light, to entreat him to bestow upon you that ear of the heart which alone makes his voice to be heard; to give to his word that efficacy, that inward unction, those attractions so powerful and so successful in the conversion of sinners, that he may overcome that insensibility which you have opposed to all the truths hitherto heard; that he fix those momentary feelings which you have so often experienced while listening to us, but which have never been productive of any consequences toward your salvation; that to us he give that zeal, that wisdom, that dignity, that fulness of his Spirit, those piercing lights, that divine vehemence which carries conviction to the heart, and which never speaks in vain; that he form in our hearts the relish of those truths which he putteth in our mouths; that he render us insensible to your praises, or to your censures, in order that we may be more useful to your wants; that the ardent desire to accomplish your salvation fully compensate the want of those talents denied to us by nature; and that we honour our ministry, not by seeking to please, but to save you.

And, surely, if the Israelites, before approaching Mount Sinai to hear the words of the law which the angel was to announce to them, were obliged, by the order of the Lord, to purify themselves, to wash their garments, and even to abstain from the holy duties of marriage, in order to prepare themselves for that grand operation, and to carry nothing to the foot of the mountain unworthy of the sanctity of the law they went to hear; is it not, says a holy father, much more reasonable, when you come to hear the words of a more holy law, that you bring there at least those precautions of faith, of piety, of external respect, which mark in you a sincere desire of conforming your manners to those maxims which we are to announce to you? What, my brethren! are the precepts of Jesus Christ, the words of eternal life, to be listened to with less precaution than the ordinances of a figurative law? Is it because they are no longer announced to you by an angel from heaven? But are not we equally as he, the instruments of God to promulgate his word, and, like him, do we not speak in his place? Did the angel upon the mountain bear more the mark of Divinity than we bear of him? He wrote the law upon tables of stone; the grace of our ministry engraves it on hearts. He promised milk and honey; and we announce real and everlasting riches. The thunders of heaven, which accompanied his menaces against the transgressors of the law, overthrew the people struck with terror at the foot of the mountain; but what were these threatenings and temporal maledic-

tions, their cities demolished, their wives and children led into captivity, when compared to that eternal misery which we are instructed continually to foretell to the violaters of the law of God? Separate what we are from the ministry which we fill, and what is there here, either less awful or less respectable than upon mount Sinai?

And, nevertheless, what preparations accompany you to an action so holy and so worthy of respect? A vain curiosity which you wish to gratify; an irksome leisure which you are well pleased to have amused; a religious spectacle, the pleasure of which you wish to share; a custom which you follow, because the world hath adopted it? What do I know? The pleasure, perhaps, of pleasing a master, by imitating his respect for the word of the gospel, and far more in order to attract his regards than those of divine mercy? Once more, what do I know? Perhaps views still more criminal, and of which we cannot speak without degrading the dignity of our ministry. No motive of salvation leads you here; no view of faith prepares you, no sentiment of piety accompanies you to this place; in short, your coming to listen to the holy word is no work of religion.

First cause of the inutility of our ministry. For, how is it possible that a proceeding altogether profane send a disposition to grace; and that, in this multitude of believers, assembled in this holy place, the goodness of God distinguish you from among the crowd, to open your heart to the word of life; you who have brought hither only those dispositions which are most calculated to keep at a distance that mercy? My brethren, as religion hath nothing grander, in one sense, than the charge of the doctrine and of truth; so piety likewise knows nothing so important, and which requires more religious precautions, than a proper attention to, and the being well instructed in them.

The second disposition which ought to accompany you to this holy place, is, a disposition of grief and shame, founded on the little fruit you have hitherto reaped from so many truths already heard. You ought to reflect upon all those feelings of compunction, which the Lord, through the ministry of the word, hath operated in your hearts, yet which have never been attended with any success toward your salvation; so many pious resolutions, inspired in this place, which seemed to promise a change of life, yet which have all vanished on the first temptation. For, what in this ought most to alarm you, is, that all those truths which have made only such momentary impressions on you, are so many witnesses, who shall one day depose against you before the tribunal of Jesus Christ: in proportion to the times that the word of the gospel hath failed to touch you even to repentance, so many times hath it rendered you more unworthy of obtaining the grace of repentance. Faith, on this point, admits of no medium; and, if you depart unchanged, you depart, in some respect, more culpable

than before, because, to all your other crimes, you have added that of contempt of the holy word.

Behold the reflections which ought to occupy your faith; and, when you enter the assembly of believers, you ought, while trembling over the past, to demand of yourself,—am I going to hear a word which shall judge me, or truths which shall deliver me? Am I going to offer up to the compassion of God a docile and willing heart, or to his justice fresh motives of condemnation against myself? It is now so long since truths have been announced to me, the force of which my utmost deference to the passions cannot weaken in my mind; for, in spite of myself, they make me inwardly acknowledge the error of my ways: yet, have I taken a single step toward quitting them? I have so long been warned, that the body of a Christian is the temple of God; have I, in consequence, become more temperate and chaste? I have so long heard it said, that, “if thine eye be evil, pluck it out, and cast it far from thee;” have I attained strength for such separations which I know to be so indispensable toward my salvation? I have so long been told, that to defer, as I have done, from day to day, my penitence, is to be determined to die in sin; do I, even now, find myself more disposed to quit my deplorable situation, and with a willing heart to begin the work of my salvation?

Great God! cease not to give me a heart susceptible to truths, which always affect, but never change me; and punish not the abuse which I make of thy word, by depriving it, with regard to me, of that efficacy which thou still permittest it to have, in order to recall me from my errors to penitence! And, my brethren, how many believers who listen to me, formerly alive to those truths which we announce, no longer offer to them now but a tranquil and a hardened heart! They neglected those happy times when grace was yet willing to open this way of conversion; and, ever since so continued and so fatal a negligence, they listen to us with indifference, and the most terrible truths in our mouths are no longer in their ears but sounding brass, and a tinkling cymbal.

Now, I ask your own hearts, my brethren, if this feeling of sorrow, for the little advantage you have hitherto reaped from so many instructions, is even known to you? Doth that outward pomp, with which you come here, worldly women, announce that disposition? Do not the same indecent and vain cares, which fit you for profane spectacles, accompany you to our instructions, where the world is condemned? Do you make the smallest difference there in your appearance? And doth it not seem, either that we are to announce the foolish maxims of the theatres, or that you come for the sole purpose of insulting, by an indecent carriage, even in the eyes of the world, the holy maxims of the gospel?

But what do I say, my dear hearer? Far from reproaching to yourselves so many truths, heard hitherto without fruit,

alas ! you are perhaps delighted at your insensibility ; you perhaps pride yourselves and indulge a deplorable vanity, in listening to us with indifference ; you perhaps consider it as giving you an air of consequence, and as a proof of superiority of mind, that what others are affected by, should leave you tranquil and calm ; you perhaps make a vain boast of your insensibility. It seems, that in you it would be a weakness to be affected by truths which formerly triumphed over philosophers and Cæsars ; by truths, evidently come down from heaven, and which bear with them such divine marks of sublimity and wisdom ; by truths which do such honour to man, and alone worthy of reason ; by truths, so soothing and consolatory to the heart, and alone calculated to bestow internal tranquillity and peace. Lastly, by truths, which propose to us such grand interests, and toward which we can never be indifferent, without folly and madness. You vaunt the little success of our zeal, and that all our discourses leave you exactly as they found you ; and, in declaring this, you think you are doing honour to your reason. I do not say to you, that you make a boast of being in that depth of the abyss, and in that state of reprobation which is now almost beyond resource, and which is worthy both of horror and pity ; but I say to you, that the surest and most established mark of a light and frivolous mind, of a weak and limited reason, of an ill-formed heart, equally incapable of elevation and dignity, is that of finding nothing which strikes, which astonishes, which satisfies, and which interests you, in the wise and sublime truths of the morality of Jesus Christ.

For the sinners of another character still preserve at least some remains of respect for, and a certain consciousness of, the truth which subsists with a life altogether criminal, but which is always the mark of a good heart, of a heart which still retains a relish for good, of a judicious reason, which, though led away by the world and the passions, knows to do justice to itself, still feels the force of that truth which condemns it, and leaves within us resources of salvation and repentance. These sinners, at least, acknowledge that we are right : they change nothing, it is true, of their manners ; but the truth at least affects, disturbs, agitates, and excites within them some feeble desires of salvation and hopes of a future conversion ; they are sorry to find themselves even too susceptible of the terrors of faith ; they are almost afraid of listening to us, lest they lose that false tranquillity which is the only comfort of their crimes ; on quitting our instructions, they seek, in dissipation, to enliven a fund of anxiety and sadness which the truths they come from hearing have left in their soul ; they immediately hurry into the world and its pleasures, with that inward sting which the word of God hath left in their heart, there to seek out a soothing and deceitful hand which may draw it out, and which may close up that wound from which alone its cure ought to flow ; they dread

the breaking of their chains; they turn away their head, that they may not see that light which comes to disturb the comfort of their sleep. They love their passions, I confess, but at least they insult not the truth; on the contrary, they render glory to its might, by erecting defences against it; they are feeble sinners, who, dreading their incapability of defence against God, fly from, and shun him. But for you, you make a vain-glorious boast of listening to him with indifference, and of not dreading him; you find it grand and philosophical to have placed yourselves above all these vulgar terrors; you believe that the pride of your reason would be dishonoured by any religious dread; and while you are internally the meanest and the most cowardly soul, the most dejected by the first danger which threatens you, the most disheartened by the smallest accident, the very shuttlecock of every frivolous hope and fear of the earth, you pique yourself upon an undaunted courage against the truth; that is to say, that you are possessed of every thing which is mean and vulgar in fear, and you are ashamed of having that only portion of it which is dignified and reasonable; you have no resistance to offer against the world, and you make a vain parade of a senseless valour against God.

Second disposition which ought to accompany you to our instructions,—a sorrow for the little fruit you have hitherto reaped from them. The last disposition is a grateful feeling for that mean of salvation still provided for you by God, in preserving the sacred trust of the truth, and in continuing amid you the succession of those ministers alone authorized to announce to you the holy word.

In effect, the most terrible chastisement with which God formerly struck the iniquities of his people, was that of rendering his word rare and precious among them. As he saith through his prophet Amos, “And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the east even to the west; they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it.” And, not only he ceased to raise up true prophets in Israel, but he likewise permitted false teachers to spring up among his people, who turned the tribes away from his worship, and preached gods to them which their fathers had never known.

Now, my brethren, it is a signal mercy of God, that, notwithstanding the iniquities which seem to have attained to their utmost height among you, he still raiseth up to you prophets and pastors who hold out a sound and a faultless word. It is a most singular protection of the Lord, that error hath not been permitted to prevail over truth among us. And what have you done to merit the being thus distinguished from so many other nations? Why is it that you are not involved in the same condemnation? Why have you dwelt in that happy land of Goshen, alone shone upon by the lights of heaven, while all the rest of Egypt was enveloped in darkness? Is it not

the sole mercy of God who hath marked you out from among so many nations which applaud themselves in their error? You are still under the care of your pastors; you still receive from their mouths the doctrine of the apostles; truth still flows upon you in a pure and divine stream; Christian pulpits still resound in every part with the maxims of faith and of piety; and by preserving to you the doctrine and the blessings of instruction, the goodness of God still provides for you a thousand means of salvation.

Nevertheless, when you come to listen to us, do you bring a heart filled with gratitude? Do you consider, as a signal blessing of God, the charge of the truth and of the holy word, which he hath preserved, and permitted still to be announced to you? Do you ever say, with the prophet, "He hath not dealt so with any nation; and as for his judgments, they have not known them?"

Alas! you bring here only vanity and irreligious disgust. The most wearisome of your moments are those which you employ in listening to truths which ought to compose the whole consolation of your life. We are even obliged to respect your languors and disgusts, by often mingling human ornaments with the truth, which is thereby weakened. It would indeed appear, that we come here to speak to you for ourselves; and you give the same attention to us as you do to troublesome mendicants who are soliciting your favour. You have no regret for moments occupied by the frivolous pleasures of a profane spectacle. There alone it is that every thought of business, of fortune, and of family, is rejected as an intrusion, and that, all else forgotten, the mind, formed for more serious matters, feasts with avidity on chimerical adventures. It is from thence that you always come out occupied and delighted with the lascivious maxims promulgated by a criminal theatre. You dwell with transport on those parts which have made the most dangerous impressions upon the heart; you come filled with their remembrance even to the foot of the altar. These images, so fatal to innocence, can no longer be effaced; while, on quitting the word, the only portion retained by your memory is perhaps the defects of him who hath announced it to you.

My brethren, God no longer punisheth in a grievous manner the contempt of his word. He, no doubt, might still transport his gospel amidst those barbarous nations who have never heard his name, and abandon anew his heritage; he might draw from out of their deserts ferocious and infidel nations, and deliver up to them our temples and our habitations, as he formerly delivered up those churches so celebrated, which the Tertullians, the Cyprians, the Augustines had illustrated, and where now not a trace of Christianity remains but in the insults which Jesus Christ there receives, and in the shackles with which believers are there loaded: he might do it; but he avengeth himself more secretly, and perhaps more terribly. He leaveth to you still the spectacle and all the outward

ceremony of the preaching of the gospel, but he turneth the whole fruit of it upon the simple and ignorant inhabitants of the country; the terrors of faith are no longer but for them. He no longer withdraweth his prophets from cities; but he taketh away from them, if I may venture to say so, the power and the influence of their ministry: he striketh these holy clouds with dryness and unfruitfulness: he raiseth up to you such as render truth flowery and beautiful, but who do not render it amiable; who please, but who do not convert you: he permitteth the holy terrors of his doctrine to be weakened in our mouths: he no longer draweth forth, from the treasures of his mercy, grand characters like those raised up in the ages of our forefathers, who renewed cities and kingdoms, who led the great and the people, and who changed the palaces of kings into houses of penitence: he permitteth that we, weak men, succeed to these apostolic men.

What more shall I add? We assemble here, like Paul formerly in Athens, idle and curious spectators, whose only view is that of hearing something new; while those who perform the functions of their ministry among your vassals, see with consolations at their feet, like Esdras formerly, simple Israelites, who are unable to retain their tears in hearing only the words of the law. We amuse the leisure and the idleness of princes and the great of the earth, while, in the country, holy ministers bring forth Jesus Christ, and reap an abundant harvest: in a word, we preach, and they convert. It is thus, O my God, that in secret thou exercisest severe and terrible judgments.

But, my brethren, why may not we say here to you, what Paul and Barnabas formerly said to the unbelieving Jews? "It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you; but, seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo! we turn to the Gentiles." We shall therefore turn toward the nations hitherto abandoned, toward those humble and poor people buried in ignorance, who cultivate your lands, and who will, with faith and gratitude, receive that grace which you reject. Ah! our labours there would be much more availing, our yoke more easy, our ministry more consoling: we should not then, it is true, reckon among our hearers, names celebrated in history; but we would reckon the names of those who are written in heaven: we should not see there assembled all those titles and splendid dignities, which form the whole glory of the world which passeth away; but we would there see faith, piety, and innocence, which compose the whole glory of the Christian who eternally endureth: we should not hear there vain applauses given to the language of the man, and not to that of faith; but we would behold those tears flowing which are the immortal praise of grace: our pulpits might not, indeed, be surrounded with so much

pomp; but our hearers would be a spectacle worthy of angels, and of God.

Such are the dispositions which ought to prepare you for our instructions. It is necessary now to instruct you on the mind in which you ought to listen to us.

PART II.—In order toward instructing you on the mind in which you ought to listen to the holy word, it is required only to establish at first what are its authority and its end. Its authority, which is divine, demands a respectful and docile mind; its end, which is the conversion of hearts, demands a spirit of faith, which searches in it only such lights as may enable it to quit its errors, and such remedies as may cure its evils.

First, I say that its authority is divine. Yes, my brethren, the word which we announce to you is not our word, but the word of him who sendeth us. From the moment that we are established by him in the holy ministry, through the way of a legitimate call, he willeth that you consider us as sent by him, as speaking to you here on his part, and as only lending our weak voice to his divine words. We bear, it is true, that treasure in vessels of earth; but it thereby loses nothing of its majesty. Like those pitchers which Gideon formerly employed against the enemies of the Lord, the sound may be mean and contemptible; but truth, that divine light which God hath placed within us, is not, from thence, less descended from heaven, or destined, like the lamps of Gideon, still to strike with terror unfaithful souls.

Now, you owe, in the first place, to the authority of this divine word, a pious docility and an attention to it, rather in the light of disciples than of judges. In effect, we expose to you the rules of worship and of piety, the decisions of the gospel, the laws of the church, and the maxims of the holy. We come not here to give you our own opinions, our prejudices, our thoughts; this is not a pulpit of controversy, it is the place of truth: nothing which can afford room for disputation ought ever to find place in the pulpit of peace and of unity; we speak here in the name of the church, and are only the interpreters of her faith and of her doctrine.

Nevertheless, how many of those men, so wise in their own conceit, and who pique themselves upon sagacity and reason, come here with a mind set against, and, as it were, watchfully upon guard against all the terrors of the holy word! They make not a boast, like the sinners we have lately mentioned, of being callous to all truth; but they look upon our ministry as an art of exaggeration and hyperbole; the most holy emotions of zeal are only, in their opinion, studied tricks of human artifice; the most awful threatenings, only the sallies of a vain eloquence; the most incontrovertible maxims, only discourses adapted rather to

custom than to truth. Such, my brethren, is the deplorable situation in which the greatest part of you find yourselves here. You always inwardly oppose, to that truth which we announce, the maxims and the prejudices of the world, which contradict it; you are ingenious in weakening in your own breast, by specious reasons, the pretended excess of our maxims; you come here to combat, and not to yield to the force, or to the light of truth; you come here, it would seem, only in order to enter into contestation with God, to invalidate the eternal immutability of his word, to undertake the interests of error against the glory of truth, and to be the inward apologists of the world and of the passions, even in that holy place destined to condemn and to combat them. Ah! suffer that truth, at least, to triumph in its own temple; dispute not with it that feeble victory, which has formerly triumphed over the whole universe; oppress it, and welcome, amidst the world, and in those assemblies of vanity which error collects, and where error is enthroned. Is it not enough that you have banished it from the world, and that it dare no longer show itself without being exposed to derisions and censures? Leave to us, at least, the melancholy consolation of daring still to publish it in the face of those altars which it hath raised up, and which ought surely to serve it, at least, as a place of refuge.

You accuse us of exaggeration. Great God! And thou wilt one day perhaps judge us for weakening the force and the influence of thy word, in consequence of not giving sufficient consideration to it at the feet of the altars! And thou wilt one day perhaps reproach us for having accommodated the holy severity of thy gospel to the indulgences and the softenings of our age! And thou wilt perhaps range us one day among the workers of iniquity, because the lukewarmness and negligence of our manners have taken from the word which we announce that terror and that divine vehemence which can only be found in a mouth consecrated by piety and by penitence!

How, my brethren! The truths of salvation, such as Jesus Christ hath set forth to us, would be incapable of alarming consciences, were the mind of man not to add extraneous terrors to them? Paul formerly exaggerated, then, when the Roman governor, in spite of the pride of a false wisdom, and all the prejudices of an idolatrous worship, trembled, says St. Luke, while hearing him speak of righteousness, of temperance, and of the awful spectacle of a judgment to come? Paul, then, exaggerated, when the inhabitants of cities came striking their breasts, melting in tears at his feet, and bringing into the middle of the public places the lascivious or impious books, and all the other instruments of their passions, in order to make a sacrifice of them to the Lord?

You accuse us of adding additional terrors to the words of the gospel; but where are the consciences which we disturb?

Where are the sinners whom we alarm? Where are the worldly souls, who, seized with dread on their departure from our discourses, go to conceal themselves in the deepest solitudes, and, by holy excesses of penitence, to expiate the dissoluteness of their past manners? The ages which have preceded us have often seen such examples. Do we ever witness such instances now? Ah! would to God, said formerly a holy father, that you could convict me of having inspired a single soul with these salutary terrors! Would to God, said he to some worldly sages of his time, who accused him of exaggerating the dangers and the corruption of the world, that a single instance might support your assertion! And I may say to you here, with even more reason than that grand character, Would to God that the consequences of so blessed an indiscretion could be shown to me! Would to God that you had examples with which to reproach us, in justification of your censures! Ah! we with pleasure would suffer the blame, could but the success be shown to us with which we are reproached!

Alas! we manage only too much, perhaps, your weakness; we respect, perhaps too much, customs which a long usage has consecrated, in the fear of appearing to censure the grand examples by which they are authorized; we dare scarcely speak of certain irregularities, lest our censures should appear to fall rather on the persons than on the vices; we are obliged to content ourselves with showing truths to you from afar, which we ought to place immediately under your eye; and even your salvation frequently suffers through the excess of our precautions and our timid prudence. What shall I say? Weakness often extorts from us praises, where zeal ought to place anathemas and censures: like the world, we allow ourselves to be dazzled by names and titles; that which formerly encouraged the Ambroses intimidates us; and, because we owe you respect, we often keep back from you that truth which we ought still more to respect: yet, after all this, you accuse us of exaggerating, of overstraining truths, and of fashioning from them phantoms of our own brain, in order to alarm those who listen to us.

But what advantage could we draw from an artifice so unworthy of that truth confided to us? These overstrained and puerile declamations might suit the venal eloquence of those Sophists, who, amid the Grecian schools, anxiously sought to attract disciples to themselves, by vaunting the wisdom of their sect. But for us, my brethren, ah! our wish would be to have it in our power to render your path more easy, far from throwing fresh obstacles in the way. Wherefore should we dishearten you in the enterprise of salvation, by starting chimerical difficulties? It is our duty to smooth such as may actually be found in it, and to tender you an assisting hand, in order to sustain your weakness.

Meditate, my brethren, upon the law of Jesus Christ. What do

I say? Only open the gospel, and read; then shall you find that we draw a veil of discretion over the severity of its maxims; then, far from complaining of our excesses, you will yourselves supply the deficiencies of our silence and of our softenings, and will say to yourselves what we dread to say, because ye could never bear it. Great God! To bear his cross every day, to despise the world and all it contains, to live as a stranger upon the earth, to attach himself to thee alone, to renounce all which flatters the senses, incessantly to renounce himself, to consider as happy those who weep or who are afflicted,—behold the substance of thy holy law, and which every Christian undertakes. O! what can the human mind add to the rigour of this doctrine? What could we announce to you more melancholy or more formidable to self-love? Consequently, your reproaches are merely a vain language of the world, and one of those fashions of speaking which no one examines, and each adopts; your conscience inwardly belies it; and when you speak candidly, you confess that we are in the right, and that the gospel is a preacher much more severe and more fearful for the world, and for those who love it, than it could be possible for us ever to be.

First duty which the authority of the holy word exacts of you, namely, a docile spirit.

Secondly. You owe to the authority of this holy word, a spirit of sincerity, and inward application of it to yourself; that is to say, to be a rigorous examiner here of your own conscience; to have incessantly before your eyes, on one side, the state of your soul, and, on the other, the truths which we announce; to measure yourself according to that rule; to search into yourself by that light; to judge yourself by that law; to listen to, as if addressed to you alone, the holy maxims announced to the multitude; to consider yourself as alone here before Jesus Christ, who speaks to you alone through our mouth, and who sends us here perhaps for you alone. For, my brethren, no one here takes to himself that truth which attacks and condemns him; no one thinks himself an interested personage: it would seem that we form at pleasure to ourselves phantoms of the brain, for the purpose of combating them, and that the reality of that sinner whom we attack is nowhere in existence. The lewd and dissolute person recognizes not himself in the most animated and most striking traits of his passion. The man, loaded with ill-acquired wealth, and perhaps with the blood and spoils of the people, joins with us in deprecating that very iniquity in others, and sees not that he judges himself. The courtier, consumed with ambition, and who sacrifices conscience and integrity every day to that idol, frankly admits of the meanness of that passion in his equals, and looks upon it as a virtue, and as a deep experience of the court, in himself. Every one continually views himself by certain favourable sides, which effectually hinder him from ever knowing himself

such as he is. In vain do we mark you, as I may say, in the most pointed manner; you always inwardly find out some softened traits, which alter the resemblance. You whisper to yourself, I am not this man. And, while the public makes application of such striking truths to us, we alone either succeed in being convinced that they are not drawn for us, or we only find in them the defects of our brethren: in our own exactest portraits, we search out foreign likenesses; we are ingenious in turning the blow upon others, which truth had given to us alone; the malignity of the application is the only fruit which we reap from that picture of our vices made from the pulpit, and we rashly judge our brethren where we ought to have judged only ourselves. And thus it is, O my God! that men become corrupted, misapply every thing, and that even the light of truth seals up their eyes upon their own errors, and opens them only to see in others either what is not, or what it ought to have kept entirely hid from them.

Such are the duties which the authority of the holy word exacts of you. Let us now proceed to those attached to its end. Its end, my brethren, you know, is the conversion of hearts, the establishment of truth, the destruction of error and of sin, and the sanctification of the name of Jesus Christ. All there is grand, elevated, important, and worthy of the most sublime function of the hierarchy; and, consequently, it is from thence to be inferred, that you ought to listen to us with a respectful and religious spirit, which despises not the simplicity of our discourses, and with a spirit of faith which seeks nothing human in it, nothing frivolous, nothing which does not correspond with the excellency and the dignity of its end.

I say, a spirit of religious respect, which despises not the simplicity of our discourses; for, however enlightened you may in other respects be, you ought not, in consequence of your pretended lights, to claim a title to neglect the instructions of the church to believers. The unction of the Spirit will always inform you of something here, of which you would perhaps have remained ignorant. If possessed of that knowledge which is the cause of pride, you will be strengthened in that charity which edifies. If your mind acquire nothing new, your heart shall perhaps be made to feel new things: you will there, at least, learn that your knowledge is nothing, if you be ignorant of the science of salvation; that you are but a cloud without moisture,—elevated, it is true, above other men, by your talents, and by the superiority of your knowledge, but empty of grace, and the sport of every wind and of every passion in the sight of God; and, lastly, that a simple and pure soul shall, in an instant, be taught the whole in the bosom of God, and shall be transformed from light to light; while, on the contrary, that you, after an entire life of watchings and ardent study, and the attainment of a useless mass

of knowledge and lights, shall perhaps reap for your portion only eternal darkness.

What a mistake, my brethren, to banish yourselves from these holy assemblies, under pretence that you already know enough, and likewise that you are already sufficiently versed in all the duties of piety, which you have long professed; and that Christian reading, and a small degree of reflection in private, go a greater way, and are attended with more benefit, than all our discourses! But, my dear hearer, if you profess piety and righteousness, what sweeter consolation can you enjoy, than that of hearing the wonders of the Lord published, the ordinances of his holy law, truths which you love and practise, and of which you ought to wish the knowledge to be given to all men? What sight more soothing and consoling to you than that of your brethren assembled here at the foot of the altar, attentive to the words of life, absent from the spectacles of the world, and removed from the occasions of sin, forming holy desires, opening their hearts to the voice of God, perhaps conceiving the promises of the Holy Spirit, and the commencement of their penitence, and to be enabled to join yourself with them, in order to obtain from the Father of mercies, the completion in their soul of the work of salvation, which he hath begun to operate within them?

Not but that the most consolatory resources are furnished to Christian piety, by the meditation of the divine writings. But the Lord hath attached graces to the power of our ministry, and to the legitimate calling, which you will not find elsewhere. The most simple truths in the mouths of the pastors, or of those who speak to you in their place, draw an efficacy from the grace of their mission, which is not inherent to them. The same book of Isaiah, which, when read from a chariot by that officer of the queen of Ethiopia, was to him as a book sealed up, and only amused his leisure without enlightening his faith,—explained by Philip, instantly became to him a word of life, and of salvation. And, lastly, you owe that example to your brethren, that edification to the church, that respect to the word of Jesus Christ, that uniformity to the spirit of peace and of unity, which binds us together. O, banish yourselves, and so much the better, from those profane and criminal assemblies, where piety, alas! is always a stranger, suffering, and constrained: but here is its place, and its home; this is the assembly of the holy, seeing it is only toward their formation that our ministry hath been established, and still continues to endure in the church.

I have said, in the second place, a spirit of faith; and in this disposition, two others are comprised:—a love of the holy word, independent of the talents of the man who announces it to you; a taste, formed by religion, which comes not here in search of vain ornaments, but of the solid truths of salvation; that is to say, to listen to it, neither with a spirit of censure nor with a spirit of curiosity.

And, in effect, your love of the word of Jesus Christ ought to render you blind, as I may say, to the defects of those who announce it to you: in a mouth even rude and unpolished, you ought to find it lovely, divine, and worthy of all your homage; in whatever shape it be presented to you, decked with pompous ornaments, or simple and neglected, provided that its celestial traits are still to be recognized, it preserves the same rights over your heart. And, indeed, is any portion of its sanctity lost by passing through less brilliant and less copious channels? Did the holy word of the Lord lose any thing of its dignity, whether he formerly gave it out from a bush, mean and despicable to the sight, or from a cloud of glory;—whether he gave out his oracles in the midst of the desert, and in a tabernacle covered with the skins of animals, or in the temple of Solomon, the most magnificent which hath ever been raised up to the glory of his name? And did the faith of Israel make any distinction, when it was the same Lord who every where spake?

Nevertheless, how few among all those who listen to us, who do not constitute themselves judges and censurers of the holy word! They come here merely for the purpose of deciding on the merit of those who announce it, of drawing foolish comparisons, of pronouncing on the difference of the lights and of the instructions; they think it an honour the being difficult to please; they pass without attention over the most striking truths, and which might be of the most essential benefit to all; and the only fruit reaped by them from a Christian discourse is confined to the miserable pride of having, better than any other, remarked its defects. This is so truly the case, that we may with justice apply to the greatest part of our hearers what Joseph, become the preserver of Egypt, said, through pure artifice, to his brethren:—It is not to seek food that you are come here; it is as spies, to see the nakedness of the land. It is not to nourish yourselves with the bread of the word, or to seek assistance and efficacious remedies for your evils, that you come to listen to us; it is in order to find out cause for applying some vain censures, and to show your skill in remarking our defects; which defects are perhaps a terrible punishment upon you of the Lord, who, in consequence of your crimes, refuseth more accomplished labourers in his vineyard, who would have been enabled to recall you to repentance.

But candidly, my brethren, however weak our language may be, do we not always say enough to overthrow you, to dissipate your errors, and to make you inwardly confess irregularities which you are unable to justify to yourselves? Are such sublime talents required to tell you that fornicators, extortioners, and men without mercy, shall never enter the kingdom of God; that unless you become penitent, you shall perish; and that it matters little to become master of the whole world, if you thereby lose your soul? Is it not, in fact, that very simplicity which constitutes the whole force,

and gives such energy to these divine truths? And ought they to be less alarming to the criminal souls, though in the mouth of the most obscure individual of the ministry?

And besides, granting that it were here permitted us to recommend ourselves, as the apostle formerly said to ungrateful believers, more attentive to censure the simplicity of his appearance and of his language, and, as he says himself, his contemptible figure in the eyes of men, than touched with the endless fatigues and dangers which he had surmounted, in order to announce to them the gospel, and to convert them to truth; were it permitted, we might say to you, my brethren, we sustain, solely on your account, the whole weight of a painful and laborious ministry; our cares, our watchings, our prayers, the endless toilings which qualify us for, and accompany us in these Christian pulpits, have no other object but that of your salvation. O! do not our pains entitle us at least to your respect and gratitude? Is it possible that that zeal which suffers all, in order to secure your salvation, can ever become the melancholy subject of your derisions and censures? Demand of God, good and well, that, for the glory of the church and for the honour of his gospel, he raise up to his people labourers powerful in speech, of those men whom the sole unction of the Spirit of God renders nervous and eloquent, and who announce the gospel in a manner worthy of its elevation and sanctity. But likewise demand, that, when we happen therein to fail, your faith may supply the deficiencies of our discourses; that your piety may render the truth, in your own hearts, that which it loses in our mouths; and that, through your unrighteous distastes, you force not the ministers of the gospel to have recourse, in order to please you, to the vain artifices and colouring of a human eloquence, to shine rather than to instruct, and, like the Israelites formerly, to go down to the Philistines to sharpen their instruments, destined solely to cultivate the earth:—I mean to say, to seek in profane learning, or in the language of a hostile world, foreign ornaments to embellish the simplicity of the gospel; and to give to instruments, and to talents destined to increase, to multiply, and to strengthen the holy seed, a vain brilliancy and a subtlety which blunt its energy and its virtue, and which substitute a false splendour in the place of truth and zeal.

And now, my brethren, behold the last fault inimical to that spirit of faith; it is a spirit of curiosity. You do not sufficiently distinguish the holy gravity of our ministry from that vain and frivolous art which has nothing in view but the arrangement of the Discourse and the glory of eloquence; you assist at our Discourses with the same view as Augustine, still a sinner, did in former times at those of Ambrose. It was not, says that illustrious penitent, in order to learn from the mouth of the man of God the secrets of eternal life, which I had so long sought, nor the desire of finding in them remedies for the shameful and

inveterate wounds of my soul, and which thou, O my God! alone art acquainted with; it was in order to examine whether his eloquence corresponded with his great reputation, and if his discourses warranted the unbounded applauses which his hearers bestowed upon him. The truths which he announced interested me not; I was moved only by the beauty and the charms of the discourse.

And such is still, at present, the deplorable situation of far too many believers who listen to us; who, like Augustine, loaded with crimes, and fettered with the most shameful passions, far from coming here to seek remedies for their evils, come in search of vain ornaments, which amuse without curing the afflicted, which are the means of our pleasing the sinner, but have no influence toward making the sinner displeased with himself. They come here, it would appear, to say to us what the inhabitants of Babylon formerly said to the captive Israelites,—“Sing us one of the songs of Zion.” They come in search of harmony and delight, in the serious and important truths of the morality of Jesus Christ; in the sighs of the sorrowful Zion, captive in a strange land; and require of us that we flatter the ear while publishing the threatenings and the rigid maxims of the gospel.

O! you who now listen to me, and whom this Discourse regards, reflect for a moment, I entreat of you, upon yourselves! Your case is, as it were, desperate in the eyes of God; your wounds, become virulent through their long-standing, no longer leave almost a hope of cure; your evils press; time is short; God, wearied with having so long borne with you, is at last on the point of striking and of surprising you: behold the eternal miseries which we foretell to you, and which happen every day to your equals. You are not far distant from the fulfilment; we show you the terrible sword of the Lord suspended over your head, and ready to fall upon you; and, far from shuddering at the after part of your destiny, or taking any measures to avoid the impending blow, you childishly amuse yourselves in examining whether it shine and have a lustre; and you search, even in the terrors of the prediction, for the puerile beauties of a vain eloquence. Great God! how despicable and how worthy of derision doth the sinner appear when we view him through thy light!

For, my brethren, are we then here upon a profane tribunal, for the purpose of courting, with artificial words, the suffrages of an idle assembly, or in a Christian pulpit, and in the place of Jesus Christ, to instruct, to reprove, and to sanctify you, in the name and under the eyes of him who sends us? Is it here a dispute for worldly fame, an idle exercise of the faculties, or the most holy and the most important ministry of faith? O! why do you come to loiter away with our feeble talents, or to seek human qualifications where God alone speaketh and acteth? Are not the humblest instruments the most suitable to the mightiness of his grace? Do not the walls of

Jericho fall when he pleaseth, at the sound of the weakest trumpets? O! what matters it to us that we please, if we do not change you? Of what consequence is it to us, the being eloquent, if you continue always sinners? What fruit can we reap from your applauses, if you reap none yourselves from our instructions? Our only praise, our only glory, is the establishment of the reign of God in your hearts; your tears alone, much rather than your applauses, can prove our eulogium; and we covet no other crown than yourselves, and your eternal salvation.

SERMON XVII.

ON THE DELAY OF CONVERSION.

“I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord.”
JOHN i. 23.

IT is that he may enter into our hearts, that Jesus Christ announces, by John the Baptist, that we have the way to make straight for him, by removing all those obstacles, which, like a wall of separation, rise up between his mercy and our wretchedness. Now, these obstacles are the crimes with which we so often stain ourselves, which always subsist because it would be necessary to expiate them by penitence, and we expiate them not: these obstacles are the passions by which our heart foolishly allows itself to be carried away, which are always living, because, in order to destroy, it would be necessary to conquer them; and we never conquer them: these obstacles are the occasions against which our innocence hath so often split, and which are still every day the rock fatal to all our resolutions, because, in place of yielding to that inward inclination which leads us toward them, it would be necessary to shun them; and we shun them not: in a word, the true and only manner of making straight the way of our hearts for Jesus Christ, is that of changing our life, and of being sincerely converted.

But, though the business of our conversion be the most important with which we can be intrusted here below, seeing that through it alone we can draw Jesus Christ into our hearts; though it be the only one truly interesting to us, since on it depends our eternal happiness; yet, O, deplorable blindness! it is never considered by us as a matter either of urgency or of importance;

it is continually put off to some other time, as if times and seasons were at our disposal. What wait you, Christians, my brethren? Jesus Christ ceaseth not to forewarn you, by his ministers, of the evil which threaten your impenitence, and the delay of your conversion; he hath long announced to you, through our mouth, that, unless you repent, you most assuredly shall perish.

Nor is he satisfied with publicly warning you through the voice of his ministers; he speaks to you in the bottom of your hearts, and continually whispers to you, Is it not time now to withdraw yourself from that guilt in which, for so many years, you have been plunged, and from which almost nothing but a miracle can now extricate you? Is it not time to restore peace to your heart to banish from it that chaos of passions which has occasioned all the misfortunes of your life, to prepare for yourself at least some few happy and tranquil days, and, after having lived so long for a world which hath always left you empty and uneasy, at last to live for a God who alone can give peace and tranquillity to your heart? Will you not at last bestow a thought upon your eternal interests, and, after a life wholly frivolous, return to the true one; and, in serving God, adopt the only wise plan which man can pursue upon the earth? Are you not wearied out with struggling against those remorse which tear you, that sadness of guilt which weighs you down, that emptiness of the world which every where pursues you? And do you not wish to finish at last your misfortunes and your inquietudes, by finishing your crimes?

What shall we reply to that inward monitor which hath so long spoken in the bottom of our hearts? What pretext shall we oppose? First, that we are not, as yet, furnished by God with the succours necessary to enable us to quit the unhappy state in which we live. Secondly, that we are at present too much engaged by the passions to think of a new life. That is to say, that we start two pretexts for delaying our conversion: the first drawn from the part of God; the second from within ourselves. The first which justifies us, by accusing God of being wanting to us; the second which comforts us, by alleging to ourselves our inability of, as yet, returning to him. Thus we delay our conversion, under the belief that grace is wanting, and that, as yet, God desireth us not; we delay our conversion, because we flatter ourselves that some future day we shall be less attached to the world and to the passions, and more in a situation to begin a Christian and an orderly life:—two pretexts which are continually in the mouth of sinners, and which I now mean to overthrow.

PART I.—It is not of to-day that men have dared to accuse even God himself for their transgressions, and have tried to render his wisdom and his goodness responsible for their iniquitous weak-

nesses. It may be said, that this blindness entered with sin into the world: the first man sought not elsewhere an excuse for his guilt; and, far from appeasing the Lord whom he had so lately disobeyed, by a humble confession of his wretchedness, he accused him of having been himself the cause of his disobedience, in associating with him the woman.

And such, my brethren, is the illusion of almost all souls living in guilt, and who delay to a future day that conversion required of them by God. They are continually repeating, that conversion does not depend upon us; that it is the Lord who must change their heart, and bestow upon them that faith and grace which they, as yet, have not. Thus they are not satisfied with provoking his anger, by delaying their conversion; they even insult him, by laying upon him the blame of their obstinacy and of the delay of their penitence. Let us now overthrow the error and the impiety of this disposition; and, in order to render the criminal soul more inexcusable in his impenitence, let us deprive him at least of the pretext.

You tell us, then, first, that if you had faith, and were thoroughly convinced of the truth of religion, you would be converted; but that faith is a gift of God which you expect from him alone, and that as soon as he shall have given it to you, you will easily and heartily begin to adopt your party.—First pretext; the want of faith, and it is God alone who can give it.

But I ought first to ask you, how have you then lost that faith so precious? You have received it in your baptism; a Christian education hath cherished it in your heart; it had grown up with you; it was an inestimable talent which the Lord had intrusted to you in discerning you from so many infidel nations, and in marking you, from the moment you quitted your mother's womb, with the seal of salvation. What have you then done with the gift of God? Who hath effaced from your forehead that sign of eternal election? Is it not the corruptions of the passions, and that blindness which has been their just punishment? Did you suspect the faith of your fathers before you became dissolute and abandoned? Is it not yourself who hath extinguished in the dirt that celestial torch, which the church, in regenerating you, had placed in your hand, to enlighten your way through the obscurities and the dangers of this life? Why then accuse God of that waste which you have made of his favours? He has the right of reclaiming his own gift; to him it belongs to make you accountable for the talent which he had intrusted to your care; to say to you, "Wicked and ungrateful servant, what had I done for others that I had not done for thee? I had embellished thy soul with the gift of faith, and with the mark of my children: thou hast cast that precious jewel before unclean animals; thou hast extinguished faith, and the light that I had placed within thee. I have long, in spite of myself, preserved it in thy heart: I have

caused it to outlive all the impious efforts which, because it was become troublesome to thy debaucheries, thou hast made to extinguish it: thou knowest how much it hath cost thee to throw off the yoke of faith, and to be what thou now art; and this dreadful state, which is the justest punishment of thy crimes, should now become their only excuse? And thou sayest that the want of faith is no fault of thine, seeing it depends not on man,—thou, who hast had such difficulty in tearing it from the bottom of thy soul? And thou pretendest that it is me who ought to give it to thee, if I wish thee to serve me,—I, who reclaim it from thee, and who so justly complain that thou hast lost it?" Enter into judgment with your Lord, and justify yourself, if you have any reply to make to him.

And to make you, my dear hearer, more sensible of all the weakness of this pretext; you complain that you want faith; you say that you would wish to have it; that happy are those who are feelingly convinced, and that, in that state, no suffering can affect them. But, if you wish for faith, if you believe that nothing is so fortunate as that of being truly convinced of the truths of salvation, and of the illusion of all that passeth away; if you envy the lot of those souls who have attained to that desirable state; if this be, behold then that faith which you await, and which you thought to have lost. What more do you require to know, in order to terminate a criminal life, than the happiness of those who have forsaken it, to labour toward their salvation? You say that you would wish faith; but you have it from the moment that you think it worthy of a wish; at least you have enough of it to know, that the greatest happiness of man is that of sacrificing all to its promises. Now, the souls whom we daily see returning to their God, are not led by other lights: the righteous, who bear his yoke, are not sustained or animated by other truths; we ourselves, who serve him, know nothing more of it.

Cease, then, to deceive yourself, and to await what you already have. Ah! it is not faith that is wanting to you, it is the inclination to fulfil the duties it imposes on you: it is not your doubts, but your passions, which stop you. You know not yourself; you willingly persuade yourself that you want faith, because that pretext which you oppose to grace is less humiliating to self-love than that of the shameful vices which retain you. But mount to the source; your doubts have sprung solely from your irregular mode of living: regulate, then, your manners, and you will see nothing in faith but what is certain and consoling: be chaste, modest, and temperate, and I answer for that faith which you believe to have lost: live uprightly, and you will find little difficulty in believing.

And a proof of the truth of what I tell you is, that if, in order to be converted, nothing more were to be required than to bend your reason to mysteries which exceed our comprehension; if a

Christian life were accompanied with no other difficulties than certain apparent contradictions which it is necessary to believe without being able to comprehend them; if faith proposed the fulfilment of no irksome duties; if, in order to change your life, it were not necessary to renounce passions the most lively, and attachments the most dear to your heart; if the matter in question were merely a point of opinion and of belief, without either the heart or the passions being interested in it, you would no longer have the smallest difficulty in yielding to it; you would view in the light of madmen those, who, for a moment, could hesitate between difficulties of pure speculation, of which the belief can be followed by no injury, and an eternity of misery, which, after all, may be the lot of unbelievers. Faith appears difficult to you, therefore, not because it holds out mysteries, but because it regulates the passions: it is the sanctity of its maxims which shocks, and not the incomprehensibility of its secrets: you are therefore corrupted, but not an unbeliever.

And, in effect, notwithstanding all your pretended doubts upon faith, you feel that avowed unbelief is a horrible cause to adopt; you dare not determine upon it. It is a quicksand, under which you have a glimpse of a thousand gulfs which fill you with horror, in which you find no consistency, and on which you could not venture to tread with a firm and confident foot. You continually say to yourself, that there is no risk in devoting one's self to God; that, after all, and even admitting the uncertainty of any thing after this life, the alternative is too horrible not to require precautions, and that, even in an actual uncertainty of the truths of faith, the party of the godly would always be the wisest and the safest. Your state, therefore, is rather the vague determination of an agitated heart, which dreads to break its chains, than a real and actual suspicion of faith, and a fear lest, in sacrificing to it all your iniquitous pleasures, your pains and time should be lost: your uncertainties are efforts which you make to defend yourself against a remnant of faith, which still inwardly enlightens you, rather than a proof that you have already lost it. Seek no longer, then, to convince yourself; rather endeavour to oppose no more that internal conviction which enlightens and condemns you. Follow the dictates of your own heart; be reconciled to yourself; allow a conscience to speak, which never fails to plead within you for faith, against your own excesses; in a word, hearken to yourself, and you will be a believer.

But it is admitted, you will say, that if nothing more were to be required than to believe, that would easily be subscribed to. This is the second pretext of the sinners who delay; it is the want of grace, and they await it: conversion is not the work of man, and it belongs to God alone to change the heart.

Now, I say, that this pretext, so vulgar, so often repeated in the world, and so continually in the mouth of almost all those

who live in guilt; if we consider the sinner who alleges it, it is unjust; if we view it on the part of God, on whom he lays the blame, it is rash and ungrateful; if we examine it in itself, it is foolish and unwarrantable.

In the first place, if we consider the sinner who alleges it, it is unjust; for you complain that God hath not yet touched you, that you feel no relish for devotion, and that you must wait the coming of that relish before you can think of changing your life. But, full of passions as you are, can you reasonably expect or exact of God that he shall ever make you to feel a decided inclination for piety? Would you that your heart, still plunged in debauchery, feel the pure delights and the chaste attractions of virtue? You are similar to a man who, nourishing himself with gall and wormwood, should afterward complain that every thing feels bitter to his palate. You say, that if God wish you to serve him, in his power alone it is to give you a relish for his service; you, who every day defile your heart by the meanest excesses; you who every moment place a fresh chaos between God and you; you, in a word, who, by new debaucheries, finally extinguish in your soul even those sentiments of natural virtue, those happy impressions of innocence and of regularity born with you, which might have been the means of recalling you to virtue and to righteousness. O man! art thou then unjust only when there is question of accusing the wisdom and the justice of thy God?

But I say farther, that were God even to operate in your heart that relish for, and those feelings of, salvation, which you await, dissolute and corrupted as you are, would you even feel the operation of his grace? Were he to call upon you, plunged as you now are in the pleasures of a life altogether worldly, would you even hear his voice? Were he to touch your heart, would that feeling of grace have any consequence for your conversion, extinguished as it would immediately be by the ardour and the frenzy of profane passions? And, after all, this God of longanimity and of patience still operateth in your heart; he still poureth out within you the riches of his goodness and of his mercy. Ah! it is not his grace which fails you, but you receive it into a heart so full of corruption and wretchedness, that it is ineffectual; it excites no feeling there of contrition; it is a spark which, falling into a sink of filth and of nastiness, is extinguished the moment it falls.

Reflect, then, my dear hearer, and comprehend all the injustice of your pretexs. You complain that God is wanting to you, and that you await his grace to be converted; but is there a sinner in whose mouth that complaint would be more unjust than from your lips? Recall here the whole course of your life; follow it from the earliest period down to this day. The Lord had anticipated you from your birth with his blessings; he had placed in you a happy disposition, a noble spirit, and all the incli-

nations most favourable to virtue ; he had even provided for you, in the bosom of a family, domestic succours and pious and godly examples. The mercies of the Lord went still farther ; he hath preserved you from a thousand dangers ; through his goodness you have outlived occasions where your friends, and perhaps the accomplices of your debaucheries, have fallen a sacrifice to the scourge of war. To recall you to him, he hath spared neither afflictions, disgusts, nor disgraces ; he hath torn from you the criminal objects of your passions, even at the moment when your heart was most strongly attached to them ; he hath so mercifully conducted your destiny, that a thousand obstacles have continually thwarted your passions, that you have never been able to arrive at the accomplishment of all your criminal wishes, and that something has always been wanting to your iniquitous happiness ; he has formed for you serious engagements and duties, which, in spite of yourself, have imposed the obligation of a prudent and regular life in the eyes of men ; he has not permitted your conscience to become hardened in iniquity, and you have never been able to succeed in calming your remorse, or in living tranquilly in guilt ; not a day hath past in which you have not felt the emptiness of the world and the horror of your situation ; amidst all your pleasures and excesses, conscience hath awoke, and you have never succeeded in lulling your secret disquiets but by promising to yourself a future change. A just and a merciful God urges and pursues you every where : ever since you have forsaken him, he has fixed himself to you, said a prophet, like a worm which burrows in the vestment, continually to gnaw your heart, and to render the importunity of his biting a wholesome remedy to your soul. Even while I am now speaking to you, he worketh within you, filleth my mouth with these holy truths, and placeth me here to proclaim them to you, for the sole purpose of recalling perhaps you alone. What, then, is your whole life but one continued succession of favours ? Who are you yourself but a child of dilection and the work of God's mercies ? Unjust that thou art ! And thou darest, after this, to complain that his grace is wanting, thou, on whom alone on the earth the Lord seemeth to cast his regards ; thou, in whose heart he so continually operateth, as though, of all men, he had only thee to save ; thou, in a word, whose every moment is a fresh grace, and whose greatest guilt shall one day be, that of having received too many, and of having constantly abused them.

But, to finish your overthrow, upon what grounds do you say that you want grace ? You doubtless say so, because you feel that in your present state conversion would require too many sacrifices ; but you then believe that, with grace, you are converted without any sacrifice on your part, without any self-denial, and almost without being sensible of it yourself ? You believe, then, that to have grace is to have no more passions to

conquer, no more charms to break, no more temptations to overcome; that it is to be regenerated through penitence, without tears, pain, or sorrow? Ah! I assure you that on this footing you will never possess that chimerical grace, for conversion must always require many sacrifices; be the grace what it may, you will always be required to make heroic efforts to repress your passions, to tear yourself from the most beloved objects, and to sacrifice every thing which may yet captivate you. Look around, and see if no sacrifices are required of those who are daily returning to their God; yet they are favoured with grace, since it is it which delivers them and changes their heart. Inquire of them, if grace render every thing easy and smooth; if it leave nothing more for self-love to undergo. Ask them if they have not had a thousand struggles to sustain, a thousand obstacles to overcome, a thousand passions to moderate, and you will know if to have grace is to be converted without any exertion on your part. Conversion is, therefore, a painful sacrifice, a laborious baptism, a grievous delivery, a victory which supposes combats and fatigues. Grace, I confess, softens them all; but it by no means operates so as to leave nothing more to overcome; and if, in order to change your life, you await a grace of that nature, I declare to you, that such never existed, and that so absurdly to await your salvation and deliverance, is to be absolutely bent upon perishing.

But, if the pretext of the default of grace be unjust on the side of the sinner who alleges it, it is not less rash and ungrateful with regard to God, on whom he pretends to fix the blame.

For you say that God is the master, and that, when he shall want you, he will perfectly know how to find you; that is to say, that you have only to leave him solely to act, and that, without giving yourself any trouble with respect to your salvation, he, when so inclined, will know how to change your heart; that is to say, that you have only to pass your life in pleasures and in guilt, and that, without any interference on your part, without your bestowing even a thought upon it, without bringing to that conversion, which you expect, other preparation than a whole life of debauchery and constant opposition to his grace, he will know how to obtain you, when his moment shall be come; that is to say, that your salvation, that grand, that only business which you have upon the earth, is no longer a concern of yours; and that the Lord, who hath given you that alone to manage, who hath commanded you to give it the preference over all others, and even to neglect every other in order to devote yourself to it alone, has, nevertheless, absolutely discharged you from the trust, in order to take it wholly upon himself. Show us, then, this promise in some new gospel, for you well know that it is no where to be found in that of Jesus Christ. "The sinner," says the prophet Isaiah, "hath nothing

but foolish things wherewith to justify himself; and his heart worketh iniquity, to practise hypocrisy, and to utter error against the Lord."

Lastly. This pretext is foolish in itself, for you say that you want grace: I have already replied that you deceive yourself; that, if candid, you will acknowledge that grace has never been wanting to you; that you have more than once felt its salutary impressions; that, had so obstinate a resistance not been opposed by your hardness of heart and impenitence, it would have triumphed over your passions; that God, who wishes all men to be saved, who out of nothing has drawn reasonable beings, solely to praise, to bless, and to glorify him; in a word, who has only made us for himself, has opened to you, my dear hearer, as well as to so many other sinners, a thousand ways of conversion, which would have infallibly recalled you ere now to the right path, had you not obstinately shut your ears against his voice. You want grace, you say: well, what do you thereby pretend? Would it be to have it understood that God, who is our Father, and of whom we are the children, who has an affection for us infinitely surpassing that of the tenderest mother for an only son, that a God so good leaves us, through want of assistance, in the actual impossibility of well-doing? But do you reflect that such language would be a blasphemy against the wisdom of God, and the justification of every crime? Are you then ignorant, that whatever be the blow given to our liberty by the fall of our first parent, it is still however left to us; that neither law nor duties would longer be imposed upon man, had he not the real and actual power of fulfilling them; that religion, far from being an aid and a consolation, would consequently be no longer but a vexation and a snare; that if, notwithstanding all the cares which God has for our salvation, we perish, it is always the fault of our own will, and not the default of grace; that we are individually the authors of our misery and destruction; that it has depended upon ourselves to have avoided them; and that a thousand sinners, with neither more grace nor succours than we, have broken their chains, and have rendered glory to God and to his mercies by a life altogether new?

But, granting that these truths were less certain, and that, in reality, you, my dear hearer, want grace, it would equally be true then that God hath altogether forsaken you; that you are marked with a character of reprobation, and that your state cannot be worse. For, to be without grace is surely the most terrible of all situations, and the most certain presage of eternal condemnation. And it is that horrible thought, however, which comforts you, which justifies in your eyes your tranquillity in guilt, which makes you, without trouble or remorse, to delay your conversion, and which even serves as an excuse for all your excesses: that is to say, that you are delighted in the want of this precious grace;

that you continually say, with satisfaction to yourself, God wishes me not as yet; I have only to live, in the meanwhile, tranquilly in guilt; his grace will not come yet awhile: that is to say, that you wish it not, and that you would even be sorry were it to come to break those chains which you still love. To you, the want of grace ought to be the most fearful and the most powerful inducement to extricate yourself from your deplorable state, and it is the only one which quiets and stops you.

Besides, the more you delay, the less will you have of grace; for the more you delay, the more do your crimes increase, the more does God estrange himself from you; his mercies wear out, his moments of indulgence slip away, your measure becomes full, and the dreadful term of his wrath approaches; and if it be true, that you have not at present sufficient grace to be converted, you will not, in a little time, have wherewithal even to comprehend that you have occasion either for penitence or conversion.

It is not grace, then, that you have to accuse, it is yourself. Did Augustine, during his feeble desires of conversion, tax the Lord with the delay of his penitence? Ah! he went no farther for the reason of it than in the weakness and the licentiousness of his own heart. "I dragged on," said he, "a heart diseased and torn with remorse, accusing myself alone for all my evils, and for all the delays which I started against a new life. I turned me in my chains, as though they should break off themselves, without any effort on my part. For thee, Lord, never hast thou ceased to chastise my heart with inward sorrows, continually operating there, through a merciful severity, the most pungent remorse, which embittered every comfort of my life. Nevertheless, the amusements of the world, which I had always and still loved, withheld me; they secretly whispered to me, Thou meanest, then, to renounce every pleasure? From this moment, then, thou biddest an eternal farewell to all that hath hitherto rendered life agreeable to thee? What! shall it no more be permitted to thee to see those persons who have been so dear to thee? Thou shalt henceforth be separated from thy companions in pleasure, be banished from their assemblies, and be obliged to deny thyself the most innocent delights, and all the comforts of society. And is it possible that thou canst believe thyself capable of supporting the sad weariness of a life so gloomy, so void, so uniform, and so different from the one thou hast hitherto led?"

Behold where this half-contrite sinner found the reasons of his delays and of his resistance; it was the dread of having to renounce his passions, and of being unable to support the step of a new life, and not any default of grace: and such is precisely the situation in which you are, and what you say every day to yourself.

For, after all, supposing that grace is wanting to you, what do you thence conclude? That the crimes into which you con-

tinually plunge yourself will not condemn you, should death surprise you in that deplorable state? You would not dare to say so. That you have only to live tranquil in your debaucheries till God shall touch you, and till grace shall be given to you? But it is the height of folly to expect grace while you render yourself every day more and more unworthy of it. That you are not guilty before God of the delay of your conversion, seeing it depends not on you? But all delaying sinners who die impenitent would then be justified, and hell would no longer be but for the just who are converted. That you ought no more to concern yourself with your salvation, but to leave it to chance, without giving yourself any uneasiness or trouble with regard to it? But that is the resolution of impiety and despair. That the moment of your conversion is marked, and that a little more or less of debauchery will neither advance nor retard it an instant? But, according to that doctrine, you have only to pierce your heart or plunge yourself into the waves, under the pretext that the moment of your death is determined, and that such madness will neither hasten nor retard it a single instant. "O man!" cries the apostle, in replying to the folly and impiety of this pretext, "is it thus that thou contemnest the riches of the goodness of thy God? Art thou ignorant, that his patience in suffering thy debaucheries, far from authorizing them, ought to recall thee to penitence; and, nevertheless, it is his long forbearance itself which hardens thee in guilt; and through thine obstinacy of heart thou amassest an overflowing treasure of wrath for that terrible day which shall surprise thee, and on which shall be rendered to every one according to his works?"

The only rational consequence, therefore, that you could be permitted to draw, supposing that grace is wanting to you, is, that you, more earnestly than any other, ought to pray to obtain it; to neglect nothing to soften an irritated God, who has withdrawn himself from your heart; to overcome by your importunities his resistance; to remove, in the meanwhile, whatever removes his grace from your heart; to make straight the way for him; to throw aside all the obstacles which have hitherto rendered it ineffectual to you; to deny yourself every opportunity in which your innocence almost always finds new rocks, and which completely shut your heart against the holy inspirations: such is the Christian and prudent manner of rendering glory to God, of confessing that he alone is the master of hearts, and that every blessing and gift proceed from him. But to say, as you continually do, without changing in any respect your disorderly manners, "When God shall want me, he knoweth how to find me," is to say, "I wish him not as yet; I have no occasion for him; I live happy and contented: when he shall force me, and I can no longer avoid him, then I will yield; but, in the mean time,

I will enjoy my prosperity, and the privilege which he granteth to me of delaying my conversion." What a shocking preparation for that precious grace which changeth the heart! Such is, however, all that an impenitent soul can adduce for confidently awaiting it.

Such are the pretexts which the sinner who delays his conversion draws from the part of God. Let us now examine those which he takes from within himself.

PART II.—It is astonishing, my brethren, that, life being so short, the moment of death so uncertain, every instant so precious, conversions so rare, the examples of those who are taken unawares so frequent, and futurity so awful, so many frivolous pretexts can be urged for delaying a change of life. In all other dangers which threaten either our life, our honour, or our property, the precautions are prompt and ready, the danger alone is dubious and distant; here the danger is certain and present, and the precautions are always uncertain and remote. It seems either that salvation is an arbitrary thing, or that our life is in our own hands, or that the time for our penitence hath been promised to us, or that to die impenitent is no great misfortune,—so strongly do all sinners lull themselves in this hope of being one day converted, without ever attempting a change of life. And what is still more incomprehensible in the delay of their penitence, is, that they all admit of the necessity of their conversion, of the bad state of their conscience, and that they all consider as the worst of evils, that of dying in that fatal state; and, nevertheless, that they all defer withdrawing from it, under pretexts so childish, that even the gravity of the Christian pulpit suffers in refuting and overthrowing them.

Age, the passions, the consequences of a change of life, which they dread the being able to support,—such are the vain pretexts inwardly alleged for delaying that conversion which God demands of us.

I say, in the first place, the age. They wish to allow the years of youth to pass away, to which a consideration so important as piety seems little suited; they wait a certain season of life, when, the bloom of youth effaced, the manners become more sedate, the attention more exact, the world less watchful upon us, even the mind riper and more capable of supporting that grand undertaking; they promise themselves to labour at it, and that they will not then allow any thing to divert them from it.

But, it would be natural to ask you first, who hath told you that you shall arrive at the term which you mark to yourself; that death shall not surprise you in the course of those years which you still allot to the world and to the passions; and that the Lord, whom you do not expect till the evening, shall not arrive in the morning, and when you least think of it? Is youth a certain safe-

guard against death? See, without mentioning here what happens every day to the rest of men, if, even in confining yourself to the small number of your friends and of your relations, you shall find none for whom the justice of God hath dug a grave in the first years of their course; who, like the flower of the field, blooming to the morn, have withered before the close of day, and have left you only the melancholy regret of seeing so speedily blasted, a life of which the blossoms had promised so fair. Fool! Thy soul is to be re-demanded perhaps at the opening of thy race; and those projects of conversion which thou deferrest to a future period, what shall they avail thee? And those grand resolutions which thou promisest to thyself to put in execution one day, what shall they change in thine eternal misery, should death anticipate them, as it every day doth in a thousand instances, and leave thee only the unavailing regret of having vainly formed them?

But, even granting that death shall not take you unawares, and I ask you, upon what foundation do you promise yourself, that age shall change your heart, and incline you more than you are at present to a new life? Did age change the heart of Solomon? Ah! it was then that his passions rose to the highest, and that his shameful frailty no longer knew any bounds. Did age prepare Saul for his conversion? Ah! it was then that, to his past errors, he added superstition, impiety, hardness of heart, and despair. Perhaps in advancing in age, you shall leave off certain loose manners, because the disgust alone which follows them shall have withdrawn you from them; but you will not thereby be converted: you will no longer live in debauchery; but you will not repent, you will not do penance, your heart will not be changed; you will still be worldly, ambitious, voluptuous, and sensual: you will live tranquil in that state, because you will no longer have but all the dispositions of these vices, without giving yourself up to their excesses. Years, examples, long habit of the world, shall have served only to harden your conscience, to substitute indolence and a worldly wisdom in the room of the passions, and to efface that sense of religion which, in the youthful period of life, is left in the soul as yet fearful and timorous; you will die impenitent.

And, if you suppose this to be merely a movement of zeal, and not a truth founded on experience, examine what passes every day before you; view all the souls who have grown old in the world, and who, through age alone, have withdrawn from its pleasures. The love of the world is extinguished only with them under different exteriors, and which are changed solely through decency: you see the same relish for the world, the same inclinations, the same ardour for pleasures, a youthful heart in a changed and worn-out body. The delights of our younger years are recalled with satisfaction; the imagination dwells upon, and delights in reviving all that time and age have wrested from us; a blooming youth, and all its attendant amusements, are regarded with envy;

all of them are entered into, which can be thought in any degree compatible with the sedateness proper to advanced age; pretexts are formed for still mingling in certain pleasures with decency, and without being exposed to the public ridicule. Lastly, in proportion as the world flies from, and deserts us, it is pursued with more relish than ever: the long habit of it hath served only to render it more necessary to us, and to render us incapable of doing without it; and age hath never as yet been the cause of conversion.

But, even admitting that this misfortune were not to be dreaded, the Lord, is he not the God of all times, and of all ages? Is there a single one of our days which belongs not to him, and which he hath left to us for the world and for vanity? Is he not even jealous of the first-fruits of our heart and of our life, figured by those first-fruits of the earth, which were commanded by the law to be offered up to him? Why then would you retrench from him the fairest portion of your years, to consecrate it to Satan and to his works? Is life too long to be wholly employed for the glory of the Lord who hath given it to us, and who promiseth to us an eternal one? Is youth too precious to be consecrated toward becoming worthy of the eternal possession of the Supreme Being? You reserve, then, for him, only the remains and the dregs of your passionate and life! And it precisely is, as if you said to him, Lord, so long as I shall be fit for the world and its pleasures, think not that I shall turn toward or seek thee; so long as the world shall be pleased with me, I can never think of devoting myself to thee; afterward, indeed, when it shall begin to neglect and to forsake me, then I will turn me toward thee; I will say to thee, Lo, I am here! I will pray thee to accept a heart which the world hath rejected, and which reluctantly finds itself under the hard necessity of bestowing itself on thee; but, till then, expect nothing from me but perfect indifference, and a thorough neglect. After all, thou art only entitled to our services when we ourselves are good for nothing else; we are always sure, at least, of finding thee; all times are the same to thee; but, after a certain season of life, we are unfitted for the world, and, while yet time, it is proper to enjoy it before it deserts us. Soul, unworthy of ever confessing the mercies of a God whom you treat with such insult! and do you believe that he will then accept of a homage so forced, and so disgraceful to his glory, he, who taketh no delight but in voluntary sacrifices, he, who hath no need of man, and who favour-eth him when he deigneth to accept even his purest vows and his sincerest homages?

The prophet Isaiah formerly mocked, in these terms, those who worshipped vain idols: "You take," said he to them, "a cedar from Lebanon; you set apart the best and handsomest parts of it for your occasions, your pleasures, the luxury and ornament of your palaces; and when you know not how to

employ otherwise the remnant, you carve it into a vain idol, and offer up to it ridiculous vows and homages." And I, in my turn, might say to you, You set apart from your life the fairest and the most flourishing of your years, to indulge your fancies and your iniquitous passions; and when you know not to what purpose to devote the remainder, and it becomes useless to the world and to pleasures, then you make an idol of it; you make it serve for religion; you form to yourself of it a false, a superficial, and inanimate virtue, to which you reluctantly consecrate the wretched remains of your passions and of your debaucheries. O my God! is this then regarding thee as a jealous God, whom the slightest stain in the purest offerings wounds and offends, or as a vain idol, which feels not the indignity and the hypocrisy of the homages offered up to it?

Yes, my brethren, nothing can be reaped in an advanced age but what has been sown in the younger years of life. If you sow in corruption, said the apostle, you will cut down in corruption. You are continually saying, yourselves, that we always die as we have lived; that the character and disposition change not; that we bear within us in old age all the defects and all the tendencies of our younger years; and that nothing is so fortunate for us as to have formed laudable inclinations from an early period, and, as the prophet said, to have accustomed ourselves from the tenderest youth to bear the yoke of the Lord.

And, in effect, when we should attend solely to the quiet of our life, when we should have no other interest in view than that of securing peaceful and happy days to ourselves here below, what happiness to anticipate, and to stifle in their birth, by bending from the first toward virtue, so many violent passions which afterward tear the heart, and occasion all the sorrows and misery of our life! What happiness to have grafted in ourselves only gentle and innocent ideas, to spare ourselves the fatal experience of so many criminal pleasures, which for ever corrupt the heart, defile the imagination, engender a thousand shameful and unruly fancies, which accompany us even in virtue, outlive our crimes, and frequently become new ones themselves! What happiness to have created innocent and tranquil pleasures for ourselves in these younger years, to have accustomed the heart to be contented with them, not to have contracted the sad necessity of being unable to do without violent and criminal gratifications, and not to have rendered insupportable, by a long habit of warm and tumultuous passions, the gentleness and the tranquillity of virtue and innocence! How these younger years, passed in modesty and in horror at vice, attract blessings on the remainder of life! How attentive to all our ways do they render the Lord! And how much do they render us the well-beloved object of his cares and of his paternal kindness!

But nobody denies, you will say, the happiness of being early

devoted to God, and of having been able to resist all the temptations of youth and of pleasure. But that such is not your case; you have followed the common track; the torrent of the world and of the passions has swept all before it; you find yourselves, even still, under engagements too intimate and powerful to think of breaking them; you wait a more favourable situation; and you promise yourselves that, when the passion which now enslaves you shall be extinguished, you will never again enter into new bonds, but will heartily range yourselves on the side of duty and of virtue. Second pretext; the passions and the engagements, from which it is impossible as yet to withdraw.

But, in the first place, are you quite certain that this more favourable situation which you await, in order to return to God, shall arrive? Who has revealed to you the course and the duration of the passions which at present retain you? Who has marked limits to them, and said, like the Lord to the troubled waters, "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther?" When shall they have an end, do you know? Can you take upon you to say that they shall one day be terminated,—that they shall be ended at least before yourself? Would you be the first sinner surprised in his deplorable passions? Do not almost all around you die in that melancholy state? Do the ministers, called in to the assistance of the dying, find many sinners on the bed of death, who, for a length of time, have quitted their former habits in order to prepare themselves for that last moment? What do we find there but souls still bound with a thousand chains, which death alone shall break asunder;—but inexplicable consciences, if I may venture to say so, and still enveloped in the chaos of a life wholly dissolute? What indeed do we expect on these occasions, but unavailing regrets on that dreadful surprisal, and vain protestations of the different measures they would have adopted had they been able to have foreseen it? What are the usual offices of our ministry in these last moments? To enlighten consciences which ought then to need only consolation; to assist them in recalling crimes which we should then have only to exhort them to forget; to make the dying sinner sensible of his debaucheries, we who should then have to support and to animate him with the remembrance of his virtues; in a word, to open the dark concealments of his heart, we who should then have to open only the bosom of Abraham, and the treasures of an immortal glory, for the soul on the point of disengaging itself from the body. Such are the melancholy offices which we shall one day perhaps have to render to you; you, in your turn, will call upon us, and, in place of a soothing conversation with you on the advantages which a holy death promises to the believer, we shall then be solely employed in receiving the narration of the crimes of your life.

But, should your passions not extend even to that last hour,

the more you delay, the deeper do you allow the roots of guilt to become, the more do your chains form new folds round your heart, the more does that leaven of corruption which you carry within you spread itself, ferment, and corrupt all the capacity of your soul. Judge of this by the progress which the passion has hitherto made in your heart. At first it was only timid liberties, and, to quiet yourself in which, you still sought some shadow of innocence; afterward it was only dubious actions, in which it was still difficult to distinguish guilt from a venial trespass; licentiousness closely followed, but striking excesses were still rare; you reproached yourself in the very moment of their commission; you were unable to bear them long upon a conscience still alarmed at its state: the backslidings are insensibly multiplied; licentiousness is become a fixed and habitual state; conscience has no longer but feebly cried out against the empire of the passion; guilt is become necessary to you; it has no longer excited remorse; you have swallowed it like water, which passes unfelt, and without tickling the palate by any particular flavour. The more you advance, the more does the venom gain; the weaker does any residue of strength, which modesty, reason, and grace had placed in you, become, the more what was yet wholesome in your soul becomes infected and defiled. What folly, then, to allow wounds to become old and corrupted, under pretence that they will afterward be more easily cured! And what do you, in delaying, but render your evils more incurable, and take away from the hope of your conversion every resource which might still be left to you?

You perhaps flatter yourself that there are no lasting passions, and that, sooner or later, time and disgust shall withdraw you from them.

To this I answer, first, that, in all probability, you shall indeed become tired of the objects which at present enslave you, but that your passions shall not be consequently ended. You will doubtless form new ties, but you will not form to yourself a new heart. There are no eternal passions, I confess, but corruption and licentiousness are almost always so; the passions which are terminated solely by disgust, always leave the heart open for the reception of some other, and it is commonly a new fire which expels and extinguishes the first. Call to your remembrance what has hitherto happened to you. You firmly thought that, were such an engagement once at an end, you should then be free, and wholly at liberty to return to your God; you fixed upon that happy moment as the term for your penitence: that engagement has been terminated; death, inconstancy, disgust, or some other accident, has broken it, and nevertheless you are not converted; new opportunities have offered, you have formed new ties, you have forgotten your former resolutions, and your last state is become worse than the first. The passions which are not extin-

guished by grace serve merely to light up and to prepare the heart for new ones.

I answer, secondly, when all your criminal engagements should even be ended, and that no particular object should interest your heart, if time and disgust alone have effected this, yet will not your conversion be more advanced. You will still hold to all, in no longer holding to any thing; you will find yourself in a certain vague state of indolence and of insensibility, more removed from the kingdom of God than even the ardour of mad passions; your heart, free from any particular passion, will be as if filled with a universal passion; if I may speak in this manner, with an immense void which will wholly occupy it. It will even be so much the more difficult for you to quit this state, as you will have nothing sufficiently striking to catch at. You will find yourself without vigour, taste, or inclination for salvation; it is a calm from which you will find it more difficult to extricate yourself than even from the tempest, for the same winds which cause the storm may sometimes drive us fortunately into port; but the greater the calm is, the more certainly it leads to destruction.

But, lastly, you say, We would willingly change and adopt the party of a more reasonable and more Christian life; we feel the utter emptiness of the world and of all its pleasures; we enter into amusements, and into a certain dissipation, without relish, and as if with regret; we would wish to renounce them, and seriously to labour toward our salvation; but this first step startles us. It is a matter of notoriety which engages us toward the public, and which we have many doubts of being able to support; we are of a rank which renders the smallest change conspicuous; and we are afraid lest, like so many others, we act a part that will not be lasting, and consequently will leave us only the ridicule without the merit of devotion.

You dread, my dear hearer, the being able to go through with it? What! in delaying your conversion, you promise yourself that God shall one day touch you; and, in being converted at present, you dare not promise yourself that he will sustain you? You depend upon his mercies while insulting him, and you dare not trust to them when glorifying him? You believe that you have nothing to risk, on his part, in continuing to offend him, and you have no confidence in him when beginning to serve him? O man! where is here that reason and that rectitude of judgment which thou vauntest so much? And must it be, that in the business of thy salvation alone thou art a sink of contradiction and an incomprehensible paradox?

Besides, might we not with reason say to you, Make a beginning at least; try if, in effect, you shall be unable to sustain yourself in the service of God? Is it not worth the trouble of being tried? Does a man, precipitated by the tempest into the sea, and who finds himself on the point of drowning, not

strain every nerve, in the first place, to gain the shore by swimming, before he resigns himself to the mercy of the waves? Would he say to himself, as an excuse for making no effort to save himself, "I shall perhaps be unable to go through with it; my strength will most likely fail me by the way?" Ah! he tries, he makes every effort, he struggles against the danger, he labours to the last moment of his strength, and only gives way at last when, overpowered by the violence of the waves, he is forced to yield to the evil of his destiny. You perish, my dear hearer, the waves gain upon you, the torrent sweeps you away, and you hesitate whether you shall try to extricate yourself from the danger; you waste, in calculating your strength, the only moments left to provide for your safety; and you sacrifice, in deliberating, the little time that is left to you for the sole purpose of disengaging yourself from the peril, which is imminent, and in which so many others are continually perishing before your eyes!

But, lastly, even granting that in the end the various hardships of virtue tire out your weakness, and that you find yourself under the necessity of retreating; at any rate, you will always have passed some little time without offending your God; you will always have made some efforts toward appeasing him; you will always have devoted some days to the praise of his holy name; at any rate, it will be a portion cut off from your criminal life, and from that treasure of iniquity which you amass for the terrible day of vengeance; you will have acquired, at least, the right of representing your weakness to God, and of saying to him, "Lord, thou beholdest my desires and my weakness; why, O my God! have I not a heart more constant to thee, more determined in the cause of truth, more callous to the world, and more difficult to be led astray? Put an end, O Lord, to mine uncertainties and to mine inconstancy; take from the world that dominion which it hath over my heart; resume thine ancient rights over it, and no longer imperfectly attract me, lest I again fly off from thee. I am covered with shame at the eternal variations of my life, and they make me that I am afraid to raise up mine eyes to thee, or to promise a constant fidelity. I have so often broken my promises after swearing to thee an eternal love; my weakness hath so often led me to forget the happiness of that engagement, that I have no longer the courage to answer for myself. My heart betrays me every instant; and a thousand times, on rising from thy feet, and with mine eyes still bathed in tears of sorrow for having offended thee, an opportunity hath seduced me; and the very same infidelities, of which I had so lately expressed mine abhorrence, have found me, as formerly, weak and unfaithful: with a heart so light and so uncertain, what assurance, O my God! can I give to thee? And what, indeed, could I presume to promise to myself? I have so often thought that my resolutions would now at last be constant;

I have found myself in moments so lively and so affecting of grace and of compunction, and which seemed for ever to fix the durability of my fidelity, that I see nothing now which can either be capable of fixing me, or of affording me a hope of that stability in virtue which I have hitherto been unable to attain. Let the danger of my situation touch thee, O my God! The character of my heart discourages and alarms me; I know that inconstancy in thy ways is a presage of perdition, and that the versatile and changeable soul is cursed in thy holy books. But, while yet sensible of the holy inspirations of thy grace, I will once more endeavour to enter into thy ways; and, if I must perish, I prefer being lost while exerting myself to return to thee, O my God! who permittest not the soul who sincerely seeketh thee to perish, and who art the only Lord worthy of being served, to the shocking tranquillity of an avowed and determined rebellion, and to the melancholy idea of renouncing all hope of those eternal riches which thou preparest for those who shall have loved and served thee."

SERMON XVIII.

ON FALSE TRUST.

"But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel."

LUKE xxiv. 21.

IN vain had Jesus Christ, during his mortal life, a thousand times declared to his disciples, that it was flattering themselves to count upon a reward which had not been merited by crosses and toils: this truth, so little agreeable to nature, had never been willingly received; and all the times that the Saviour had tried to undeceive them on the opposite error, they heard not that word of the gospel, and it was not seen by them. Such is still at present the disposition of the two disciples to whom Jesus Christ condescends to appear in their way to Emmaus; they expected that their Master should deliver Israel from the yoke of nations, and should cause them to be seated on twelve earthly thrones, without any exertion being necessary on their part in order to mount them, without the Saviour himself having occasion to suffer, in order to triumph over his enemies.

Besides the mistake which led them to consider Jesus Christ as a temporal deliverer, I likewise observe another, which appears to me not less dangerous in them, but which at present is more common among us: it is that false trust by which they are persuaded, that, without co-operating toward it themselves, and in leaving to Jesus Christ the whole management of their deliverance, they shall receive the fulfilment of the magnificent promises, which, in his conversations with them upon the earth, he had so often reiterated. Now, my brethren, this false trust, which makes all to be expected by sinners from grace alone, without any co-operation on their part, and the reward of the holy to be hoped, although they labour not toward meriting it; this false trust, which always reckons upon the goodness of God whom it offends, which, without combating, promises itself to be crowned, and which always hopes against probability; this false trust, which is unwilling to purchase heaven, and yet expects it, is the most universal and most established error among Christians; and when Jesus Christ shall once more appear upon the earth, he will find many of his unbelieving disciples, who shall have occasion to say to him, "we trusted."

This, my brethren, is what induces me to occupy your time at present upon so important a matter, persuaded that a false trust is the source of condemnation to almost all sinners; that those who are afraid of perishing, never perish; and that I could not better fulfil my ministry, than by establishing in your hearts those salutary feelings of mistrust which lead to precautions and to remedies, and which, in disturbing the peace of sin, leave, in its place, the peace of Jesus Christ, which surpasseth all feeling. Thus, in order to give a proper extension to so useful a subject, I reduce it to two propositions. There is no disposition more foolish than that of the sinner who presumes, without labouring toward his amendment, is the first: there is none more injurious to God, is the second. The folly of a false trust: the insult of a false trust. Let us explain these two truths.

PART I.—I am not afraid of openly agreeing with you, my brethren, that the mercies of the Lord are always more abundant than our wickednesses, and that his goodness may furnish legitimate motives of trust to all sinners. The doctrine which I go to establish is sufficiently terrible, without adding to it new terrors by concealing part of those truths which may tend to soften it; and if caution be required in this matter, it is rather in not bringing forward all that might alarm the conscience, than in concealing what might tend to console it.

It is true, that every where the holy books give us magnificent and soothing ideas of the goodness of God. One while he is a mild and long-forbearing master, who awaits the penitence of the sinner; who covers the sins of men, in order to lead them to repentance; who is silent and quiet; who is slow to

punish, and delays in order that he may be prevented; who threatens in order to be disarmed: another while he is a tender friend, who is never weary of knocking at the gate of the heart; who flatters, intreats, and solicits us; and who, in order to draw us to himself, employs every thing which an ingenious love can invent, to recall a rebellious heart. Again, and lastly, for all would never be said, he is an indefatigable Shepherd, who goes even through the wildest mountains, in search of his strayed sheep; and, having at last found it, places it upon his shoulders, and is so transported with joy that even the celestial harmony are ordered to celebrate its happy return. It must surely be confessed, that the consolation of these images can receive no addition; and every sinner who, after this, despairs, or even gives way to despondency, is the most foolish of all men. But do not from thence conclude, that the sinner who presumes is less foolish, or that the mercy of the Lord can be a legitimate foundation of trust to those who are continually desiring their conversion, and yet, without labouring toward that great work, promise every thing to themselves from a goodness which their very confidence insults. To convince you of this, before I enter into the main points of my subject, remark, I beg of you, that, among that innumerable crowd of sinners, of every description, with which the world is filled, there is not one who hath not hopes of his conversion; not one who, before-hand, considers himself as a child of wrath, and doomed to perish; not one who doth not flatter himself that at last the Lord shall one day have pity upon him: the lewd, the ambitious, the worldly, the revengeful, the unjust, all hope, yet no one repents. Now, I mean, at present, to prove to you, that this disposition of false trust is, of all others in which the creature can be, the most foolish: follow, I beg of you, my reasons; they appear worthy of your attention.

In effect, when, in order to make the folly of false trust apparent, I should have only the uncertainty in which a sinner, who hath lost the sanctifying grace, is of his salvation, no other argument would be required to justify my first proposition. And, when I speak of the uncertainty of his salvation, you easily comprehend that there is no question here of that uncertainty common to all believers, which occasions that no one can know whether he be worthy of love or of hatred; whether he shall persevere to the end, or fall, never more to recover himself: terrible subject of dread, even for the most righteous! I speak of a more shocking uncertainty, since it does not suppose, in the sinner in question, a doubtful state of righteousness and Christian fears, upon backslidings to come; but because it is founded upon a certain state of sin, and upon a repentance which nobody can guarantee to him.

Now, I say that it is the height of folly to presume in this state. For confess it, my dear hearer, inveterate sinner as you

are, abiding, as you tranquilly do, in iniquitous passions, in the midst even of all the solemnities of religion, and of all the terrors of the holy word, upon the foolish hope of one day, at last, quitting this deplorable state; you cannot deny that it is at least doubtful whether you shall retrieve yourself, or, even to the end, remain in your sin. I even admit you to be full of good desires; but you are not ignorant that desires convert nobody, and that the greatest sinners are often those who most long for their conversion. Now, the doubt here only equal, would you be prudent in remaining careless? What! In the frightful uncertainty whether you shall die in your irregularity, or if God shall withdraw you from it; floating, as I may say, between heaven and hell; on the poise between these two destinies, you could be indifferent on the decision? Hope is the sweetest and the most flattering choice; and for that reason you would incline to its side? Ah! my dear hearer, were there no other reason to be afraid than that of hoping, you would not be prudent to live in this profound calm.

But such is not even your case; things are far indeed from being equal; in this shocking doubt which every sinner may inwardly form,—“Shall I expire in mine iniquity, in the sin in which I actually and have so long lived; or shall I not die in it?”—the first part is infinitely the most probable. For, first, your own powers are not sufficient to regain that sanctity you have lost; a foreign, supernatural, and heavenly aid is necessary, of which nobody can assure you; in place of which, you need only yourself to remain in your sin: there is nothing in your nature which can resuscitate the grace lost, no seed of salvation, no principle of spiritual life; and you bear in your heart a fatal source of corruption which may every day produce fresh fruits of death: it is more likely, therefore, that you shall die in your guilt than it is that you shall be converted. Secondly, not only is a foreign and divine aid necessary, but also an aid uncommon, rare, denied to almost all sinners; in short, a miracle for your conversion; for the conversion of the sinner is one of the greatest prodigies of grace, and you know yourself that such instances are extremely rare in the world; now and then some fortunate soul whom God withdraweth from licentiousness. But these are remarkable exertions of the Divine mercy, and not in the common tract. In place of which, you have only to let things pursue their natural course, and you shall die such as you are: God hath only to follow his ordinary laws, and your destruction is certain; the possibility of your salvation is founded solely on a singular effort of his power and mercy; the certitude of your condemnation is founded upon the commonest of all rules: in a word, that you perish, is the ordinary lot of sinners who resemble you; that you are converted, is a singularity of which there are few examples. Thirdly, in order to continue in your present state, you have only to follow your inclinations, to yield yourself up to yourself, and quietly

to allow yourself to be carried down by the stream; to do this you have occasion for neither effort nor violence: but to return, ah! you must break through inclinations fortified by time; you must hate and resist yourself, tear yourself from the dearest objects, break asunder the tenderest ties, make the most heroic efforts, you who are incapable of the commonest ones. Now, I demand, if, in a matter to come, or in uncertain events, we ever augur in favour of those who have most obstacles to surmount, and most difficulties to struggle against? Doth not the most easy always appear the most probable? Soften as much as you please this truth in your mind; view it in the most favourable light; this proposition on your eternal destiny is the most incontestible of the Christian morality. It is beyond comparison more certain that I shall never be converted, and that I shall die in my sin, than that the Lord shall have pity upon me, and at last withdraw me from it: this is your situation; and, if you can still be indifferent, and flatter yourself in such a state, your security, my dear hearer, terrifies me.

But I go farther, and I intreat you to listen to me. The sinner who, without labouring to reclaim himself, assures himself of conversion, presumes not in a fearful uncertainty, and where every thing seems to conclude against him, but also in spite of the moral certainty, as we are taught by faith, that he is lost. Here are my proofs: first, you expect that God shall convert you; but how do you expect it? By continually placing new obstacles in the way of his grace; by riveting your chains; by aggravating your yoke; by multiplying your crimes; by neglecting every opportunity of salvation, which, his solemnities, his mysteries, and even the terrors of his word offer to you; by always remaining in the same dangers; by changing nothing in your manners, your pleasures, your intimacies; in short, in every thing which continues to nourish in your heart that fatal passion from which you hope that grace shall deliver you. How! the foolish virgins are rejected, solely for having negligently and without fervour awaited the bridegroom; and you, faithless soul, who await him while completing the measure of your crimes, you dare to flatter yourself that you shall be more favourably treated?

Secondly. Grace is accorded only to tears, to solicitations, to eager desires; it requires to be long courted. Now, do you pray? At least, do you intreat? Do you imitate the importunity of the widow of the gospel? Do you labour, like Cornelius the Gentile, to attract that grace by charities and other Christian works? Do you say to the Lord, every day, with the prophet, "Hide not thy face from me, O Lord, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit?" Ah! you say to him, "Lord, thou wilt draw me to thyself; in vain I resist thee; thou wilt, at last, break asunder my chains; however great be the corruption of my heart, thou wilt ultimately

change it." Fool! what more likely to repeal a gift than the temerity which exacts it, and even in the very moment when most unworthy dares to claim it as a right! Fresh argument against you; grace is reserved for the lowly and the fearful, who dread being refused what is not owing to them: it is upon these souls that the Spirit of God relieth, and taketh delight in his working wonders; on the contrary, "he despiseth the presumptuous sinner, and knoweth him afar off."

Thirdly. The grace of conversion which you so confidently expect, is, as you know, the greatest of all gifts. Nevertheless, as you know still better, there is scarcely a sinner more unworthy of it than yourself; unworthy through the nature of your disorders, of which you alone know the infamy and the enormity; unworthy through the lights and inspirations you have a thousand times misused; unworthy through the favours of the mysteries and of the truths which you have always neglected; unworthy through the sequel, even of your natural inclinations, which heaven, at your birth, had formed so happy and so tractable to truth, and which you have turned into melancholy means of vice; unworthy through the iniquitous derisions which you have made of piety, and those impious desires, so injurious to the truth of God, which have a thousand times led you to wish that all we say of a future state were a fable; lastly, unworthy through that profound security in which you live, which, before God, is the worst of all your crimes. Now, I ask nothing here but equity; if only a single sinner were to be excluded from that grace of conversion which you expect, you would have every reason to dread that the exclusion fell upon you, and that you were to be that single child of curse, separated as an anathematized from all his brethren. But, if almost all be deprived of that blessing, ah! my dear hearer, ought you to reckon upon it as secure? And what have you but a superabundance of sins to distinguish you from others? If the hope of the presumptuous sinner perish in general with himself, can you suppose that your salvation shall be accomplished by the same way in which all others perish? I know that we ought never to despair; but humble confidence is very different from presumption: humble confidence, after having tried all, counts upon nothing, and you depend upon all without having ever tried any thing. Humble trust considers the mercy of the Lord only as the supplement of the defects of penitence, and you make it the refuge of your crimes; humble trust, with fear and trembling, awaits the pardon of those faults it hath lamented, and you coolly expect that those should be forgiven of which you never mean to repent. I know, and I again repeat, that we ought never to despair; but were it possible that despair could be legitimate, ah! it would be when hope is presumptuously encouraged.

But age will mellow the passions, says inwardly the sinner here: enticing opportunities will not always come in the way; circumstances more favourable for salvation will occur; and what is at present impossible, shall one day perhaps be done when a thousand actual impediments shall be removed. My God! in this manner doth the unfortunate soul deceive himself; and it is through an illusion so palpable that the demon seduces almost all men, the wisest as the most foolish, the most enlightened as the most credulous, the great as the common people. For, say, my dear hearer, when you promise yourself that one day the Lord shall at last have pity upon you, you no doubt promise yourself that he will change your heart; now, why do you depend upon this change, so necessary to your salvation, more in future than at present? In the first place, shall your dispositions for penitence be then more favourable? Shall your heart find it easier to break asunder its chains? What! inclinations deeply rooted through time and years shall be more easily torn out? A torrent which has already hollowed out its bed, shall be more easy to turn aside? Are you in your senses when you say so? Ah! even now, it appears so difficult to repress your inordinate passions, though yet in their infancy, and consequently more tractable and easy to regulate! You delay your conversion only because it would cost you too much to conquer yourself on certain points: how! you are persuaded that it will cost you less in the end; that this fatal plant, then become a tree, shall be more pliable; that this wound, inveterate and of longer standing, shall be more easy to cure, and shall require less grievous remedies? You expect resources and facilities toward penitence from time; it is time, my brethren, which will deprive you of all those yet remaining.

Secondly. Shall grace be either more frequent in future, or more victorious? But, granting it even to be so, your cupidity, then more powerful, opposing greater impediments, the grace which would now triumph over your heart, and change you into a thorough penitent, will no longer then but slightly agitate you, and excite within you only weak and unavailing desires of repentance. But you have little reason to flatter yourself even with this hope: the more you irritate the goodness of God by delaying your conversion, the more will he withdraw himself from you: every moment diminishes in some measure his favours and his kindness. Recollect, that when you first began to deviate from his ways, not a day passed without his operating within you some movement of salvation, troubles, remorse, and desires of penitence. At present, if you attend to it, these inspirations are more rare: it is only on certain occasions that your conscience is aroused; you are partly familiarized with your disorders. Ah! my dear hearer, you easily see that your insensibility will be only increased in the sequel: God will more and more retire from you, and will deliver you up to a reprobate feeling, and to that fatal tranquillity which is the consummation

and the most dreadful punishment of iniquity. Now I ask, are you not absurd in thus marking out, for your conversion, a time in which you shall never have had fewer aids on the part of grace, and less facility on the part of your heart?

I might still add, that the more you delay, the more you accumulate debts; the more you enrich the treasure of iniquity, the more crimes you shall have to expiate, the more rigorous shall your reparation have to be, and consequently the more shall your penitence be difficult. Slight austerities, some retrenchments, some Christian charities, would perhaps suffice at present to acquit you before your Judge, and to appease his justice. But, in the sequel, when the abundance of your crimes shall have risen above your head, and time and years shall have blunted, if not totally destroyed, in your memory, the multitude and the flagrancy of your iniquities; ah! no reparation on your part shall then be sufficiently rigorous, no mortification sufficiently austere, no humiliation sufficiently profound, no pleasure, however innocent, which you must not deny yourself, no indulgence which will not be criminal: holy excesses of penitence will be necessary to compensate the duration and the enormity of your crimes; it will require you to quit all, to tear yourself from every thing, to sacrifice your fortune, interests, and conveniency, perhaps to condemn yourself to a perpetual retreat, for it is only through these means that the great sinners are recalled. Now, if slight rigours, which would at present be sufficient amends, appear so insupportable, and disgust you at the idea of a change, shall penitence be more alluring, when more toils, and steps a thousand times more bitter, present themselves in its train? My God! upon the affair of salvation alone it is that men are capable of such wilful mistakes. Ah! my brethren, of what avail are great lights, extent of genius, deep penetration, and solid judgment in the management of earthly matters, and of vain undertakings which shall perish with us, if we are children in the grand work of eternity?

And allow me to conclude this part of my Discourse with a final reason, which, I trust, will serve to convince you. You consider the vain hope of a conversion as a feeling of grace and salvation, and as a proof that the Lord visiteth you, and that he hath not yet delivered you up to all the inveteracy of sin. But, my dear hearer, the Lord cannot visit you in his mercy without inspiring you with salutary troubles and fears on the state of your conscience: all the operations of grace begin with these; consequently, while you continue tranquil, it is evident that God treateth you according to all the rigour of his justice, and that he exerciseth upon you the most terrible of his chastisements; I mean to say, his neglect and the denial of his grace. Peace in sin, the security in which you live, is therefore the most infallible mark that God is no longer with you, and that this grace, which in the

criminal soul always works trouble and anxiety, dread and distrust, is totally extinguished in yours. Thus you comfort yourself on what ought to excite your justest fears: the most deplorable signs of your reprobation form in your mind the most solid foundation of your hope: trust in sin is the most terrible chastisement with which God can punish the sinner, and you draw from it a prejudication of salvation and of penitence. Tremble, if any remains of faith be yet left you: this calm is the forerunner of a shipwreck; you are stamped with the mark of the reprobate; reckon not upon a mercy which treats you so much the more rigorously, as it permits you to hope and to depend upon it.

The error of the majority of sinners is that of imagining that the grace of conversion is one of those sudden miracles by which the whole face of things is changed in the twinkling of an eye; which plants, tears up, destroys, rears up at the first stroke, and in an instant creates the new man, as the earthly man was formerly drawn from nothing. The grossest of all mistakes, my dear hearer; conversion is in general a slow and tardy miracle, the fruit of cares, of troubles, of fears, and of bitter anxieties.

The days, saith Jesus Christ, which are to precede the utter destruction of this visible world and the coming of the Son of Man, shall be days of trouble and woe; nations shall rise against nations, and kings against kings; horrible signs shall be seen in the firmament long before the King of Glory himself shall appear; all nature shall announce, by its disorder, the approaching destruction and the coming of its God. Ah! my dear hearer, behold the image of the change of your heart, of the destruction of that world of passions within you, of the coming of the Son of Man into your soul. Long before that great event, internal wars shall take place; you shall feel your passions excited one against the other; blessed signs of salvation shall appear upon your person; all shall be shaken, all shall be disturbed; all within you shall announce the destruction of the carnal man, the coming of the Son of God, the end of your iniquities, the renovation of your soul, a new heaven and a new earth. Ah! when these blessed things shall come to pass, then lift up your head, and say that your redemption draweth nigh; then be confident, and adore the awful but consolatory preparations of a God who is on the eve of entering into your heart. But, while nothing is shaken within you, and no change appears in your soul; while your heart faileth not for fear, and your passions, still tranquil, remain undisturbed but by the obstacles which retard their gratification; ah! mistrust those who shall tell you that the Lord draweth nigh; that you will immediately find him in the sanctuary, I mean to say, in the participation of the sacrament, in those retired places to which you shall perhaps go to comfort him in the person of his afflicted members; who will be continually saying, "Lo, here is Christ;" believe them not; they are false prophets, saith Jesus Christ: no sign of his coming hath taken

place within you; in vain you expect and presume; it is not in this manner that he will come; trouble and dread walk before him; and the soul who continues tranquil, and yet trusts, shall never be visited by him.

“Happy, therefore, is the man that feareth always:” he whose virtues do not entirely quiet him upon his eternal destiny, who tremble lest the imperfections mingled with his most laudable works not only destroy their whole merit before God, but even rank them among those which God shall punish on the day of his wrath. But what idea, will some one say to me, do you give us of the God we worship! An idea worthy of him, my brethren; and, in my second part, I shall prove to you, that false trust is injurious to him, and forms to itself the idea of a God, who is neither true, wise, just, nor even merciful.

PART II.—It is rather surprising, my brethren, that false trust should pretend to find even in religion motives which authorize it, and should mistake the most criminal of all dispositions, for a sentiment of salvation, and a fruit of faith and of grace. In effect, the sinner, who, without wishing to quit his irregularities, promises himself a change, alleges, in justification of his presumption, first, the power of God, who ruleth over the hearts of men, who can change in an instant the will, and to whom it is equally easy to produce the child of promise from the sterility of old age, as from the fecundity of youth. Secondly, his justice, for having formed man of clay, that is to say, weak, and with almost unconquerable tendencies to pleasure, he ought to have some consideration for his weakness, and more readily pardon faults which are, as it were, unavoidable to him. Lastly, his mercy, always ready to receive the repentant sinner. Now, my brethren, it is easy to take from false trust pretexes so unworthy of piety, and show that the disposition of the presuming sinner insults God in all the above-mentioned perfections. Allow me to explain my reasons, and continue to honour me with your attention.

In the first place, when you conceive a powerful God, master of hearts, and changing at his pleasure the rebellious wills of men, is it not true, that you at the same time conceive a power regulated by wisdom, that is to say, which doth nothing but in conformity with that order it hath established? Now, the presumptuous sinner attributes to God a blind power, which acts indiscriminately. For, though he can whatever he willeth, nevertheless, as he is infinitely wise, there is an order in his wills; he willeth not at random, and whatever he doth hath its eternal reasons in the depth of his divine wisdom. Now, it is evident that this divine wisdom would not be sufficiently justified before men, if the grace of conversion were to be at last accorded to false trust. For say, in order to merit the greatest of all favours, it would then be sufficient to have a thousand times rejected it? The

righteous man, who continually crucifies his flesh, who incessantly groans in order to obtain the precious gift of perseverance, would then have no better claim than the sinner, who, without having ever placed himself in a situation to merit it, hath always promised it to himself? It would then be perfectly indifferent either to serve the Lord, and to walk uprightly before him, or to pursue the erroneous ways of the passions, since, at the end, the lot of each would be the same? Much more, it would then be a misfortune, a folly, a lost trouble, to have carried the yoke from youth, since nothing would be risked by delaying it? The maxims of debauchery, on the love of pleasures in the early stage of life, and on deferring repentance to the years of decrepitude and debility, would then be the rules of wisdom and of religion? The wonders of grace would then serve but to tempt the fidelity of the just, but to authorize the impenitence of sinners, but to destroy the fruit of the sacrament, and to augment the ills of the church? Is this the God whom we worship? And would he be so wonderful in his gifts, according to the expression of the prophet, if he were to dispense them with so little either of order or of wisdom?

In effect, if the empire which God hath over hearts could serve as a resource for a presumptuous sinner, upon that footing the conversion of all men would be certain, even of those infidels who know not the Lord, of those barbarous nations who have never heard his name. Doth God not rule over the hearts of all men? Who hath ever withstood his will? Is he not able to make his light shine through the profoundest darkness, to change into lambs the fiercest lions, and to turn his enemies into the most intrepid confessors of his name? Is the heart of an Indian, or of a savage, a more arduous conquest to him than that of a presumptuous sinner? Is not every thing alike easy to him? He hath only to say, and it is done. Yet, nevertheless, would you thereupon be willing that your eternal destiny should run the same hazard as that of a savage, who, in the heart of his forests, almost inaccessible to the preaching of the gospel, worships absurd and monstrous divinities? God may raise up, in his favour, evangelical ministers, who, along with the lights of faith, shall bring grace and salvation to his soul. You say that it requires one of those miraculous efforts of the Almighty power to overcome all the difficulties which apparently render the conversion of that unfortunate creature impossible: on the contrary, that you, surrounded with the aids of the sacrament, with the light of the doctrine and of instruction, are surely in a situation much more likely to secure your salvation, and consequently, that you have infinitely more ground to promise it to yourself. Ah! my dear hearer, you deceive yourself, and I assure you, that, to me, the salvation of that infidel appears less hopeless than yours. He has never abused favours which he has never received; and hitherto you have unworthily rejected all those

which have been offered to you: he has never resisted that truth which he has never known, and you iniquitously withstand it: the first impulse of grace will triumph over his heart, and the strongest impressions are ineffectual against the inflexibility of yours: a single ray of light will disclose to him errors and truths till then unknown, and all the lights of faith are unable to disturb the tranquillity of your passions: he holds out to the mercy of God only the misfortune of his birth, only sins almost involuntary, only wretchedness rather than crimes, all of them proper motives to affect him, and you hold out to him affected acts of ingratitude and vile perseverance in obstinacy, all subjects calculated to remove him for ever from you. Ah! it is easy for the Lord to bear upon the wings across the seas apostolical men; his angels, when he pleaseth, know to transport his prophets from the land in which he is worshipped, even into Babylon, in order to visit a just man exposed to the fury of lions; but if any thing were difficult to him, it would be that of conquering a rebellious heart, of recalling a soul born in the kingdom of light, surrounded with all the succours of faith, penetrated with all the feelings of grace, aided by all the examples of piety, and, nevertheless, always firm in its errors. It is an illusion, therefore, in his power to search for vain motives of security; God could operate so many other prodigies in favour of a thousand sinners whom he forsaketh, although they be not so unworthy as you of his grace. It is a dangerous maxim to regulate his will upon his power.

The second error which authorizes false trust, has its foundation in the unjust idea formed of the divine justice. They persuade themselves that, man being born with violent inclinations for pleasure, our errors are more worthy of the pity than of the anger of the Lord; and that our weakness alone solicits his favour, in place of arming his indignation against us.

But, in the first place, it might be said to you, that the corruption of your nature comes not from the Creator; that it is the work of man, and the punishment of his sin; that the Lord had created man righteous; and consequently, that this unfortunate tendency, of which you complain, is an irregularity which God must punish whenever you fall under it; how then can you suppose that it shall serve you as an excuse? It is in consequence of it that you are a child of wrath and an outcast vessel: how do you pretend to draw reasons from thence, in order to enter into contestation even with God, and to challenge his justice? It is, in a word, in consequence of it that you are unworthy of all favours: how dare you to hold it out as a reason for demanding them?

Secondly. It might be said to you, that, whatever be the weakness of our will, man is always master of his desires; that he hath been left under the charge of his own resolution; that his passions have no more empire over him than what he himself

chooses to allow them; and that water, as well as fire, hath been placed in our way, in order to allow a perfect freedom of choice to our own will. Ah! I could herein attest your own conscience, and demand of you, above all, of you my dear hearer, if, in spite of your weakness, whenever you have forsaken the law of God, you have not felt that it wholly depended upon yourself to have continued faithful? If piercing lights have not discovered to you all the horror of your transgression; if secret remorse have not turned you away from it; if you have not then hesitated between pleasure and duty; if, after a thousand internal deliberations, and those secret vicissitudes, where one while grace, and the other while cupidity gained the victory, you have not at last declared for guilt, as if still trembling, and almost unable to harden yourself against yourself? I might go even farther, and demand of you, if, considering the happy inclinations of modesty and of reserve, the dispositions with which God had favoured you at your birth, the innocency of virtue would not have been more natural, more pleasing, and more easy to you than the licentiousness of vice; demand of you, if you have not suffered more by being unfaithful to your God, than it would have cost you to have been righteous; if you have not been obliged to encroach more upon yourself, to do more violence to your heart, to bear with more vexations, to force your way through more intricate and more arduous paths? Ah! what then can the justice of God find in your dissipations which doth not furnish to him fresh matter of severity and anger against you?

Lastly. It might be added, that, if you are born weak, yet the goodness of God hath environed your soul with a thousand aids; that it is that well-beloved vine which he hath fostered with the tenderest care, which he hath fenced with a deep moat, and fortified with an inaccessible tower; I mean to say, that your soul hath been as if defended from its birth by the succours of the sacrament, by the lights of the doctrine, by the force of examples, by continual inspirations of grace, and perhaps by the special aids likewise of a holy and a Christian education provided for you by the Lord, and which so many others have wanted. Ingrate! wherein could you be able to justify your weakness before the Lord, and to interest his justice itself to use indulgence toward you? Ah! what do your transgressions present to him but the abuses of his grace, and means of salvation perverted, through the licentiousness of your will, into occasions of sin?

But let us leave all these reasons, and tell me, that weakness of which you complain, and for which you pretend that God will have consideration, is it not your own handwork, and the fruit of your own special irregularities? Recollect here, those happy days when your innocence had not been wrecked; were your passions then so difficult to be overcome? Did modesty, temperance,

fidelity, piety, then appear to you as impracticable virtues? Did you find it impossible to resist occasions? Were your tendencies to pleasure so violent that you were not then their master? Ah! whence comes it then that they now tyrannize with such dominion over your heart? Is it not, that having, through a fatal negligence, allowed them to usurp the command, they have ever since been too powerful to be conquered? Have you not forged, with your own hands, these chains? Look around you, and see if so many just, who bear (and from their earliest youth) the yoke, are even tempted in situations in which you are always certain to perish. Ah! why then should you complain of a weakness which you have brought upon yourself? Why should you count, that what must irritate the Lord against you shall serve to appease him? What doth he see, when he sees the weakness of your inclinations? He sees the fruit of your crimes, the consequences of a licentious and sensual life. Is it here that you dare to appeal to justice itself, to that justice before which the righteous themselves entreat not to be judged? My God! upon what shall the sinner not flatter himself, since, in the most terrible of thy perfections, he finds reasons of confidence?

The only rational and legitimate conclusion which it is permitted to you to draw from your own weakness, and from these inclinations for the world, and for pleasures, which, in spite of your resolutions, hurry you away, is, that you have more occasion to watch, to lament, and to pray, than others; that, with more studious care, you ought to shun the dangers and the attractions of the senses and of the flesh. But then it is that you believe yourself invincible, when we exhort you to fly all profane conversations, suspicious intercourses, doubtful pleasures, lascivious spectacles, and assemblies of sin. Ah! you then defend yourself upon the ground that your innocence is in no degree injured there: you resign to weak souls all the precautions of flight and of circumspection: you tell us that every one must feel and know himself, and that those who are weak enough to be injured there, should in prudence keep away from them. But how can you expect that God shall have consideration for a weakness for which you have so little yourself? You are weak when there is question of excusing your crimes to him; you are no longer so, when, upon that ground, it is necessary to adopt painful measures in order to continue faithful to him.

But you will say, that if every thing be to be dreaded from his justice, at least his mercies are infinite; when his goodness should find nothing in us proper to touch him, would it not find motives sufficiently pressing in itself? This would be the third illusion of false trust which I should have to overthrow; but, besides that I have elsewhere sufficiently mentioned it, it is almost time to conclude. I mean, therefore, my dear hearer, to ask you only one question: When you say that the goodness of God is infinite, what do you pretend to say? That he never punishes guilt? You would not dare to mean so. That he never abandons the sinner? The

Sauls, the Antiochuses, the Pharaohs, have taught you the contrary. That the immodest, the worldly, the revengeful, the ambitious, shall be alike saved as the just? You know that nothing unclean shall enter heaven. That he hath not created man to render him eternally miserable? But wherefore hath he prepared a hell? That he hath already given you a thousand marks of his goodness? But that is what ought to overwhelm your ingratitude on the past, and to make you to dread every thing for the future. That he is not so terrible as it is said? But nothing is told of his justice but what he has told you himself. That he would be under the necessity of damning almost all men were all that we say true? But the gospel declares to you, in express terms, that few shall be saved: that he punisheth not but at the worst? But every rejected grace may be the term of his mercies. That it costs him nothing to forgive? But hath he not the interests of his glory to attend to? That little is required to disarm him? But a change must take place, and the changing of the heart is the greatest of all his works, That that lively trust which you have in his goodness can come only from him? But whatever leads not to him, by leading to repentance, can never come from him. What then do you mean to say? That he will not reject the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart? And behold, my dear hearer, what I have all along been preaching to you. Turn to the Lord, and then place your trust in him; whatever your crimes may be, his mercy is always open to the repentant sinner; throw yourself unreservedly upon his goodness for the permanence of your conversion, for perseverance in his service, for victory over the numerous obstacles which the enemy to salvation will continually be throwing in the way of your holy desires; the grace which he doth, in inspiring the feelings of a sincere penitence, is always a blessed presage of those which he prepareth: never mistrust his mercy; there is nothing but what may be expected from him, when it is the sorrow of having offended him which intreats it; never allow yourself to be cast down by the remembrance of your past iniquities; whatever can be wept can be pardoned: lock up in the bosom of his mercy the whole duration of the days which you have employed in offending him; they will be as though they had never been: from the moment that you shall begin to serve him, you will begin to increase before him; a thousand years are only a day in his eyes, from the moment that your crimes are terminated by a sincere change: he is the God of sinners, the Benefactor of the ungrateful, the Father of prodigal children, the Shepherd of strayed sheep, the friend of Samaritans; in a word, all the consolations of faith seem to be for the repentant sinner.

But if you continue to promise yourself, that, at last, the time will come, when you shall seriously think upon your salvation without doing it still; ah! remember, my dear hearer, that it is in that very way that almost all sinners have perished, and that it is

the high-road to death in sin. Remember, that the sinner who often vainly desires is never converted. Even the more you feel within you these unproductive impulses of salvation, depend upon it that the more is your measure filled, and that every rejected grace draws you a degree nearer to hardness of heart : comfort yourself not upon desires which hasten your ruin, and which, in all times, have been the lot of the reprobate ; and say often to the Lord, with the prophet, How long, O my God ! shall I amuse the secret anxieties of my soul with vain projects of penitence ? How long shall I see my days flowing rapidly on in promising to my heart, in order to quiet it in its disorders, a sorrow and a repentance which are more and more distant from me ? How long shall the enemy, taking advantage of my weakness, employ so gross an error to seduce me ? Ah ! dissipate this illusion which leads me astray ; regard these feeble desires of salvation as the cries of a conscience which cannot be happy without thee ; accept these timid beginnings of penitence ; favourably attend to them now, O my God ! when to me it seems that thy grace renders them more lively and more sincere ; and complete, by thy inward operation, what is yet wanting to the fulness and to the sincerity of this offer ; and perfect, in receiving, my desires, in order that they be worthy of the reward which thou promisest to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Hear, said the Lord in his prophet, to the unfaithful soul, you who live in ease and in pleasures, and who nevertheless hope in me, sterility and widowhood shall at once burst upon your heads ; sterility, that is to say, that you shall no longer be fit to bear the fruits of penitence ; cultivation and watering shall be in vain ; the power of my word, the virtue of my sacraments, the grace of my mysteries, all care shall be unavailing, and you shall no longer be but a withered tree allotted to the fire : widowhood, that is to say, I will for ever forsake you ; I will leave you single ; I will deliver you up to your inclinations, and to the false peace of your passions ; I will no longer be your God, your protector, your spouse ; I will for ever forsake you.

But may I here finish my ministry, my brethren, with the words formerly made use of by Jesus Christ, in finishing his mission to an ungrateful people ? You have refused to believe in me, said he to them a few days before his death ; you have shut your eyes against the light ; you have had ears, yet you heard not : I go, and you shall die in your blindness. If you were still blind, and if you had never known the truth, your sin would be more excusable ; but at present, you see, I have announced to you the truths which my Father had taught me, and therefore your sin is without excuse : your obstinacy is consummate ; you have rejected that salvation which shall be offered to you no more, and the guilt of the truth despised must for ever be upon your head.

Great God! should this then be the price of my toils, and the whole fruit of my ministry? Could the unworthiness of the instrument, which thou hast employed to announce thy word, have destroyed its efficacy, and placed a fatal impediment to the progress of the gospel? No, my dear brethren, the virtue of the word of the cross is not attached to that of the minister who announces it. In the hands of the Lord, clay can give sight to the blind; and, when he pleaseth, the walls of Jericho fall at the sound of the weakest trumpets. I trust then in the Lord for you, my brethren, that having received his word with gladness, as Paul formerly said to the believers of Corinth, that, having received it, not as the word of man, but as the word of God, it shall fructify in you; and that, on the awful day of judgment, when account shall be demanded from me of my ministry, and from you of the fruit which you have reaped from it, I shall be your defence and your justification, and you my glory and my crown. So do I ardently wish it.

SERMON XIX.

ON THE VICES AND VIRTUES OF THE GREAT.

"And the Devil showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them: and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me."—MATTHEW iv. 8, 9.

HUMAN prosperities have always been one of the most dangerous wiles employed by the devil to entrap men. He knows that the love of fame and of distinction is so natural to us, that, in general, nothing is considered as too much for their attainment; and that the use of them is so seducing, and so apt to lead astray, that nothing is more rare than piety surrounded with pomp and power.

Nevertheless, it is God alone who raiseth up the great and the powerful; who placeth you above the rest, in order to be the fathers of the people, the comforters of the afflicted, the refuge of the helpless, the supports of the church, the protector of virtue, and the models of all believers.

Suffer then, my brethren, that, entering into the spirit of our gospel, I here lay before you the dangers, as well as the advan-

tages of your state; and that I point out to you the obstacles and the faculties which the rank, to which, through Providence, you are born, presents to your discharge of the duties of a Christian life.

Great temptations, I confess, are attached to your station; but it has likewise as great resources. People of rank are born, it would seem, with more passions than the rest of men; yet have they also the opportunity of practising more virtues: their vices are followed with more consequences; but their piety become also more beneficial: in a word, they are much more culpable than the people, when they forget their God; but they have likewise more merit in remaining faithful to him.

My intention, therefore, at present, is to represent to you the extensive good, or the boundless evils, which always accompany your virtues or vices; to convince you of what influence the elevated rank to which you are born, is toward good, or toward evil; and, lastly, to render irregularity odious to you, by unfolding the inexplicable consequences which your passions drag after them; and piety amiable, through the unutterable benefits which always follow your good examples. It would matter little to point out the dangers of your station, were the advantages of it not likewise to be shown. The Christian pulpit declaims in general against the grandeurs and glory of the age; but it would be of little avail to be continually speaking of your complaints, were their remedies not held out to you at the same time. These are the two truths which I mean to unite in this Discourse, by laying before you the endless consequences of the vices of the great and powerful, and what inestimable benefits flow from their virtues.

PART I.—“A sore trial shall come upon the mighty, says the Spirit of God; for mercy will soon pardon the meanest; but mighty men shall be mightily tormented.”

It is not, my brethren, because he is mighty himself, that the Lord, as the Scriptures say, rejects the great and the mighty, or that rank and dignity are titles hateful in his eyes, to which his favours are denied, and which, of themselves, constitute our guilt. With the Lord there is no exception of persons: he is the Lord of the cedars of Lebanon, as well as of the humble hyssop of the valley: he causes his sun to rise over the highest mountains, as well as over the lowest and obscure places: he hath formed the stars of heaven, as well as the worms which crawl upon the earth: the great are even more natural images of his greatness and glory, the ministers of his authority, the means through which his liberalities and generosity are poured out upon his people. And I come not here, my brethren, in the usual language, to pronounce anathemas against human grandeurs, and to make your station a crime, since that very station comes from God, and that the object in question is not so much to exaggerate

the perils of it, as to point out the infinite ways of salvation attached to that rank to which, through the will of Providence, you have been born.

But, I say, that the sins of the great and powerful have two characters of enormity which render them infinitely more punishable before God than the sins of the commonalty of believers. First, the scandal; secondly, ingratitude.

The scandal. There is no crime to which the gospel leaves less hopes of forgiveness than that of being a stumbling-block to our brethren: "Wo unto the man," said Jesus Christ, "who shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me; it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." First, because you destroy a soul which ought eternally to have enjoyed God. Secondly, because you occasion your brother to perish, for whom Jesus Christ had died. Thirdly, because you become the minister of the devil's designs for the destruction of souls. Fourthly, because you are that man of sin, that antichrist, of whom the apostle speaks; for Jesus Christ hath saved man, and you destroy him; Jesus Christ hath raised up true worshippers to his Father, and you deprive him of them; Jesus Christ hath gained us by his blood, and you snatch his conquest from him; Jesus Christ is the physician of souls, and you are their corrupter; he is their way, and you are their snare; he is the shepherd who comes in search of his perishing sheep, and you are the ravenous wolf which slays and destroys those his Father had given him. Fifthly, because all other sins die, as I may say, with the sinner; but the fruit of his scandals will outlive him, and his crimes will not go down with him into the tomb of his fathers.

Achan was punished with so much rigour for having taken only a wedge of gold from among the spoils which were consecrated to the Lord: My God! what then shall be the punishment of him who deprives Jesus Christ of a soul which was his precious spoil, redeemed not with gold and silver, but with all the divine blood of the Lamb without strain? The golden calf was reduced into powder for having occasioned the prevarication of Israel: Great God! and could all the splendour which surrounds the great and the powerful shelter them from thy wrath, when their exaltation becomes only a stumbling-block and a source of idolatry to the people? The brazen serpent itself, that sacred monument of God's mercies upon Judah, was broken in pieces for having been an occasion of scandal to the tribes: My God! and the sinner, already so odious through his own crimes, shall he be spared when he becomes a snare and a stumbling-block to his brethren?

Now, my brethren, such is the first character which always accompanies your sins, you who are exalted, through rank or birth, over the commonalty of believers:—the scandal. The obscure and vulgar live only for themselves. Mingled in the crowd, and

concealed by the abjectness of their lot from the eyes of men, God alone is the secret witness of their ways, and the invisible spectator of their backslidings: if they fall, or if they remain stedfast, it is for the Lord alone, who sees and who judges them; the world, which is unacquainted even with their names, is equally uninstructed by their examples; their life is without consequence; they may depart from the right path, but they quit it alone; and if they accomplish not their own salvation, their ruin is, at least, confined to themselves, and has no influence over that of their brethren.

But persons of an exalted station are like a public pageant, upon which all eyes are fixed; they are those houses built upon a summit, the sole situation of which renders them visible from afar; those flaming torches, the splendour of which at once betrays and exposes them to view. Such is the misfortune of greatness and of rank; you no longer live for yourselves alone; to your destruction or to your salvation is attached the destruction or the salvation of almost all those around you: your manners form the manners of the people; your examples are the rules of the multitude; your actions are as well known as your titles; it is impossible for you to err unknown to the public, and the scandal of your faults is always the melancholy privilege of your rank.

I say, the scandal, first, of imitation. Men always willingly copy after evil, but more especially when held out by great examples; they then ground a kind of vanity upon their errors, because it is through these that they resemble you. The people consider it as giving them an air of consequence to tread in your steps. The city thinks it an honour to adopt all the vices of the court. Your manners form a poison which penetrates even into the provinces; which infects all stations, and gives a total change to the public manners; which decks out licentiousness with an air of nobility and spirit, and, in place of the simplicity of our ancient manners, substitutes the miserable novelty of your pleasures, of your luxury, of your profusions, and of your profane indecencies. Thus from you it is that obscene fashions, vanity of dress, those artifices which dishonour a visage where modesty alone ought to be painted, the rage of gaming, freedom of manners, licentiousness of conversations, unbridled passions, and all the corruption of our ages, pass to the people.

And from whence, think you, my brethren, comes that unbridled licentiousness which reigns among the people? Those who live far from you, in the most distant provinces, still preserve, at least, some remains of their ancient simplicity and the primitive innocence; they live in a happy ignorance of the greatest part of those abuses which are now, through your examples, become laws. But the nearer the countries approach to you, the more is the change of manners visible, the more is innocence adulterated, the more the abuses are common, and the greatest

crime of the people is to be acquainted with your manners and your customs. After the chiefs of the tribes had entered into the tents of the daughters of Midian, all Judah went aside from the Lord, and few were to be found who had kept free from the general guilt. Great God! how terrible shall one day be the trial of the great and powerful, since, besides their own endless passions, they shall be made accountable to thee for the public irregularities, the depravity of the manners, and the corruption of their age; and since even the sins of the people shall become their own special sins!

Secondly. A scandal of compliance. They endeavour to please, by imitating you; your inferiors, your creatures, your dependents, consider a resemblance to you as the high road to your favour: they copy your vices, because you hold them out to them as virtues; they enter into your fancies, in order to enter into your confidence; they outrival each other in copying, or in surpassing you, because, in your eyes, their greatest merit is in resembling you. Alas! how many weak souls, born with the principles of virtue, and who, far from you, would have nursed only those dispositions favourable to salvation, have had their innocence wrecked through the unfortunate necessity in which their fortune placed them of imitating you?

Thirdly. A scandal of impunity. You could never reprehend, in your dependants, those abuses and those excesses which you allow to yourself: you are under a necessity of suffering in them what you have no inclination to refuse to yourself: your eyes must be shut upon disorders which are authorized by your own manners; and you are forced to pardon those who resemble you, lest you condemn yourself. A woman of the world, wholly devoted to the art of pleasing, spreads through all her household an air of licentiousness and of worldliness; her house becomes a rock from whence innocence never departs uninjured; every one imitates at home what she displays abroad; and she must pass over these irregularities, because her own manners do not permit her to censure them. What excesses, in those houses kept open and appropriated to everlasting gaming, among that people, as I may say, of domestics, whom vanity has multiplied beyond all number! You know the truth of this, my brethren, and the dignity of the Christian pulpit does not forbid me from repeating it here. How dearly do these unfortunate wretches pay for your pleasures, who, out of your sight, and no check to restrain them, fill up the idle time which your pleasures leave to them, in every excess adapted to the meanness of their education and their abject nature, and which they think themselves authorized in doing by your examples! O my God, if he who neglects his people be worse in thy sight than an infidel, what then is the guilt of him who scandalizes them, and is the cause of their finding death and condemnation where they

ought to have found the succours of salvation and the asylum of their innocence?

Fourthly. A scandal of employment and of necessity. How many unfortunate wretches perish in order to feed your pleasures and your iniquitous passions! For you alone the dangerous arts subsist: the theatres are erected solely for your criminal recreations; profane harmonies every where resound, and corrupt so many hearts only to flatter the corruption of yours; the works, fatal to innocence, are transmitted to posterity solely through the favour of your names and protection. It is you alone, my brethren, who give to the world lascivious poets, pernicious authors, and profane writers: it is to please you that these corrupters of the public manners perfect their talents, and seek their exaltation and fortune in a success, the only end of which is the destruction of souls: it is you alone who protect, reward, and produce them; who take from them, by honouring them with your familiarity, that mark of disgrace and infamy with which they had been stigmatized by the laws of the church and of the state, and which degraded them in the eyes of men.

Thus it is through you that the people participate in these debaucheries; that this poison infects the cities and provinces; that these public pleasures become the source of the public miseries and licentiousness; that so many unfortunate victims renounce their modesty to gratify your pleasures, and, seeking to improve the mediocrity of their fortune by the exercise of talents which your passions alone have rendered useful and recommendable, come upon criminal theatres to express passions for the gratification of yours; to perish in order to please; to sacrifice their innocence, in occasioning the loss of it to those who listen to them; to become public rocks, and the scandal of religion; to bring misery and dissension even into your families, and to punish you, woman of the world, for the support and the credit which you give them by your presence and your applauses, by becoming the criminal object of the passion and of the ill-conduct of your children, and perhaps dividing with yourself the heart of your husband, and completely ruining his affairs and fortune.

Fifthly. A scandal of duration. It is little, my brethren, that the corruption of our age is almost wholly the work of the great and powerful; the ages to come will likewise be indebted to you, perhaps, for a part of their licentiousness and excesses. Those profane poems, which have seen the light solely through your means, shall still corrupt hearts in the following ages: those dangerous authors, whom you honour with your protection, shall pass into the hands of your posterity; and your crimes shall be multiplied with that dangerous venom which they contain, and which shall be communicated from age to age. Even your passions, immortalized in history, after having been a scandal in their time, will also become one in the following ages: the reading

of your errors, preserved to posterity, shall raise up imitators after your death: instructions in guilt will be sought for in the narrative of your adventures; and your excesses shall not expire with you. The voluptuousness of Solomon still furnishes blasphemies and derisions to the impious, and motives of confidence to libertinism; the infamous passion of Potiphar's wife hath been preserved down to us, and her rank hath immortalized her weakness. Such is the destiny of the vices and of the passions of the great and powerful: they do not live for their own age alone; they live for the ages to come, and the duration of their scandal hath no other limits than that of their name.

You know this to be a truth, my brethren. Do they not, at present, continue to read, with new danger, those scandalous memoirs composed in the age of our fathers, which have transmitted down to us the excesses of the preceding courts, and immortalized the passions of the principal persons who figured in them? The irregularities of an obscure people, and of the rest of men who then lived, remain sunk in oblivion: their passions terminated with them; their vices, obscure as their names, have escaped history; and, with regard to us, they are as though they had never been; and the errors of those who are distinguished in their age by their rank and birth, are all that now remains to us of these past times. It is their passions that continually inflame new ones, even at this day, through the licentiousness of, and the open manner in which they are mentioned by the authors who hand them down to us; and the sole privilege of their condition is, that, while the vices of the lower orders of people sink with themselves, those of the great and the powerful spring up again, as I may say, from their ashes, pass from age to age, are engraven on the public monuments, and are never blotted out from the memory of men. What crimes, great God! which are the scandal of all ages, the rock of all stations, and which, even to the end, shall serve as an excitement to vice, as a pretext to the sinner, and as a lasting model of debauchery and licentiousness!

Lastly. A scandal of seduction. Your examples, in honouring vice, render virtue contemptible. The Christian life becomes so ridiculous, that those who profess it are almost ashamed of it before you. The exterior of piety has an ungracious and awkward appearance, which is concealed in your presence, as if it were a bent which dishonours the mind. How many souls, touched by God, only resist his grace and his spirit through the dread of forfeiting with you that degree of confidence which a long society in pleasures hath given to them! How many souls, disgusted with the world, yet who have not the courage to declare themselves, and return to God, lest they expose themselves to your senseless derisions, still continue to copy your manners, upon which they have been fully undeceived by grace, and, through an unrighteous complaisance and respect for your rank, take a thousand steps

from which their new faith and likewise their inclination are equally distant!

I speak not of the prejudices which you perpetuate in the world against virtue; of those lamentable discourses against the godly, which your authority confirms; which pass from you to the people, and keep up, in all stations, those ancient prepossessions against piety, and those continual derisions of the righteous, which deprive virtue of all its dignity, and harden sinners in vice.

And from thence, my brethren, how many righteous seduced! how many weak led astray! how many wavering souls retained in sin! how many impious and libertine souls strengthened! What an obstacle do you become to the fruit of our ministry! How many hearts, already prepared, oppose, to the force of the truth which we announce, only the long engagements which bind them to your manners and to your pleasures, and find within themselves only you who serve as a wall and a buckler against grace! My God! what a scourge for the age, what a misfortune for the people, is a grandee according to the world, who lives not in the fear of thee, who knows thee not, and who acts in contempt of thy laws and eternal ordinances! It is a present which thou sendest to men in thy wrath, and the most dreadful mark of thine indignation upon the cities and upon the kingdoms.

Yes, my brethren, behold what you are when you belong not to God. Such is the first character of your faults,—the scandal. Your lot decides in general that of the people: the excesses of the lower ranks are always the consequence of your excesses; and the transgressions of Jacob, said the prophet, that is to say, of the people and of the tribes, came only from Samaria, the seat of the great and of the mighty.

But, even granting that no new degree of enormity should be specially attached to the great by the scandal inseparable from their sins, ingratitude, which forms the second character of them, would be amply sufficient to attract, upon their heads, that neglect of God by which his bowels are for ever shut to compassion and clemency.

I say ingratitude: for God hath preferred you to so many unfortunate fellow-creatures who languish in obscurity and in want: he hath exalted you, and hath caused you to be born amid splendour and abundance; he hath chosen you above all the people, to load you with benefits; in you alone he hath assembled riches, honours, titles, distinctions, and all the advantages of the earth. It would seem that his providence watches only for you, while so many unfortunate millions eat the bread of tribulation and of sorrow. The earth seems to be produced for you alone; the sun to rise and to go down solely for you; even the rest of men seem born only for you, and to contribute to your grandeur and purposes. It would appear that the Lord is occupied solely with you, while he neglecteth so many obscure

souls, whose days are days of sorrow and want, and for whom it would seem that there is no God upon earth. Yet, nevertheless, you turn against God all that you have received from his hands; your abundance serves for the indulgence of your passions; your exaltation facilitates your criminal pleasures, and his blessings become your crimes.

Yes, my brethren, while thousands of unfortunate fellow-creatures, upon whom his hand is so heavy; while an obscure populace, for whom life has nothing but hardships and toil, invoke and bless him, raise up their hands to him in the simplicity of their heart, regard him as their father, and give him every mark of an unaffected piety, and of a sincere religion—you, whom he loads with his benefits; you, for whom the entire world seems to be made, you acknowledge him not; you deign not to lift up your eyes, to him; you never bestow even a moment's reflection whether there be or be not a God above you who interferes in the things of the earth; in place of thanksgivings, you return him insults, and religion is only for the people.

Alas! you think it so mean and so ungenerous when those whose advancement was your work, neglect you, deny their obligations, and even employ that credit which they owe solely to you, in thwarting and in ruining you. But, my brethren, they only act by you as you do toward your God. Is not your exaltation his work? Is it not his hand alone which hath separated your ancestors from the crowd, and hath placed them at the head of the people? Is it not through his providence alone that you are born of an illustrious blood, and that you enjoy, from your birth, what a whole life of care and toil could never have afforded you reason to expect? What had you in his eyes more than so many unfortunate fellow-creatures whom he leaveth in want? Ah! if he had paid regard only to the natural qualities of the soul, to probity, honesty, modesty, innocence, how many obscure souls, born with all these virtues, might have been preferred, and would now have been occupying your place! If he had consulted only the use which you were one day to make of his benefits, how many unfortunate souls, had they been placed in your situation; would have been an example to the people, the protectors of virtue, and in their abundance would have glorified God, they who even in their indigence invoke and bless him; while you, on the contrary, are the cause of his name being blasphemed, and your example becomes a seduction for his people!

He chooseth you, however, and rejecteth them; he humbleth them, and exalteth you; for them he is a hard and severe master, and for you a liberal and bountiful father. What more could he have done to engage you to serve and to be faithful to him? What more powerful attraction, or more likely to secure the homages of hearts than benefits? "Thine, O Lord," said David, at the height of all his prosperity, "is the greatness, and the power, and the

glory: both riches and honour come from thee; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. It is just, then, O my God, to glorify thye in thy gifts; to measure what I owe thee upon what thou hast done for me; and to render mine exaltation, my greatness, and all that I am, subservient to thy glory."

Yet, nevertheless, my brethren, the more he hath done for you, the more do you raise yourselves up against him. It is the rich and the powerful who live without other God in this world than their iniquitous pleasures. It is you alone who dispute the slightest homages to him; who believe yourselves to be dispensed from whatever is irksome or severe in his law; who fancy yourselves born for the sole purpose of enjoying yourselves, of applying his benefits to the gratification of your passions, and who remit to the common people the care of serving him, of returning him thanks, and of religiously observing the ordinances of his holy law.

Thus frequently the people worship, and you insult him; the people appease, and you provoke him; the people invoke, and you neglect him; the people zealously serve him, and you look down upon his servants; the people are continually raising up their hands to him, and you doubt whether he even exists, you who alone feel the effects of his liberality and of his power; his chastisements form worshippers to him, and his benefits are followed with only derisions and insults.

I say his benefits: for, with regard to you, he hath not confined them to the mere external advantages of fortune. He hath likewise produced you with more favourable dispositions to virtue than the simple people; a heart more noble, and more exalted; happier inclinations; sentiments more worthy of the grandeur of faith; more understanding, elevation of mind, knowledge, instruction, and relish for good. You have received from nature, milder passions, more cultivated manners, and all the other incidental advantages of high birth; that politeness which softens the temper; that dignity which restrains the sallies of the disposition; that humanity which renders you more open to the impressions of grace. How many benefits do you then abuse, when you live not according to God! What a monster is a man of high rank, loaded with honours and prosperity, who never lifts up his eyes to heaven to worship the hand which bestows them!

And whence, think you, come the public calamities, the scourges with which the cities and provinces are afflicted? It is solely in punishment of your iniquitous abuse of abundance, that God sometimes striketh the land with barrenness. His justice, irritated that you turned his own benefits against himself, withdraws them from your passions, curses the land, permits wars and dissensions, crumbles your fortunes into dust, extinguishes your families, withers the root of your posterity,

makes your titles and possessions to pass into the hands of strangers, and holds you out as striking examples of the inconstancy of human affairs and the anticipated monuments of his wrath against hearts equally ungrateful and insensible to the paternal cares of his providence.

Such, my brethren, are the two characters inseparable from your sins,—the scandal and the ingratitude. Behold what you are when you depart from God; and this is what you have never perhaps paid attention to. From the moment that you are guilty, you cannot be indifferently so. The passions are the same in the people and among the powerful; but very different is the guilt; and a single one of your crimes often leads to more miseries, and hath, before God, more extended and more terrible consequences, than a whole life of iniquity in an obscure and vulgar soul. But your virtues have also the same advantage and the same lot: and this is what remains for me to prove in the last part of this Discourse.

PART II.—If scandal and ingratitude be the inseparable consequences of the vices and passions of persons of high rank, their virtues have also two particular characters, which render them far more acceptable to God than those of common believers: firstly, the example; secondly, the authority. And this, my brethren, is a truth highly consoling to you, who are placed by Providence in an exalted station, and well calculated to animate you to serve God, and to render virtue lovely to you. For it is an illusion to consider the rank to which you are born as an obstacle to salvation, and to the duties imposed upon us by religion. The rocks are more dangerous there, I confess, than in an obscure lot,—the temptation stronger and more frequent; and, while pointing out the advantages, with regard to salvation, of high rank, I pretend not to conceal those dangers which Jesus Christ himself hath pointed out to us in the gospel, as being attached to it.

I mean only to establish this truth,—that you may do more for God than the common people; that infinitely more advantages accrue to religion from the piety of a single person of distinction, than from that of almost a whole people of believers; and that you are so much the more culpable when you neglect God, in proportion to the glory that he would draw from your fidelity, and that your virtues have more extended consequences for the edification of believers.

The first is the example. A soul from among the people who fears God, glorifies him only in his own heart: he is a child of light, who walks, as I may say, amid darkness: he pays his own homage, but he attracts no others to him. Shut up in the obscurity of his fortune, he lives under the eyes of God alone; he wishes that his name be glorified, and, by these desires, he renders to him that glory which he cannot do by his examples: his virtues tend

to his own salvation; but they are as lost for the salvation of his brethren: he is here below as a treasure hidden in the earth, which the vineyard of Jesus Christ beareth unwittingly, and of which he maketh no use.

But for you, my brethren, who live exposed to the view of the public, and whose eyes are always upon you, your virtuous examples become equally shining as your names: you spread the good savour of Jesus Christ wherever that of your rank and titles is spread: you make the name of the Lord to be glorified wherever your own is known. The same elevation which makes you to be known upon the earth, likewise informs all men what you do for heaven. The wonders of grace are every where seen in your national advantages: the people, the cities, the provinces, who are continually hearing your names repeated, feel, awakened with them, that idea of virtue which your examples have attached to them. You honour piety in the opinion of the public: you preach it to those whom you know not: you become, says the prophet, like a signal of virtue raised up amid the people: a whole kingdom has its eyes upon you, and speaks of your examples, and even abroad your piety becomes equally known as your birth.

Now, amid this general estimation, what attraction to virtue for the people! First, the great models are more striking, and, when countenanced by the great, piety becomes as it were fashionable with the people. Secondly, that idea of weakness commonly attached to virtue is dissipated from the moment that you ennoble it, as I may say, with your names, and that they can produce your examples in honour of it. Thirdly, the rest of men no longer blush at modesty and frugality, when they see, in your instance, that modesty is perfectly compatible with greatness; and that to shun luxury and profusion is so far from being a subject of shame to any rank whatever, that, on the contrary, it adds lustre and dignity to the highest rank and birth. Fourthly, how many weak souls, who would blush at virtue, are confirmed by your example, are no longer afraid of acting as you act, and who even pride themselves in following your steps! Fifthly, how many souls, still too attached to worldly interests, would dread lest piety should be an obstacle to their advancement, and perhaps find, in this temptation, an effectual bar to all their penitential desires, if they were not taught, in seeing you, that piety is useful to all, and that, while attracting the favours of Heaven, they do not prevent those of the earth! Sixthly, your inferiors, your creatures, and all who depend upon you, view virtue in a much more amiable light, since it is become a certain way of pleasing you, and that their progress in your confidence and esteem depends upon their advancement in piety.

Lastly. What an honour to religion, when, in your persons, she proves that she is still capable of forming righteous men,

who despise honours, dignities, and riches; who live amidst prosperity without being dazzled with it; who enjoy the first places without losing sight of eternal riches; who possess all, as though possessing nothing; who are greater than the whole world, and consider as dirt all the advantages of the earth, whenever they become an obstacle to promises held out by faith in heaven! What confusion for the wicked to feel, in seeing you treading the paths of salvation amidst every human prosperity, that virtue is not an adoption of despair! that they vainly endeavour to persuade themselves, that recourse is had to God only when forsaken by the world, since you fail not, though loaded with all the favours of the world, to love the shame of Jesus Christ! What consolation, even for our ministry, to be enabled to employ your examples in these Christian pulpits, in overthrowing the sinners of a more obscure lot; to cite your virtues to make them blush at their vices; to cover with shame all their vain excuses, by proving your fidelity to the law of God; that their dangers are not greater than yours; that the objects of their passions are less seductive: that more charms and more illusions are not held out by the world to them than to you; that if grace can raise up faithful hearts even in the palaces of kings, it must be equally able to form them under the roof of the citizen and of the magistrate, and, consequently, that salvation is open to all, and that our station becomes a favourable pretext to our passions, only when the corruption of our hearts is the true reason which authorizes them.

Yes, my brethren, I repeat, that, in serving God, you give a new force to our ministry; more weight to the truths announced by us to the people; more confidence to our zeal; more dignity to the word of Jesus Christ; more credit to our censures; more consolation to our toils; and, in viewing you, the world is convinced of truths which it hath disputed with us. What benefits, then, accrue from your examples! You accredit piety, and honour religion in the mind of the people; you animate the righteous of every station; you console the servants of God; you spread throughout a whole kingdom a savour of life that overthrows vice and countenances virtue; you support the rules of the gospel against the maxims of the world; you are cited in the cities and in the most distant provinces to encourage the weak, and to aggrandize the kingdom of Jesus Christ; fathers teach your names to their children, to animate them to virtue; and, without knowing it, you become the model of the people, the conversation of the lower orders, the edification of families, the example of every station and of every class. Scarcely had the heads of the tribes in the desert, and the most distinguished women, brought to Moses their most precious ornaments for the construction of the tabernacle, when all the people, incited by their example, presented themselves in

crowds to offer their gifts and presents; and Moses was even under the necessity of placing bounds to their pious alacrity, and of moderating the excess of their liberalities.

Ah! my brethren, what good, once more, may your examples do among the people! Public dissipations discredited from the moment that you cease to countenance them; indecent fashions proscribed whenever you neglect them; dangerous customs antiquated as soon as you forsake them; the source of almost all disorders dried up from the moment that you live according to God. And how many souls thereby saved—what evils prevented—what crimes checked—what misfortunes hindered! What gain for religion is a single person of rank, who lives according to faith! What a present doth God make to the earth, to a kingdom, to a people, when he bestoweth grandees who live in his fear! And, should the interest even of your own soul be insufficient to render virtue amiable to you, should not the interest of so many souls, to whom, by living according to God, you are an occasion of salvation, induce you to prefer the fear and the love of his law, to all the vain pleasures of the earth? Is the heart capable of tasting a more exquisite pleasure than that of being a source of salvation and of benediction to our brethren?

And what is yet more fortunate here for you, is, that you do not live for your own age alone. I have already observed that your examples will pass to the following ages: the virtues of the simple believers perish, as I may say, with them, but your virtues will be recorded in history with your names. You will become a pious model for our posterity, equally as you have been so for the people of your own times. Connected, through your rank and your employments, with the principal events of our age, you will be transmitted with them to the ages to come. Succeeding courts will still find the history of your piety and of your manners blended with the public history of our days. You will do credit to piety even in the ages to follow. The memory of your virtues, preserved in our annals, will still serve as an instruction to those of your descendants who shall read them; and it shall one day be said of you, as of those men full of glory and of righteousness, mentioned by Scripture, that your piety has not finished with you; that your bodies, indeed, are buried in peace, but that your name liveth for evermore, that your seed standeth for ever, and that your name shall not be blotted out.

Nor is this all: the example renders your virtues a public good, which is their first character; but authority, which is their second, finishes and sustains the endless good which your examples have begun. And, in speaking of the authority, why can I not here unfold all the immensity of the fruitful consequences of the piety of the great, which this idea excites in my mind?

First. The protection of virtue. Timid virtue is often oppressed

because it wants either boldness to show itself, or protection to defend it; obscure virtue is often despised, because nothing exalts it to the eyes of the senses, and the world is delighted to turn into a crime against piety the obscurity of those who practise it. But, so soon as you adopt its cause, ah! virtue no longer wants protection: you become the interpreters of the godly with the prince, and the channels by which they find continual access to the throne; you bring righteous characters into office, who become public examples; you bring to light servants of God, men of learning and of virtue, who would have remained in the dust, and who, through favour of your support, appear to the public, employ their talents, contribute to the edification of believers, to the instruction of the people, to the consummation of the holy, teach the rules of virtue to those who know them not, will teach them to our descendants, and will hand down, to all ages to come, with the pious monuments of their own zeal, the immortal fruits of that protection with which you have honoured virtue, and of your love for the righteous.

What shall I say?—You strengthen the zeal of the godly in holy undertakings; and your protection animates and enables them to conquer all the obstacles which the demon constantly throws in the way of works which are to glorify God and to contribute to the salvation of souls. What noble foundations and pious designs, now carried into execution, would have failed, if the authority of a righteous man in office had not removed the impediments which rendered their accomplishment apparently impossible!

What more shall I say?—By your examples you render virtue respectable to those who love it not, and they are no longer ashamed of being a Christian from the moment that they therein resemble you. You divest impiety of that air of confidence and of ostentation with which it dares to show itself, and free-thinking ceases to be fashionable as soon as you declare against it. You maintain the religion of our fathers among the people; you preserve faith to the following ages; and often it requires only a single person of rank in a kingdom, firm in faith, to stop the progress of error and innovation, and to preserve to a whole people the faith of their ancestors. The single Esther saved the people and the law of God in a great empire; Matthias individually stood out against foreign altars, and prevented superstitions from prevailing in the midst of Judah. Oh! my brethren, how grand when you belong to Jesus Christ! And with what superior lustre and dignity do your rank and your birth appear in the vast fruits of your piety, than in the luxury of your passions, and in all the vain pomp of human magnificence!

Secondly. The rewards of virtue. You render it honourable by giving it that preference which is its due, in the choice of places dependent upon you, and in intrusting with employments only those

whose plety entitles them to the public confidence; by placing dependence upon the fidelity of your inferiors only in proportion as they are faithful to God, and, in men, looking principally for rectitude of heart and innocence of manners, without which all other talents no longer form but an equivocal merit, either injurious to themselves, or useless to the public.

And from thence, what new weal to the public! What happiness for a kingdom in which the godly occupy the first places; where employments are the rewards of virtue; where the public affairs are intrusted only to those who have more the public interest in view than their own, and who consider as nothing the gain of the whole world if they thereby lose their soul!

What advantage for the people when they find their fathers in their judges,—the protectors of their helplessness in the arbiters of their lot,—the consolers of their sufferings in the interpreters of their interests! What abuses prevented!—what tears wiped away!—what crimes avoided!—what harmony in families!—what consolation for the unfortunate! What a compliment even to virtue, when the people are rejoiced to see it in office, and when the world, all worldly as it is, is, however, well pleased to have the godly for its defenders and judges! What an attraction to virtue, when it is seen to have the promise, not only of the life that now is, but of that also which is to come.

And say not, my brethren, that, in rewarding virtue, sinners are not corrected, but only hypocrites multiplied. I know how far men may be carried by a thirst of advancement, and what abuses they are capable of making of religion in order to accomplish their ends: but, at least, you force vice to hide itself; you divest it of that notoriety and security which spread and communicate it; you preserve the externals of religion among the people; you multiply the examples of piety among believers, and if licentiousness be not in reality diminished, at least the scandals are more rare!

Lastly. The holy liberalities of virtue. But I feel that my subject leads me away, and it is time to conclude. Yes, my brethren, what an additional fund of comfort for the people in the Christian and charitable use of your riches! You shelter innocence; you open asylums of penitence for guilt; you render virtue lovely to the unfortunate by the resources which they find in yours; you secure to husbands the fidelity of their wives,—to fathers the salvation of their children,—to pastors the safety of their flock; peace to families, comfort to the afflicted, innocence to the deserted widow, an aid to the orphan, good order to the public, and, to all, the support of their virtue, or the cure of their vices.

And here, my brethren, could you but comprehend the wide-extended fruits of your virtue, and the inexplicable advantages

accruing from it to the church,—what scandals avoided!—what crimes prevented!—what public scourges checked!—how many weak preserved!—how many righteous sustained!—how many sinners recalled!—how many souls withdrawn from the precipice!—how much you contribute to the aggrandizement of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, to the honour of religion, to the consummation of the holy, and to the salvation of all believers!—how many of the chosen of every tongue and of every tribe shall one day, in heaven, place at your feet their crown of immortality, as if publicly to acknowledge their obligation to you!—what consolation to be able to say to yourself, that, in serving God, you will attract other servants to him, and that your piety becomes a blessing upon the people! No, my brethren, if there be any thing flattering in rank, it is not those vain distinctions attached to it by custom; it is the power of becoming, by serving God, the source of public blessings, the support of religion, the consolation of the church, and the chief instruments employed by God for the accomplishment of his merciful designs upon men.

Ah! what then do you not lose when you do not live according to God! What do we ourselves not lose when you are wanting to us! Of how many advantages do you deprive believers! Of what consolations do you not deprive yourselves! What joy in heaven for the conversion of a single great sinner in the age! How highly criminal when you live not according to God! You can neither be saved nor condemned alone. You resemble either that dragon of the Revelation, who, being cast out from heaven into the earth, drags after him in his fall so many of the stars; or that mysterious serpent spoken of by Jesus Christ, who, being exalted upon the earth, haply attracts all after him. You are established for the ruin or for the salvation of many; public scourges or comforts. May you, my brethren, know your true interests; may you feel what you are in the designs of God, how much you have it in your power to do for his glory, how much he expecteth of you, how much the church, and even we ourselves, expect of you! Ah! you have so high an idea of your rank and of your stations with relation to the world!

But, my brethren, permit me to say it to you, you are yet unacquainted with all their greatness; you see but the humblest part of what you are; you are still greater with relation to piety, and the privileges of your virtue are much more illustrious and more marked than those of your titles. May you, my brethren, act up to your lot! And thou, O my God! touch, during these days of salvation, through the force of that truth with which thou fillest our mouths, the great and the powerful; draw to thyself those hearts upon whose conquest depends that of the rest of believers; have compassion upon thy people by sanctifying those whom thy providence hath placed at their

head; save Israel, in saving those who rule it; give to thy church great examples, who perpetuate virtue from age to age; and who assist, even to the end, in forming that immortal assembly of the righteous which shall bless thy name for ever and ever!

SERMON XX.

ON THE INJUSTICE OF THE WORLD TOWARD THE GODLY.

“ Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner.”—JOHN ix. 24.

WHAT can the purest and most irreproachable virtue expect from the injustice of the world, seeing it hath formerly found subjects for scandal and censure in the sanctity even of Jesus Christ? If, before their eyes, he work wonderful miracles; if, on this occasion, he restore sight to the blind, the Jews accuse him of being a sabbath-breaker; of working miracles through Beelzebub rather than in the name of the Lord, and of only wishing, through these impostures, to overturn and to destroy the law of Moses; that is to say, that they attack his intentions, in order to render suspicious and to criminate his works.

If he honour with his presence the table of the Pharisees, that he may have an opportunity of recalling and instructing them, he is looked upon as a sinner, and as a lover of good cheer: that is to say, that they make a crime to him of his works, when they find it convenient not to search into the integrity of his intentions.

Lastly. If he appear in the temple, armed with zeal and severity, to avenge the profanations which disgrace that holy place, the zeal with which he is inflamed for the glory of his Father is no longer in their mouth, but an unjust usurpation of an authority which belongs not to him: that is to say, that they exercise themselves in vague and unfounded reproaches, when they have nothing to say against his intentions or his works.

I say, and I say it with sorrow, that the piety of the godly doth not, at present, experience more indulgence amongst us, than the sanctity of Jesus Christ formerly met with in Judea. The pious are become objects of censure and derision to the public; and in an age where dissipation is become so general,

where scandalous excesses of every kind furnish such ample matter to the malignity of conversations and censures, favour is liberally shown to all, excepting to virtue and innocence.

Yes, my brethren, if the conduct of the godly be apparently irreproachable, and furnish no materials for censure, you fix yourselves on their intentions which appear not; you accuse them of labouring toward their own purposes, and of having their own particular views and designs.

If their virtue seem to draw nearer to an equality with our own, and sometimes abate from its severity to attach us to God, by an ostensible conformity to our manners and customs; without searching into, or giving yourselves any concern about their intentions, you constitute, as a crime in them, the most innocent complaisances, and concessions the most worthy of indulgence.

Lastly. If their virtue, inspired by a divine fire, no longer keep measures with the world, and leave nothing to be alleged against either their intentions or their works, then you exercise yourselves in vague discourses and unfounded reproaches against even their zeal and piety.

Now, suffer me, my brethren, for once, to stand up against an abuse so disgraceful to religion, so injurious to that Being who forms the holy, so scandalous among Christians, so likely to draw down upon us those lasting curses which formerly turned the inheritance of the Lord into a deserted and forsaken land, and so worthy of the zeal of our ministry.

You attack the intentions, when you have nothing to say against the works of the godly; and that is a temerity. You exaggerate their weaknesses, and you make a crime to them of the slightest imperfections; and that is an inhumanity. You turn even their zeal and fervour into ridicule; and that is an impiety. And behold, my brethren, the three descriptions of the world's injustice toward the pious:—an injustice of temerity, which always suspects their intentions; an injustice of inhumanity, which gives no palliation to the slightest imperfections; an injustice of impiety, which, of their zeal and sanctity, makes a subject of contempt and derision. May these truths, O my God! render to virtue that honour and glory which are due to it, and force the world itself to respect the pious characters whom it is unworthy to possess!

PART I.—Nothing is more sublime, or more worthy of veneration on the earth, than true virtue: the world itself is forced to acknowledge this truth. The elevation of sentiment, the nobility of motive, the empire over the passions, the patience under adversity, the gentleness under injuries, the contempt of one's self under praise, the courage under difficulties, the austerity in pleasures, the fidelity in duties, the equality of temper in all events with which philosophy hath decked out its imaginary sage, find their

reality only in the disciple of the gospel. The more our manners are even corrupted, the more our times are dissolute, the more doth a just soul, who, in the midst of the general corruption, knows how to preserve his righteousness and his innocence, merit the public admiration; and if the Pagans themselves so highly respected Christians, in a time when all Christians were holy, with much greater reason are those Christians, who act up to the name of Christian, worthy of our veneration and respect, at this period, when sanctity is become so rare among believers.

How melancholy then for our ministry, that the corruption of manners should oblige us to do here what the first defenders of faith formerly did with so much dignity before the Pagan tribunals; that is to say, to make the apology of the servants of Jesus Christ; and that it should be necessary to teach Christians to honour those who profess themselves such! Yet true it is; for derision and censure against piety seem at present to be the most dominant language of the world. I confess, that the world ideally respects virtue; but it always despises those who make a profession of it: it acknowledges that nothing is more estimable than a solid and sincere piety; but it complains that such is no where to be found; and, by always separating virtue from those who practise it, it only makes a show of respecting the phantom of sanctity and righteousness, that it may be the better entitled to condemn and to censure the just.

Now the first object, on which the ordinary discourses of the world fall against virtue, is the probity of the intentions of the just. As what is apparent in their actions gives little hold, in general, to malignity and censure, they confine themselves to the intentions: they pretend, and above all at present, when, under a prince equally great as religious, virtue, formerly a stranger, and dreaded at court, is now become the surest path to favour and reward,—they pretend that it is there to which all who make a public profession of it, point their aim; that their only wish is to accomplish their ends; and that those who appear the most sanctified and disinterested, are superior to the rest only in art and cunning. If they excuse them from the meanness of such a motive, they give them others equally unworthy of the elevation of virtue and of Christian sincerity. Thus when a soul, touched for its errors, becomes contrite, it is not God, but the world, whom it seeks through a more cunning and concealed path; it is not grace which hath changed the heart, it is age which begins to efface its attractions; and to withdraw it from pleasures, only because pleasures begin to fly from it. If zeal attaches itself to works of piety, it is not that they are charitable, it is because they wish to become consequential. If they shut themselves up in solitude and in prayer, it is not their piety which dreads the dangers of the world, it is their singularity and ostentation which wish to attract its suffrages. Lastly, the merit of the most holy and the most virtuous actions is always disparaged in the

mouth of the worldly, by the suspicions with which they endeavour to blacken the intentions.

Now, in this temerity, I find three hateful characters, which expose the absurdity and the injustice of it: it is a temerity of indiscretion, seeing you judge, you decide upon what you know not: it is a temerity of corruption, seeing we generally suppose in others only what we feel in ourselves: lastly, it is a temerity of contradiction, seeing you find unjust and foolish when directed against yourself, the very same suspicions which to you appear so well-founded against your brother. Lose not, I intreat of you, the consequence of these truths.

I say, first, a temerity of indiscretion. For, my brethren, to God alone is reserved the judgment of intentions and thoughts: He alone who sees the secrecy of hearts can judge them; nor will they be manifested till that terrible day when his light shall shine through and dispel every darkness. An impenetrable veil is spread here below, over the depth of the human heart; we must then wait till that veil shall be rent, before the shameful passion which it conceals, as the apostle says, can become manifest, and before the mystery of iniquity, which worketh in secret, can be revealed; till then, whatever passes in the heart of men, buried from our knowledge, is interdicted to the temerity of our judgments: even when what is visible in the conduct of our brethren appears unfavourable to them, charity obliges us to suppose that what we see not makes amends for and rectifies it; and it requires us to excuse the faults of the actions which offend us by the innocency of the intentions which are concealed from our knowledge. Now, if religion ought to render us indulgent, and even favourable to their vices, will it suffer us to be cruel and inexorable to their virtues?

Indeed, my brethren, what renders your temerity here more unjust, more black, and more cruel, is the nature of your suspicions. For, were your suspicions of the pious to be directed only toward some of those weaknesses inseparable from human nature,—for instance, too much sensibility of injury, too much attention to their interests, too much inflexibility in their opinions,—we would be entitled to reply to you, as we shall afterward tell you, that you exact from the virtuous an exemption from error, and a degree of perfection which exists not in life. But you rest not there: you attack their probity and integrity of heart; you suspect them of atrocity, dissimulation, and hypocrisy; of making the most holy things subservient to their own views and passions; of being public impostors; of sporting with God and man; and all these through the ostensible appearances of virtue. What, my brethren! you would not dare, after the most notorious guilt, to pronounce such a sentence on a convicted criminal; you would rather consider his fault as one of those misfortunes which may happen to all men, and of which an evil moment may render us capable; and you decidedly give judgment against the virtuous; and you suspect in a pious character, from

a holy and praiseworthy life, what you would not dare to suspect from the most scandalous and criminal conduct of a sinner? And you consider as a witticism, when directed against the servants of God, what would appear to you as a barbarity when against a man stained with a thousand crimes. Is virtue, then, the only crime unworthy of indulgence; or is it sufficient, to serve Jesus Christ, to become unworthy of all respect? Do the holy practices of piety, which surely ought rather to attract respect and estimation to your brother, become the only titles which confound him, in your mind, with the infamous and the wicked?

I allow that the hypocrite deserves the execration of both God and man; that the abuse which he makes of religion is the greatest of crimes; that derisions and satires are too mild to decry a vice which deserves detestation and horror from the human race; and that a profane theatre errs in throwing only ridicule upon a character so abominable, so shameful, and so afflicting to the church; for it ought to excite the tears and indignation rather than the laughter of believers.

But I say, that this eternal inveteracy against virtue; that the rash suspicions which always confound the pious man with the hypocrite; that that malignity which, in making the most pompous eulogiums on righteousness, finds no character amongst the upright who is entitled to them; I say, that such language, of which so little scruple is made by the world, saps religion, and tends toward rendering all virtue suspicious: I say, that you thereby furnish arms to the impious in an age when too many other scandals countenance and authorize impiety. You assist in making them believe that none, truly pious, exist on the earth; that even the saints, who have formerly edified the church, and whose memory we so warmly cherish, have held out to men only a false spectacle of virtue, of which, in reality, they had only the phantom and the appearances: and that the gospel hath never formed but pharisees and hypocrites. Do you, my brethren, comprehend all the guilt of these foolish derisions? You think that you are only deriding false virtue, and you are blaspheming religion. I repeat it; in mistrusting the sincerity of the just whom you see, the freethinker concludes that all who have preceded them, and whom we see not, were equally insincere; that the martyrs themselves, who met death with such fortitude, and who rendered to truth the most shining and least suspicious testimony which can be given by man, were only madmen, who sought a human glory by a vain ostentation of courage and heroism; and lastly, that the venerable tradition of so many saints, who, from age to age, have honoured and edified the church, is merely a tradition of knavery and deceit. And would to God that this were only a transport of zeal and exaggeration! These blasphemies, which strike us with such horror, and which ought to have been buried with Paganism, we have still the sorrow to hear repeated among us. And you who shudder at them,

unknowingly put them, however, into the mouth of the freethinker; it is your continual sarcasms and censures upon piety which have rendered, in our days, impiety so general and so uncurbed.

I do not add, that, by these means, every thing in society becomes dubious and uncertain. There is no longer, then, either good faith, integrity, or fidelity among men. For, if we must no longer depend on the sincerity and virtue of the just; if their piety be only a mask to their passions, we assuredly will not place any confidence in the probity of sinners and worldly characters: all men are consequently only cheats and villains, of whom too much care cannot be taken, and with whom we ought to live as with enemies; and these so much the more to be dreaded, as, under a treacherous outside of friendship and humanity, they conceal the design of either deceiving or ruining us. None but a heart profoundly wicked and corrupted can suppose such iniquity and corruption in that of others.

And behold the second character of that temerity of which we speak. Yes, my brethren, that fund of malignity, which sees guilt through the appearances even of virtue, and attributes criminal intentions to works of holiness, can proceed only from a black and corrupted heart. As the passions have poisoned your heart, you whom this discourse regards,—as you are capable yourself of every duplicity and meanness,—as you have nothing in your own breast right, noble, or sincere,—you easily suspect your brethren to be what you are; you cannot persuade yourself that there still exist simple, sincere, and generous hearts on the earth; you think that you every where see what you feel in yourself; you cannot comprehend how honour, fidelity, sincerity, and so many other virtues, always false in your own heart, should have more reality in the hearts of persons, even the most respectable for their rank and character; you resemble the courtiers of the king of the Ammonites,—having no other occupation than that of being incessantly on the watch to supplant and lay snares for each other, they had little difficulty in believing that David was not more upright in his intentions with regard to their master. You think, said they to that prince, that David means to honour the memory of your father, by sending comforters to you to condole with you on his death? They are not comforters, but spies, whom he sends to you: he is a villain, who, under the specious outside of an honourable and amicable embassy, seeks to discover the weaknesses of your kingdom, and to take measures to surprise you. Such is more especially the misfortune of courts: bred up, and living in deceit, they see only dissimulation equally in virtue as in vice; as it is a stage upon which every one acts a borrowed character, they conclude that the pious man merely acts the personage of virtue; uncommon or unprofitable sincerity seems always impossible.

A worthy heart, a heart upright, simple, and sincere, can hardly

comprehend that there are impostors on the earth; he finds within himself the apology of other men, and, by what it would cost himself to be dishonest, he measures what it ought to cost others. Thus, my brethren, search into those who form these shameful and rash suspicions against the pious, and you will find that, in general, they are disorderly and corrupted characters, who seek to quiet themselves in their dissipations by the illusive supposition that their weaknesses are the weaknesses of all men; that those who are apparently the most virtuous are superior to themselves only in the art of concealment; and that, were they narrowly examined, we should find them, in reality, made like other men: this idea is an iniquitous comfort to them in their debaucheries. They harden themselves in iniquity, by thus associating with themselves in it all whom the credulity of the people calls virtuous: they form and endeavour to establish in themselves a shocking idea of the human race, in order to be less shocked with what they are forced to entertain of themselves, and they try to persuade themselves that virtue no longer exists, in order that vice may appear to them more excusable; as if, O my God! the multitude of criminals could disarm thy wrath, or deprive thy justice of the right to punish guilt.

But, say you, one has seen so many hypocrites who have so long abused the world, whom it regarded as saints and the friends of God, and who, nevertheless, were only perverse and corrupted men.

I confess it with sorrow, my brethren: but, from that, what would you wish to conclude? That all the virtuous are similar to them? The conclusion is detestable; and what would become of mankind, were you, in this manner, to reason on the rest of men? We have seen many wives faithless to their honour and to their duty; but, do modesty and fidelity no longer exist in the sacred bond of marriage? Many magistrates have sold their honour and disgraced their function; but are justice and integrity consequently banished from every tribunal? History hath preserved to us the remembrance of too many perfidious, dissembling, unfaithful, and dishonourable princes, equally faithless to their subjects, their allies, and their enemies; but are integrity, truth, and religion, for ever excluded from a throne? The past ages have seen many subjects, distinguished for their names, their offices, and the gifts of their sovereign, betray their prince and country, and keep up the most criminal intelligence with the enemy: would you find just the master whom you serve with so much zeal and courage, were he merely upon such grounds to suspect the truth of your fidelity? Why then is a suspicion, which excites the indignation of all other descriptions of men, only supportable when directed against the pious? Why is a conclusion, so ridiculous in every other case, only judicious when against virtue? Doth the perfidy of a single Judas give you grounds to conclude that all the

other disciples were traitors and without faith? Doth the hypocrisy of Simon the magician prove, that the conversion of the other disciples who embraced faith was merely an artifice to accomplish their own purposes; and that, like him, they walked not uprightly in the path of the Lord? What can be more unjust or foolish, than of the guilt of an individual to constitute a general crime? It is difficult, I confess, but that vice may sometimes assume the garb of virtue; that the angel of darkness may not sometimes have the appearance of an angel of light; and that the passions, which generally strain every nerve to succeed, may not sometimes call in the appearances of piety to their aid, particularly under a reign when piety, held in honour, is almost a certain road to fortune and favour. But it is the height of folly to reflect upon all virtue for the impious use which some individuals may make even of piety; and to believe that some abuses, discovered in a holy and venerable profession, universally dishonour all who have embraced it. The truth, my brethren, is, that we hate all men who are not similar to ourselves; and that we are delighted to be enabled to condemn piety, because piety itself condemns us.

But one has so often been deceived, say you. I confess it: but, in reply, I say, that, granting you are even deceived while refusing to suspect your brethren, and while rendering to a fictitious virtue that esteem and honour which are due to real virtue alone, what would be the consequence? By what would your credulity be followed, either sorrowful or disgraceful? You would have judged according to the rules of charity, which doth not easily believe in evil, and which delighteth in even the appearances of good; according to the rules of justice, which is incapable of every malignity or deed to others which it would not wish to have done to itself; according to the rules of prudence, which judges only from what is visible, and leaves to the Lord to judge of the intentions and thoughts; lastly, according to the rules of goodness and humanity, which always oblige us to presume in favour of our brethren. What would there be in such a mistake to alarm you? How noble for the mind, when the deception proceeds from a motive of humanity and kindness! What honour do not such mistakes render to a good heart; for none but the virtuous and the sincere are capable of them! But you, alas! not being such, prefer that deception which degrades the virtuous and pious man from that estimation which is his due, to hazarding the chance of not covering the hypocrite with the shame he deserves.

But, besides, whence spring this zeal and inveteracy against the abuse, made by the hypocrite, of real virtue? Is the glory of God so warmly taken to heart by you, that you wish to avenge him on the impostors who dishonour him? What matters it to you, who neither serve nor love him, whether the Lord be served by a double or a sincere heart? What is there which can so strongly interest you for the integrity or the hypocrisy of his worshippers,—you

who know not how he is even worshipped? Ah! were he the God of your heart, did you love him as your Lord and Father, were his glory dear to you, we might then indeed pardon, as an excess of zeal, the boldness with which you rise up against the outrage done to God and his worship by the simulated piety of the hypocrite. The just, who love and serve him, are surely more entitled to cry out against an abuse so injurious to sincere piety; but you, who live like the Pagans, who, sunk in debauchery, are without hope, and whose whole life is one continued guilt, ah! it belongs little to you to take the interest of God's glory against the fictitious piety which is the cause of so much disgrace and sorrow to the church; whether he be faithfully served, or merely through grimace, is no affair of yours. Whence then comes a zeal so misplaced? Would you wish to know? It is not the Lord whom you wish to avenge, nor is it his glory which interests you; it is the good name of the pious which you wish to stain; it is not hypocrisy which irritates your feelings, it is piety which displeases you; you are not the censurer of vice, you are only the enemy of virtue; in a word, you hate in the hypocrite only the resemblance of the pious.

In effect, did your censures proceed from a fund of religion and true zeal, ah! with grief alone would you recall the history of these impostors, who have sometimes succeeded in deceiving the world. What do I say? Far from alleging to us, with an air of triumph, these examples, you would lament over the scandals with which they have afflicted the church; far from applauding yourselves, when you renew their remembrance, you would wish that such melancholy events were for ever effaced from the memory of men. The law cursed him who should dare to uncover the shame and turpitude of those who had given him life; but it is the shame and dishonour of the church, your mother, which you expose with such pleasure to public derision. Do you carefully recall certain humiliating circumstances to the house from which you spring, and which have formerly disgraced the name and life of some one of your ancestors? Would you not wish for ever to efface these hateful vestiges of disgrace from the histories which hand them down to posterity? Do you not consider as enemies to your name those who ransack the past ages, in order to lay open these hateful particulars, and to revive them in the memory of men? Do you not, in opposition to their malignity, loudly proclaim that maxim of equity, that faults are personal; and that it is unjust to attach the idea of dishonour to all who bear your name, merely because it has once been disgraced through the bad conduct of an individual?

Apply the rule to yourself: the church is your house: the just alone are your relations, your brethren, your predecessors, your ancestors: they alone compose that family of first-born, to whom you ought to be eternally united. The wicked shall one day be as though they had never been: the ties of nature, of blood, and of

society, which now unite you to them, shall perish; an immeasurable and an eternal chaos shall separate them from the children of God; they shall no longer be your brethren, your forefathers, or your relatives; they shall be cast out, forgotten, effaced from the land of the living, unnecessary to the designs of God, cut off for ever from his kingdom, and no longer, by any tie, holding to the society of the just, who shall then be your only brethren, your ancestors, your people, your tribe. What do you then, when you uncover, with such pleasure, the ignominy of some false just who dishonour their history? It is your house, your name, your relations, your ancestors, whom you dishonour: you come to stain the splendour of so many glorious actions, which, in all ages, have rendered their memory immortal by the infidelity of an individual, who, bearing the name they bear, stain it by manners and a conduct totally dissimilar: upon yourselves then it is that you make the dishonour fall; unless you have already renounced the society of the holy, and prefer to associate your eternal lot with that of the wicked and the unfaithful.

But what is more particularly absurd in that temerity which is always so ready to judge and to blacken the intentions of the pious, is, that you thereby fall into the most ridiculous contradiction with yourselves:—last character of that temerity.

Yes, my brethren, you accuse them of cunningly working toward their own point, of having their own views in the most holy actions, and of only acting the personage of virtue. But doth it become you, the inhabitants of a court, to make this reproach? Your whole life is one continued disguise; you every where act a part which is not your own; you flatter those whom you love not; you crouch to others whom you despise; you act the assiduous servant to those from whom you have emolument to expect, though, in your heart, you look up with envy to their rank, and think them unworthy of their elevation: in a word, your whole life is an assumed character. Your heart, on every occasion, belies your conduct; every where your countenance is in contradiction to your sentiments; you are the hypocrites of the world, of ambition, of favour, and of fortune; and it well becomes you, after that, to accuse the just of the same tricks, and so loudly to ring their dissimulation and pretended hypocrisy: when you shall have nothing in the same way with which to reproach yourselves, then will we listen to the temerity of your censures; or rather, you shall have reason to be jealous for the glory of artifice and meanness, and to be dissatisfied, that the pious should dare to interfere with a science which so justly belongs, and is so especially adapted to you.

Besides, you so nervously clamour out against the world, when, too attentive to your actions, it maliciously interprets certain suspicious assiduities, certain animated looks; you so loudly proclaim then, that, if things go on thus, no person will in future be innocent;

that no woman in the world will be considered as a person of regular conduct; that nothing is more easy than to give an air of guilt to the most innocent things; that it will be necessary totally to banish one's self from society, and to deny one's self every intercourse with mankind; you then so feelingly declaim against the malignity of men, who, on the most trivial grounds, accuse you of criminal intentions. But do the pious give juster foundation for the suspicions which you form against them? And, if it be permitted to you to hunt for guilt in them, though hidden under the appearances of virtue, why are you so enraged that the world should dare to suppose it in you, and should believe you criminal under the appearances of guilt?

Lastly. O worldly women! when we reproach you with your assiduity at theatres, and other places where innocence encounters so many dangers, or the indecency and immodesty of your dress, you reply that you have no bad intentions; that you wish injury to none; you would wish indecent and criminal manners to be passed over, for the sake of a pretended innocency of intention, which your whole exterior belies; and you cannot pass over to the pious, virtuous, and laudable manners, for the sake of an integrity of heart, to which every thing external bears ample testimony. You exact that they shall suppose your intentions pure, when your works are not so; and you think yourselves entitled to believe that the intentions of the pious are not innocent, when all their actions are visibly so. Cease, then, either to justify your own vices, or to censure their virtues.

It is thus, my brethren, that every thing poisons in our keeping, and that every thing removes us farther from God: the spectacle even of virtue becomes to us a pretext for vice; and the examples themselves of piety are rocks to our innocence. It would seem, O my God, that the world doth not sufficiently furnish us with opportunities for our ruin: that the examples of sinners are not sufficient to authorize our errors; for we seek a support for them even in the virtues of the just.

But you will tell us, that the world is not so far wrong in censuring those who profess themselves people of piety; that such are every day seen, who, if possible, are more animated than other men in the pursuit of a worldly fortune, more eager after pleasures, more delicate in submitting to injury, more proud in elevation, and more attached to their own interests. This is the second injustice of the world toward the pious: not only does it maliciously interpret their intentions, which is a temerity, but it also scrutinizes their slightest imperfections, which is an inhumanity.

PART II.—It may truly be said, that the world is a more rigid and severer critic upon the pious than the gospel itself; that it exacts a greater degree of perfection from them, and that their

weaknesses find less indulgence before the tribunal of men than they shall one day experience before the tribunal of God himself.

Now, I say that this attention to exaggerate the slightest errors of the pious, (second injustice into which the world falls with regard to them,) is an inhumanity, considering the weakness of man, the difficulty of virtue, and, lastly, the maxims of the world itself. I intreat your attention here, my brethren.

Inhumanity, considering the weakness of man. Yes, my brethren, it is an illusion to suppose that there are perfect virtues among men; it is not the condition of this mortal life: almost every one bears with him in piety, his faults, his humours, and his peculiar weaknesses; grace corrects, but does not overturn nature; the Spirit of God, which creates in us a new man, leaves still many remains of the old: conversion terminates our vices, but does not extinguish our passions; in a word, it forms the Christian within us, but it still leaves us men. The most righteous, consequently, still preserve many remains of the sinner: David, that model of penitence, still blended with his virtues a too great indulgence for his children, a secret pride at the number of his people and the prosperity of his reign; the mother of Zebedee's children, in spite of faith, through which she was so strongly attached to Jesus Christ, lost nothing of her anxiety for the elevation of her children, or of her concern toward procuring for them the first stations in an earthly kingdom; the apostles themselves disputed rank and precedence with each other: never shall we be divested of all these little weaknesses till we are delivered from this body of death, which is the fountain from which they spring. The most shining virtue here below, always, therefore, hath its spots and its flaws, which are not to be too narrowly examined: and the just must always in some points resemble the rest of men. All, then, that can be exacted from human weakness, is, that the virtues rise superior to the vices, the good to the evil; that the essential be regulated, and that we incessantly labour toward regulating the rest.

And surely, my brethren, overflowing with passions, as we are in the wretched condition of this life; loaded with a body of sin, which oppresses the soul; slaves to our senses and to the flesh; bearing within us an eternal opposition to the law of God; the continual prey of a thousand desires which combat against our soul; the everlasting sport of our inconstancy and the natural instability of our heart; finding nothing within us but what is repugnant to duty; eagerly pursuing whatever removes us from God; disgusted with every thing which brings us nearer to him; loving only what tends to our ruin; hating only what tends to our salvation; weak in good; always ripe for evil; and, in a word, finding in virtue the rock of virtue itself, is it to be wondered at, that men, surrounded, filled with so many miseries, should some-

times allow some of them to be visible; that men, so corrupted, should not be always equally holy? And were you, in any measure, equitable, would you not rather find it worthy of admiration that some virtue still remained, than worthy of censure that they still preserve some vices?

Besides, God hath his reasons for still leaving, to the most pious, certain sensible weaknesses which strike and offend you. In the first place, he thereby wisheth to humble them, and to render their virtue more secure by concealing it even from themselves. Secondly, he wisheth to animate their vigilance, for he leaveth not Amorites in the land of Canaan, that is to say, passions in the heart of his servants, but, lest, freed from all their enemies, they should lull themselves in idleness and in a dangerous security. Thirdly, he wisheth to excite in them a continual desire for the eternal land, and to render the exilement of this life more bitter, through a proper sense of those miseries from which they can never, here below, obtain a complete deliverance. Fourthly, perhaps not to discourage sinners by the sight of too perfect a virtue, which might probably induce them to cease every exertion, under the idea of never being able to attain it. Fifthly, in order to preserve to the just a continual subject of prayer and penitence, by leaving them a continual source of sin. Sixthly, to prevent those excessive honours which the world would render to virtue were it pure and sparkling, and lest it should find its recompense, in other words, its rock, in the vain applauses of men. What shall I lastly say; it perhaps is still more to lull and to blindfold the enemies of piety; by the weaknesses of the pious to strengthen you, who listen to me, in the foolish opinion that there is no real virtue on the earth; to authorize you in your disorders, by the supposition that they are similar to yourselves; and to render unavailing to you all the pious examples of the just. You triumph in the weaknesses of the pious; yet are there weaknesses perhaps punishments from God on you, and means employed by his justice to nourish your unjust prepossessions against virtue, and completely to harden you in guilt. God is terrible in his judgments; and the consummation of iniquity, is, in general, the sequel of iniquity itself.

But, secondly, were your censures on those weaknesses, which may still remain to the pious, not rendered barbarous and inhuman, when the natural weakness of man is considered, the difficulty alone of virtue would amply render them so.

For, candidly, my brethren, doth it appear so easy to you to live according to God, and to walk in the straight path of salvation, that you should become so implacable against the pious, from the moment that they err but for an instant? Is it so easy continually to renounce one's self, to be ever guarded against one's own heart, to overcome its antipathies, to repress its likings, to lower its pride, and to fix its inconstancy? Is it so easy a

matter to restrain the sallies of the mind, to moderate its judgments, to disavow its suspicions, to soften its keenness, and to smother its malignity? It is so easy to be the eternal enemy of one's own body, to conquer its indolence, to mortify its tastes, and to crucify its desires? Is it so natural to pardon injuries, to bear with contempt, to love, and even to load with benefits those who do evil to us, to sacrifice one's fortune in order not to fail to his conscience, to deny one's self pleasures to which all our inclinations lead us, to resist example, and singly to maintain the cause of virtue against the multitude which condemns it? Do all these appear, in fact, so easy to you, that you deem those, who for an instant depart from them, unworthy of the least indulgence? How feelingly do you expatiate every day on the difficulties of a Christian life, when we propose to you these holy rules! Is it so very astonishing, that, in a long march through rough and dangerous ways, a man should sometimes stumble, or even fall, through fatigue and weakness?

Inhuman that we are! And, nevertheless, the slightest imperfection in the pious destroys, in our mind, all their most estimable qualities: far from excusing their weaknesses, in consideration of their virtue, it is their virtue itself which renders us doubly cruel and inexorable to their weaknesses. To be just is sufficient, it would appear, to forfeit every claim to indulgence: to their vices we are clear-sighted; to their virtues we are blind; a moment of weakness effaces from our remembrance a whole life of fidelity and innocence.

But what renders your injustice toward the pious still more cruel, is, that it is your own examples, your irregularities, and even your censures, which stagger, weaken, and force them sometimes to imitate you; it is the corruption of your manners which becomes the continual and the most dangerous snare to their innocence; it is those foolish derisions with which you continually assault virtue, that force them reluctantly to shelter themselves under the appearances of guilt. And how can you suppose it possible that the piety of the most righteous should always preserve itself pure, in the midst of the present manners, in a perverse world, whose customs are abuses, and its communications crimes; where the passions are the only bond of society, and where the wisest and most virtuous are those who retrenched from guilt only its scandal and publicity? How can you suppose it possible, that, amidst these eternal derisions which ridicule the pious, which make them almost ashamed of virtue, and often oblige them to counterfeit vice; that, in the midst of so many disorders, authorized by the public manners, by senseless applauses, by examples rendered respectable by rank and dignity, by the ridicule cast on those who dare to hesitate at them, and, lastly, by the weakness even of their own heart; how do you think it possible that the pious should be always enabled to stem such a torrent, and that, obliged continually

to fortify themselves against so rapid and so impetuous a course, which hurries away the rest of men, watchfulness and vigour should not sometimes fail them for an instant, and that they should not sometimes feel a momentary influence of the fatal vortex? You are their seducers; and you pretend to be displeased because they allow themselves to be seduced? No longer, therefore, reproach to them your scandals, which weaken their faith, and which they shall one day reproach to you before the tribunal of Jesus Christ; and triumph no more over their weaknesses, which are your own work, and for which they shall afterward demand vengeance against you.

I have also said, that even your maxims cannot be excused from severity and extravagance with respect to the pious. Judge from what I shall now repeat. You are continually saying that such an individual, with all his devotion, fails not, however, to prosecute his own designs; that another is very attentive in paying court to his superiors; again, that a third has a piety so delicate and sensible, that the merest trifle wounds and shocks it; that such an individual pardons nothing; that the other is not sorry to be thought still agreeable and amusing; that a third has a very commodious piety, and lives a very easy and agreeable life; lastly, that another is full of caprice and fancies, and that none of her household can put up with her temper: such are your daily discourses; nor do your satires stop there, for you boldly decide from thence that a devotion, blended with so many faults, can never lead them to salvation: behold your maxims. Yet, nevertheless, when we announce to you, from this seat, that a worldly, idle, sensual, dissipated, and almost wholly profane life, such as you lead, can never be a way to salvation, you say that you cannot see any harm in it; you accuse us of severity, and of exaggerating the rules and duties of your station; you do not believe that more is required for salvation. But, my brethren, to which side here do severity and injustice belong? You condemn the pious, because to their piety they add some particulars which resemble you; because they mingle some of your faults with an infinity of virtues and good works, which amply repair the errors: and you believe yourselves in the path of salvation, you who have only their faults, without even the piety which purifies them? O man! who then art thou that thus pretendest to save those whom the Lord condemneth, and to condemn those whom he justifieth?

Nor is this all; and you shall immediately see how little, on this point, you are consonant with yourselves. In effect, when the pious live in total retirement; when, no longer keeping any measures with the world, they conceal themselves from the eyes of the public; when they resign certain places of emolument and distinction, and divest themselves of all their employments and dignities, for the sole purpose of attending to their salvation; when they lead a life of tears, prayer, mortification, and silence,

(and happily our age hath furnished such examples,) what have you then said? That they carried matters too far; that violent counsels had been given them; that their zeal was not according to knowledge; that, were all to imitate them, public duties would be neglected; that those services, incumbent on every citizen to his country and state, would no longer be given; that such an extreme of singularity is not required; and that real devotion proves itself, by living together and fulfilling the duties of the station in which God hath placed us: such are your maxims. But, on the other hand, when the virtuous unite with piety the duties of their station and the innocent interests of their fortune; when they still keep up a certain degree of intercourse and society with the world, and show themselves in places from which their rank does not allow them to banish themselves; when they still partake in certain public pleasures, which their station renders inevitable; in a word, when they are prudent in good, and simple in evil,—ah! you then proclaim that they are made like other men; that it appears very easy to you, at that price, to serve God; that you see nothing in their devotion to frighten you; and that if nothing more were required, you would soon be yourself a great saint. In vain may piety assume every appearance; it is sufficient that it is piety, to displease and to merit your censures. Be consistent with yourselves; you would have the pious to resemble yourselves, yet you condemn them from the moment that you can trace a resemblance.

The obstinacy and injustice of the Jews, in our gospel, are renewed in you. When John the Baptist appeared in the desert, clothed in goats' skins, neither eating nor drinking, and holding out to Judea an austerity of virtue which none of the preceding just or prophets had ever equalled, they considered, says Jesus Christ, the austerity of his manners as the illusion of a false spirit, which seduced and urged him on to these excesses, merely that, in a worldly vanity, he might find the recompense of his penance. On the contrary, the Son of Man afterward came, continues the Saviour, eating and drinking; exhibiting to them, in his conduct, the model of a virtue more consonant with human weakness, and serving as an example to all, by leading a simple and ordinary life which all may imitate: is he more sheltered from their censures? Ah! they declaim against him, as being a man of pleasure and a lover of good cheer; and the bendings of his virtue are no longer, in their opinion, but a relaxation which stains and dishonours it. The most dissimilar virtues are successful only in attracting the same reproaches. Ah! my brethren, how much to be pitied would the pious be, were they to be judged before the tribunal of men! But they know that that world, which sits in judgment on them, is itself already judged.

And what in this severity, with which you condemn the slightest

imperfections of the pious, is more deplorable, is, that, if a notorious and infamous sinner, after a whole life of iniquity and crimes, but give, on the bed of death, some weak proof of repentance; if he but pronounce the name of that God whom he has never known, and has always blasphemed; if he at last consent, after many delays and repugnances, to receive the last offices of the church, which he formerly held in contempt; ah! you rank him among the saints; you maintain that he has died the death of a Christian; that he has attained to the state of repentance; and that he has intreated forgiveness and mercy from God; upon these grounds you hope every thing for his salvation, and you no longer entertain a doubt but that the Lord hath shown him mercy: some reluctant marks of religion, which have been extorted from him, are sufficient, in your idea, to secure to him the kingdom of God, into which nothing defiled shall ever enter; are sufficient, I say, in spite of the excesses and abominations of his whole life; and an entire life of virtue is not sufficient, in your opinion, to render it certain to a faithful soul, from the moment that he mingles the smallest infidelity with his past conduct: you save the wicked on the most frivolous and equivocal appearances of piety, and you condemn the just on the slightest and most excusable proofs of humanity and weakness.

I might add, my brethren, that, consulting only your own interests, the imperfections of the pious ought to find you more indulgent and favourable.

For they alone, my brethren, spare you: they alone conceal your vices, smooth your faults, excuse your errors, and with pleasure dwell upon whatever may be praiseworthy in your virtue; while the world, your equals, your rivals, and your pretended friends, perhaps lessen your talents and services, speak with contempt of all your good qualities, ridicule your defects, number your misfortunes amongst your faults, exaggerate these very faults, and empoison your most innocent words and actions; the virtuous alone excuse you, justify your heart, and are the eulogists of your virtues, or the prudent dissemblers of your vices; they alone break up those conversations in which your reputation is attacked; they alone refuse to join with the public against you; and for them alone you are destitute of humanity, and to them alone you cannot pardon even the virtues which render them estimable. Ah! my brethren, return them at least what they lend to you; spare your protectors and apologists, and by decrying them, do not debilitate the only favourable testimony which is left for you among men.

But I speak too gently; not only the pious refuse to join with the malignity of the public against you, but they alone are your true friends; they alone are touched with your misfortunes, affected by your wanderings, and interested in your salvation; they carry you in their heart; while excusing your passions and

irregularities before men, they silently lament over them before God; they raise up their hands for you to heaven; they supplicate your conversion; they entreat the forgiveness of your crimes; and you cannot bring yourselves to render justice even to their piety and innocence? Ah! they may make against you the same complaint to the Lord, that the prophet Jeremiah formerly made against the Jews of his time, unjust censures of his piety and conduct: "Give heed to me, O Lord," said that man of God, "and hearken to the voice of them that contend with me. Shall evil be recompensed for good? For they have digged a pit for my soul; remember that I stood before thee to speak good for them, and to turn away thy wrath from them."

You are surely sensible, my brethren, of all the injustice of your conduct with regard to what I have been mentioning; but what would it be, if, in completing what I had at first intended, I were to show you, that not only you give corrupted motives to the good works of the pious, which is a temerity; not only you exaggerate their slightest weaknesses, which is an inhumanity; but, likewise, when you have nothing to say against the probity of their intentions, and when their imperfections give no handle to your censures, that you fly to your last hold, that of casting an air of ridicule over their virtue itself; which is an impiety.

Yes, my brethren, an impiety. You make a sport, a comic scene of religion; you still introduce it, like the Pagans formerly, on an infamous theatre; and there you expose its holy mysteries, and all that is most sacred and most respectable on the earth, to the laughter of the spectators. You may apologize for your passions, through the weakness of temperament and human frailty; but your derisions of virtue can find no excuse but in the impious contempt of virtue itself; nevertheless, this irreligious and blasphemous mode of speaking is now regarded as a pleasantry, as a sally of wit, and as a language from which vanity appropriates to itself peculiar honour.

But, my brethren, you thereby persecute virtue, and render it useless to yourselves; you dishonour virtue, and render it useless to others; you try virtue, and render it insupportable to itself.

You persecute virtue, and render it useless to yourselves. Yes, my dear hearer, the example of the pious was a mean of salvation provided for you by the goodness of God; now, his justice, incensed at your derisions on his mercies to his servants, for ever withdraws them from you, and punishes your contempt of piety, by denying to you the gift of piety itself. The kings of the earth take signal vengeance on those who dare to injure their statues, for these are to be considered as public and sacred monuments representing themselves. But the just, here below, are the living statues of the great King, the real images of a holy God; in them he hath expressed the majesty of his purest and most resplendent features; and he for ever curseth those sacrilegious and cor-

rupted hearts who dare to make them a subject of derision and insult.

Besides, even granting that the Lord should not deny to you the gift of piety in punishment of your derisions, they still form an invincible human barrier which will for ever exclude you from its cause. For I demand, if, when tired of the world, of your disorders, of yourself, you wish to return to God, and to save that soul which you now labour to destroy, how shall you dare to declare for piety, you who have so often made it the butt of your public and profane pleasantries? How shall you ever boast of the duties of religion, you who are every day heard to say, that, to become devout, is, in other words, to say that the senses are lost; that such an individual had a thousand good qualities which rendered his society agreeable to all, but that devotion has now altered him to such a degree, that he is fully as insupportable as he was formerly pleasing; that he affects to make himself ridiculous; that we must renounce common sense before we can erect, it would appear, the standard of piety; that, may God preserve you from such madness; that you endeavour to be an honest man, but, God be praised, you are no devotee? What language!—that is to say, that God be praised you are already marked with the stamp of the reprobate; that with confidence you can say to yourself, “I shall never alter, but shall die exactly such as I am.” What impiety! And yet it is among Christians that such discourses are every day ostentatiously, and with apparent satisfaction, repeated.

Ah! my brethren, permit my sorrow to vent itself here in one reflection. The patriarchs, those men so venerable, so powerful, even according to the world, never had communication with the kings and nations of the different countries, where they were conducted by the order of the Lord, but in the following religious terms: “I fear the Lord.” They claimed no respect from the grandeur of their race, whose origin was almost coeval with the world itself, from the lustre of their ancestors, from the splendour of the blood of Abraham, that man, the conqueror of kings, the model of all the sages of the earth, and the only hero of whom the world could then boast. “We fear the Lord.” Behold their most pompous title, their most august nobility, the only character by which they wished to be distinguished from other men: such was the magnificent sign which appeared at the head of their tents and flocks, which shone on their standards, and every where bore with them the glory of their name, and that of the God of their fathers. And we, my brethren, we shun the reputation of a man just and fearing God, as a title of reproach and shame; we pompously dwell upon the vain distinctions of rank and birth; wherever we go, the frivolous mark of our names and dignities precedes and announces us; and we hide the glorious sign of the God of our fathers; we even glorify ourselves in not being among the number of those who fear and adore him.

O God! leave, then, to these foolish men a glory so hideous; confound their folly and impiety, by permitting them to the end to glorify themselves in their confusion and ignominy.

Nor is this all. By these deplorable derisions not only do you render virtue useless to yourselves, but you likewise render it odious and useless to others; that is to say, not only do you bar against yourselves every path which leads to God, but you likewise shut it against an infinity of souls, whom grace still urges in secret to relinquish their crimes, and to live in a Christian manner; who dare not declare themselves, lest they should be exposed to the lash of your satire and profane railleries; who, in a new life, dread only the ridicule which you cast upon virtue; who, in secret, oppose only that single obstacle to the voice of Heaven which calls upon them; and tremblingly hesitate, in the grand affair of eternity, between the judgments of God and your senseless and impious derisions.

That is to say, that you thereby blast the fruit of that gospel which we announce, and render our ministry unavailing; you deprive religion of its terrors and majesty, and spread through the whole exterior of piety a ridicule which falls upon religion itself. You perpetuate in the world, and support among men, those prejudices against virtue, and that universal illusion employed by Satan to deceive them, which is that of treating piety as perverse and a folly; you authorize the blasphemies of freethinkers and of the wicked; you accustom sinners to arrogate to themselves an ostentatious glory from vice and irregularity, and to consider debauchery as fashionable and genteel when contrasted with the ridicule of virtue. What, indeed, may I not say? Through your means piety becomes the fable of the world, the sport of the wicked, the shame of sinners, the scandal of the weak, and the rock even of the just; through you vice is held in honour, virtue is debased, truth is weakened, faith is extinguished, religion is annihilated, and corruption universally spreads; and, as foretold by the prophet, desolation perseveres even to the consummation and to the end.

Let me likewise add, that, through you, virtue becomes insupportable to itself: your derisions become a rock to the piety even of the just: you shake their faith; you discourage their zeal; you suspend their good desires; you stifle in their heart the liveliest impressions of grace; you stop them in a thousand deeds of fervour and virtue, which they dare not expose to the impiety of your censures; in spite of themselves, you force them to conform to your habits and maxims, which they detest; to abate from their retirement, their mortifications, and their prayers; and to consecrate to these duties only those concealed moments which may escape your knowledge and railleries. Through these means, you deprive the church of their edifying example; you deprive the weak of those succours which they

would otherwise find there; sinners of that shame with which their presence would cover them; the just of that consolation which would animate them; and religion of a sight which would do it honour.

Alas! my brethren, in former ages tyrants never derided Christians, but in reproaching to them their pretended superstitions: they ridiculed the public honours which they saw them render to Jesus Christ, a person crucified, and the preference which was given to him by Christians over Jupiter and all the gods of the empire, whose worship was become respectable through the pomp and magnificence of their temples and altars, the antiquity of the laws, and the majesty of the Cæsars: but, on the other hand, they bestowed loud and public praises on their manners; they admired their modesty, frugality, charity, patience, innocent and mortified life, and their absence from theatres, or every other place of public amusement; they could not, without veneration, regard the wise, retired, modest, humble, and benevolent manners of those simple and faithful believers. You, on the contrary, more senseless, find no fault with them for adoring Jesus Christ, and for placing their confidence and hope of salvation in the mystery of the cross; but you find it ridiculous that they should deny themselves every public pleasure; that they should live in the practice of retirement, mortification, and prayer; but you find them worthy of your derision and censure, because they are humble, simple, chaste, and modest: and the Christian life, which found admirers and panegyrists even among tyrants, experiences from you only mockery and profane raileries.

What folly, my brethren! to find worthy of laughter in the world, which is itself but a mass of trifles and absurdities, only those who know its frivolity, and whose only thoughts are bent on placing themselves secure from the wrath to come! What folly, to despise in men the very qualities which render them displeasing to God, respectable to angels, and useful to their fellow-creatures! What folly, to be convinced that an eternal happiness or misery awaits us, yet to find ridiculous only those who are interested in so important an affair!

Let us hold virtue in respect, my brethren; it alone, on the earth, merits our admiration and praise. If we find ourselves still too weak to fulfil its duties, let us at least be equitable, and esteem its lustre and innocence; if we cannot live the life of the just, let us wish to attain it, let us envy their lot; if we cannot as yet imitate their example, let us consider every derision on virtue not only as a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, but as an outrage on humanity, which virtue alone honours and dignifies; far from reproaching the godly with those virtues which render them dissimilar to us, let us reproach ourselves with the vices which prevent us from resembling them; in a word, let us,

by a true and sincere respect for piety, deserve to obtain one day the gift of piety itself.

And you, my brethren, who serve the Lord, remember, that the interests of virtue are in your hands; that the weaknesses, the stains with which you blend it, become, as I may say, stains on religion itself; consider how much the world expects from you, and what engagements you contract toward the public, when you espouse the cause of piety; consider with what dignity, what fidelity, what respectability, you ought to support the character and personage of a servant of Jesus Christ. Yes, my brethren, let us, with majesty, support the interests of piety against the sneers of those who despise it; let us purchase the right of being insensible to their censures by giving no foundation for them; let us force the world to respect what it cannot love; let us not of the holy profession of piety make a sordid gain, a vile worldly interest, a life of ill-nature and caprice, a claim to effeminacy and idleness, a singularity from which we arrogate honour, a prejudice, a spirit of intolerance which flatters us, and a spirit of division which separates us from our fellow-creatures; let us make it the price of eternity, the path to heaven, the rule of our duties, and the reparation of our crimes; a spirit of modesty which makes us unassuming, a compunction which humbles us, a gentleness which draws us to our brethren, a charity which makes us bear with them, an indulgence which attracts their regard, a spirit of peace which ties us to them; and, lastly, a union of hearts, of desires, of affections, of good and evil on the earth, which shall be the forerunner and hope of that eternal union which charity is to consummate in heaven.

SERMON XXI.

RESPECT IN THE TEMPLES OF GOD.

“And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves.”—MATTHEW xxi. 12.

WHENCE comes this aspect of zeal and of indignation which Jesus Christ, on this occasion, allows his countenance to betray? Is this, then, that King of Peace who was to appear in Zion armed with his meekness alone? We have seen him sitting as Judge over an adulteress, and he hath not even condemned her. We have

seen at his feet the prostitute of the city, and he hath graciously forgiven her debaucheries and scandals. His disciples wanted the fire of heaven to descend upon an ungrateful and perverse city; but he reproached them with being still unacquainted with that new spirit of mercy and of charity which he came to spread throughout the earth. He hath just been lamenting with tears the miseries which threaten Jerusalem, that criminal city, the murderer of the prophets, which is on the eve of sealing the sentence of her reprobation by the iniquitous death she is so soon to inflict on him whom God had sent to be her Redeemer. On every occasion he hath appeared feeling and merciful; and, in consequence of the excess of his meekness, he hath been called the friend even of publicans and sinners.

What then are the outrages which now triumph over all his clemency, and arm his gracious hands with the rod of justice and of wrath? The holy temple is profaned; his Father's house is dishonoured; the place of prayer, and the sacred asylum of the penitent, is turned into a house of traffic and of avarice: this is what calls the lightning into those eyes which would wish to cast only looks of compassion upon sinners. Behold what obliges him to terminate a ministry of love and of reconciliation, by a step of severity and of wrath similar to that with which he had opened it. For remark, that what Jesus Christ doth here, in terminating his career, he had already done, when, after thirty-three years of a private life, he entered for the first time into Jerusalem, there to open his mission, and to do the work of his Father. It might be said, that he had himself forgotten that spirit of meekness and of long-suffering which was to distinguish his ministry from that of the ancient covenant, and under which he was announced by the prophets.

Many other scandals, besides those seen in the temple, doubtless took place in that city, and were perhaps no less worthy of the zeal and the chastisement of the Saviour; but, as if his Father's glory had been less wounded by them, he can conceal them for a time, and delay their punishment. He bursts not forth at once against the hypocrisy of the pharisees, and the corruption of the scribes and priests; but the chastisement of the profaners of the temple can admit of no delay; his zeal on this occasion admits of no bounds; and scarcely is he entered into Jerusalem when he flies to the holy place, to avenge the honour of his Father there insulted, and the glory of his house which they dishonour.

Of all crimes, in effect, by which the greatness of God is insulted, I see almost none more deserving of his chastisements than the profanations of his temples; and they are so much the more criminal, as the dispositions required of us by religion, when assisting there, ought to be more holy.

For, my brethren, since our temples are a new heaven, where God dwelleth with men, they require the same dispositions of

us as those of the blessed in the heavenly temple; that is to say, that the earthly altar, being the same as that of heaven, and the Lamb, who offers himself and is sacrificed there, being the same, the dispositions of those around him ought to be alike. Now, the first disposition of the blessed before the throne of God and the altar of the Lamb, is a disposition of purity and innocence. The second, a disposition of religion and internal humiliation. Thirdly, and lastly, a disposition even of decency and of modesty in dress. Three dispositions, which comprise all the feelings of faith with which we ought to enter the temples of God; a disposition of purity and innocence; a disposition of adoration and internal humiliation; a disposition even of external decency and modesty in dress.

PART I.—The whole universe is a temple which God filleth with his glory and with his presence. Wherever we go, says the apostle, he is always beside us; in him we live, move, and have our being. If we mount up to the heavens, he is there; if we plunge to the centre, there shall we find him; if we traverse the ocean on the wings of the winds, it is his hand that guides us: and he is alike the God of the distant isles which know him not, as of the kingdoms and regions which invoke his name.

Nevertheless, in all times, men have consecrated places to him which he hath honoured with a special presence. The patriarchs erected altars to him on certain spots where he had appeared. The Israelites, in the desert, considered the tabernacle as the place in which his glory and his presence continually resided; and, come afterward to Jerusalem, they no more invoked him with the solemnity of incense and of victims but in that august temple erected to him by Solomon. It was the first temple consecrated by men of the true God. It was the most holy place in the universe; the only one where it was permitted to offer up gifts and sacrifices to the Lord. From all quarters of the earth the Israelites were obliged to come there to worship him. Captives in foreign kingdoms, their eyes, their wishes, and their homages were incessantly bent toward that holy place: in the midst of Babylon, Jerusalem and her temple were always the source of their delight, of their regrets, and the object of their worship and of their prayers; and Daniel chose to expose himself to all the fury of the lions, rather than to fail in that pious duty, and to deprive himself of that consolation. Jerusalem, indeed, had often seen infidel princes, attracted by the sanctity and the fame of her temple, coming to render homage to a God whom they knew not; and Alexander himself, struck with the majesty of that place, and with the august gravity of its venerable pontiff, remembered that he was man, and bowed his proud head before the God of hosts whom they there worshipped.

At the birth of the gospel, the houses of believers were at first domestic churches. The cruelty of tyrants obliged those first disciples of faith to seek obscure and hidden places to conceal themselves from the rage of the persecutions, there to celebrate the holy mysteries, and to invoke the name of the Lord. The majesty of the ceremonies entered into the church only with that of the Cæsars. Religion had its Davids and its Solomons, who blushed to inhabit superb palaces, while the Lord had not whereon to lay his head: sumptuous edifices gradually rose up in our cities: the God of heaven and of the earth again, if I dare to say so, resumed his rights; and the temples themselves, where the demon had so long been invoked, were restored to him as to their rightful master, consecrated to his worship, and became his dwelling-place.

But here they are no more empty temples like that of Jerusalem, where every thing took place figuratively. The Lord still dwelt in the heavens, said the prophet, and his throne was still above the clouds; but since he hath deigned to appear upon the earth, to hold converse with men, and to leave us, in the mystical benedictions, the real pledge of his body and of his blood, actually contained under these sacred signs, the heavenly altar hath no longer any advantage over ours; the victim which we there immolate is the Lamb of God; the bread in which we participate is the immortal food of the angels and blessed spirits; the mystical wine we there drink is that new beverage with which they make glad in the kingdom of the heavenly Father; the sacred canticle we there sing is that which the celestial harmony makes continually to resound around the throne of the Lamb; lastly, our temples are those new heavens promised by the prophet to men. We see not fully there, it is true, all that is seen in the heavenly Jerusalem, for here below we see only mystically, and, as it were, through a veil; but we possess him, we enjoy him, and heaven hath no longer any advantage over the earth.

Now, I say, that our temples being a new heaven, filled with the glory and the presence of the Lord, innocence and purity are the first disposition by which we are entitled, like the blessed in the eternal temple, to appear there; for the God before whom we appear is a holy God.

In effect, my brethren, the sanctity of God, spread throughout the universe, is one of the greatest motives held out by religion to induce us every where to walk before him in purity and in innocence. As all creatures are sanctified by the intimate residence of the Divinity who dwelleth in them, and all places are full of his glory and immensity, the divine writings incessantly warn us every where to respect the presence of God, who seeth and who watcheth us; on no occasion to offer any thing to his eyes which may wound the sanctity of his regards; and not sully with our crimes that earth which wholly is his temple and the dwelling-place of his glory.

The sinner, who bears an impure conscience, is therefore a kind of profaner, unworthy of living upon the earth; for, by the sole situation of his corrupted heart, he every where dishonours the presence of the holy God who is ever beside him, and he profanes every spot where he bears his crimes, for all places are sanctified through the immensity of the God who filleth and consecrateth them.

But, if the universal presence of God be a reason why we should every where appear pure and without stain to his eyes, doubtless those places which, in that universe, are particularly consecrated to him, our temples, in which the Divinity, as I may say, corporally resides, much more require that we should appear in them pure and without stain, lest the sanctity of the God who filleth and dwelleth in them be dishonoured.

Thus, when the Lord had permitted Solomon to erect, to his glory, that temple so famed for its magnificence, and so venerable through the splendour of its worship and the majesty of its ceremonies, what rigid precautions did he not take, lest men should abuse his goodness in choosing a special dwelling-place amid them, and lest they should dare to appear there, in his presence, covered with stains and defilements! What barriers did he not place between himself, as I may say, and man; and, in drawing near to us, what an interval did not his holiness leave between the spot filled with his presence, and the eyes of the people who came to invoke him!

Yes, my brethren, take a description of it. Within the circle of that vast edifice which Solomon consecrated to the majesty of the God of his fathers, the Lord chose, for the place of his abode, only the most retired and the most inaccessible spot; that was the holy of holies, that is to say, the sole spot of that immense temple which was regarded as the dwelling-place and the temple of the Lord upon earth. And, besides, what terrible precautions defended its entry! An outer and far distant wall surrounded it; and there, the Gentiles and foreigners, who wished to be instructed in the law, could only approach. Secondly, another wall very distant concealed it; and there the Israelites alone were entitled to enter: yet was it necessary that they should be free from stain, and that they had carefully purified themselves, through stated fastings and ablutions, before they should dare to approach a place still so distant from the holy of holies. Thirdly, another wall more advanced still separated it from the rest of the temple; and there the priests alone entered every day to offer sacrifices, and to renew the sacred loaves exposed upon the altar. The law required that every other Israelite who should dare to approach it, should be stoned as a sacrilegious profaner; and even a king of Israel, who thought himself entitled, through his regal dignity, to come there to offer up incense, was instantly covered with leprosy, degraded from his royalty, and excluded for the rest of his life from all society and

commerce with men. Lastly, after so many barriers and separations, appeared the holy of holies; that place, so terrible and so concealed, covered with an impenetrable veil, inaccessible to every mortal, to every righteous, to every prophet, even to every minister of the Lord, the sovereign pontiff alone excepted; and even he was entitled to appear there only once in the year, after a thousand strict and religious precautions, and bearing in his hands the blood of the victim for which alone the gates of that sacred place were opened.

Yet, after all, what did that holy of holies, that spot so formidable and so inaccessible, contain? The tables of the law, the manna, the rod of Aaron; empty figures, and the shadows of futurity: the holy God himself, who sometimes gave out from thence his oracles, yet dwelt not there as in the sanctuary of Christians, the gates of which are indiscriminately opened to every believer.

Now, my brethren, if the goodness of God, in a law of love and grace, hath no longer placed these terrible barriers between him and us, if he hath destroyed that wall of separation which removed him so far from man, and hath permitted to every believer to approach the holy of holies, where he himself now dwelleth, it is not that his sanctity exacts less purity and innocence of those who come to present themselves before him. His design hath only been to render us more pure, more holy, and more faithful, and to make us feel what ought to be the sanctity of a Christian; seeing he is every day obliged to support, at the foot of the altar, and of the terrible sanctuary, the presence of the God whom he invokes and whom he worships.

And for this reason it is that Peter calls all Christians a holy nation; for they are all equally entitled to present themselves before the holy altar: a chosen generation; for they are all separated from the world and from every profane custom, consecrated to the Lord, and solely destined to his worship and to his service: and, lastly, a royal priesthood; for they all participate, in one sense, in the priesthood of his Son, the High-priest of the new law, and because the privilege of entering into the holy of holies, formerly granted to the sovereign pontiff alone, is become the common and daily right of every believer.

It is solely through the sanctity, then, of our baptism and of our consecration, that these sacred gates are opened to us. If impure, we, in some respect, forfeit this right; we have no longer a part in the altar: we are no longer worthy of the assembly of the holy, and the temple of God is no longer for us.

Our temples, my brethren, ought therefore to be the house of the righteous alone. Every thing that takes place there supposes righteousness and sanctity in the spectators; the mysteries which we there celebrate are holy and awful mysteries, and which require pure eyes; the victim we there offer up is the reconciliation of the penitent, or the bread of the strong and perfect;

the sacred anthems heard there are the groanings of a contrite heart, or the sighs of a chaste and believing soul. And on this account it is that the church takes care to purify even every thing that is to appear on the altar: she consecrates with prayers even the stones of these holy buildings, as if to render them worthy of sustaining the presence and the looks of the God who dwelleth in them: she exposes at the doors of our temples a water sanctified by prayers, and recommends to believers to sprinkle it over their heads before they enter into the holy place, as if to complete their purification from any slight stains which might still remain; lest the sanctity of the God before whom they come to appear should be injured by them.

Formerly, the church permitted not, within the circle of her sacred walls, even tombs to the bodies of believers; she received not into that holy spot the spoils of their mortality; she did not believe that the temple of God, that new heaven filled with his presence and glory, should serve as an asylum to the ashes of those whom she numbered not as yet among the blessed.

The public penitents themselves were for a long time excluded from assisting at the holy mysteries. Prostrated at the doors of the temple, covered with hair-cloth and ashes, even the assembly of believers was denied to them equally as to the anathematized: their tears and their mortifications alone could at length open to them these sacred gates. And what delight, when, after having groaned for, and supplicated their reconciliation, they found themselves in the temple among their brethren; they once more beheld those altars, that sanctuary, those ministers so deeply engaged in the awful mysteries; they heard their names pronounced at the altar with those of the believers, and sung with them hymns and holy songs! What tears of rapture and of religion were then not shed! What regret for having so long deprived themselves of so sweet a consolation! A single day, O my God, passed in thy holy house, cried they, no doubt, with the prophet, is more consoling to the heart than whole years spent in pleasure and in the tents of the wicked! Such were formerly the temples of Christians. Far from these sacred walls, said then the minister with a loud voice to all the assembly of believers,—far from these sacred walls be the unclean, the impure, the worshippers of idols, and whosoever loveth or maketh a lie.

The church, it is true, no longer makes this rigorous discrimination. The multitude of believers, and the depravation of manners, having rendered it impossible, she opens the gates of our temples indifferently to the righteous and to sinners: she draws the veil of her sanctuary in presence even of the profane; and, in order to begin the awful mysteries, her ministers no longer wait the departure of the sinful and unclean. But the church supposes that, if you be not righteous in coming here to appear before the majesty of a God so holy, you bring with you

at least desires of righteousness and of penitence : she supposes, that, if not yet altogether purified from your crimes, you at least feel contrition for them ; that you come to lament them at the foot of the altar ; and that your confusion and the sincere regret of your faults are now to begin here your justification and your innocence.

If, sinners, it is your desires toward a more Christian life which alone can authorize your appearing in this holy place ; and if you come not here to lament over your crimes, but bring with you, even to the foot of the altar, the will, and the actual and rooted affection for them, the church, it is true, who sees not, nor judges the heart, excludes you not from these sacred walls ; but God invisibly rejecteth you. In his eyes you are accursed and excommunicated, and have no right in the altar or in the sacrifices ; you are one who comes to stain, by your sole presence, the sanctity of the awful mysteries, to seat yourself in a place where you have no right to be seated, and from whence the angel of the Lord, who watches at the gate of the temple, invisibly chases you, as he formerly chased the first sinner from that place of innocence and of sanctity which the Lord sanctified with his presence.

And, in effect, to feel guilty of the most shameful crimes, and to come to appear here in the most holy place of the earth ; to come to appear before God, without being, at least, touched with shame and sorrow, without thinking, at least, upon the means of quitting so deplorable a situation, without at least wishing it, and forming some sentiments of religion ; to bring even to the foot of the altar defiled bodies and souls ; to force the eyes even of God, as I may say, to familiarize themselves with guilt, without at least confessing to him the sorrow of thus appearing before him covered with shame and reproach, and saying to him, like Peter, “ Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man ;” or, like the prophet, “ Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities,” that I may be worthy of appearing here in thy presence,—is to profane the temple of God, to insult his glory and majesty, and the sanctity of his mysteries.

For, my dear hearer, be whom ye may who come to assist here, you come to offer up spiritually with the priest the awful sacrifice : you come to present to God the blood of his Son, as the propitiation of your sins : you come to appease his justice, through the dignity and the excellence of these holy offerings ; and to represent to him the claim which you have upon his mercies, ever since the blood of his Son hath purified you ; and that you no longer form, in one sense, with him, but one same priest and one same victim. Now, when you appear with a hardened and corrupted heart, without any sentiment of faith, or any desire of amendment, you disavow the ministry of the priest who offers in your stead : you disavow the prayers he sends up

to the Lord, in which, through the mouth of the priest, you intreat him to cast his propitious looks on these holy offerings which are upon the altar, and to accept of them as the price of the abolition of your crimes: you even insult the love of Jesus Christ himself, who renews the grand object of your redemption, and who presents you to his Father as a portion of that pure and spotless church which he hath washed in his blood: you insult the piety of the church, who, believing you united in her faith and in her charity, places in your mouth, through the hymns which accompany the holy mysteries, sentiments of religion, of sorrow, and of penitence. Lastly,—you receive the faith and the piety of the righteous there present, and who, considering you as forming with them only one heart, one mind, and one same sacrifice, join themselves with you, and offer to the Lord your faith, your desires, your prayers, as their own. You are there, then, as an anathematized, separated from all the rest of your brethren: an impostor, who secretly disavows what you are publicly professing, and who comes to insult religion, and to reject all share in the redemption and in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, in the very moment that he is renewing the memory, and offering up the price of it to his Father.

What are we thence to conclude?—that, if a sinner, we are to banish ourselves from our temples, and from the holy mysteries? God forbid! Ah! then it is, that we ought to come to this holy place in search of our deliverance; then it is, that we ought to come to solicit, at the foot of the altar, the tender mercies of the Lord, ever ready in that place to lend a favourable ear to sinners; then it is, that we ought to call in every religious aid held out to faith, to arouse in ourselves, if possible, some sentiments of piety and of repentance. And whither, O my brethren, shall we fly, when unhappily fallen under the displeasure of God? And what other resource could remain for us? It is here alone that sinners can find a refuge: here flow the quickening waters of the sacrament, which alone have the virtue of purifying the conscience: here the sacrifice of propitiation is offered up for them, alone capable of appeasing the justice of God, which their crimes have irritated: here the truths of salvation, enforced upon their heart, inspire them with hatred against sin and love of righteousness: here their ignorance is enlightened, their errors dissipated, their weakness sustained, their good desires strengthened: here, in a word, religion offers remedies for all their ills. It is sinners, therefore, who ought most to frequent these holy temples; and the more their wounds are inveterate and hopeless, the more eagerly ought they to fly here in search of a cure.

Such is the first disposition of innocence and of purity, which the presence here of a holy God requires of us, and of the blessed in heaven: “For they are without fault before the throne of God.”

But if the sole state of guilt, without remorse, without any wish

for a change, and with an actual intention of persevering in it, be a kind of irreverence, by which the sanctity of our temples and of our mysteries is profaned; what, O my God! shall it be to choose these holy places, and the hour of the awful mysteries, to come to inspire infamous passions,—to permit themselves impure looks,—to form criminal desires,—to seek opportunities which decency alone prevents them from seeking elsewhere,—to meet objects whom the vigilance of those who instruct us keeps at a distance in all other resorts? What shall it be to make instrumental to guilt, what in religion is most holy; to choose thy presence, great God! to conceal the secret of an impure passion, and to make thy holy temple a rendezvous of iniquity, a place more dangerous than even those assemblies of sin, which religion interdicts to believers? What guilt, to come to crucify afresh Jesus Christ, in the very place where he offers himself up for us every day to his Father! What guilt, to employ, in order to forward our own ruin, the very hour in which the mysteries of salvation, and the redemption of all men, are operated! What madness, to come to choose the eyes of our Judge to render him the witness of our crimes, and of his presence to make the most horrible cause of our condemnation! What a neglect of God, and what a mark of reprobation, to change the sacred asylums of our reconciliation into opportunities of debauchery and licentiousness!

Great God! when insulted on Mount Calvary, where thou wert still a suffering God, the tombs opened around Jerusalem; the dead arose, as if to reproach to their descendants the horror of their sacrilege. Ah! reanimate, then, the ashes of our fathers who await, in this holy temple, the blessed immortality; let their bodies rise out of these pompous tombs which our vanity hath erected to them; and, inflamed with a holy indignation against irreverences which crucify thee afresh, and which profane the sacred asylum of the remains of their mortality, let them appear upon these monuments; and, since our instructions and our threatenings are unavailing, let them come themselves to reproach to their successors their irreligion and their sacrileges. But if the terror of thy presence, O my God! be insufficient to retain them in respect, were the dead even to rise up, as thou hast formerly said, they would, in consequence of it, be neither more religious nor more believing.

But if the presence of a holy God require here, as of the blessed in heaven, a disposition of purity and innocence, the presence of a God, terrible, and full of majesty, requires one of dread and of internal collection.—Second disposition, marked by the profound humiliation of the blessed in the heavenly temple; “And they fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God.”

PART II.—God is spirit and truth, and it is in spirit and in

truth that he requireth principally to be honoured. That disposition of profound humiliation which we owe to him in our temples, consists not, therefore, solely in the external posture of our bodies; it also comprises, like that of the blessed in heaven, a spirit of adoration, of praise, of prayer, and of thanksgiving; and such is that spirit of religion and of humiliation which God demandeth of us in the holy temple, similar to that of the blessed in the heavenly temple.

I say a spirit of adoration; for as it is here that God manifesteth his wonders and his supreme greatness, and descendeth from heaven to receive our homages, the first sentiment which should be formed within us, on entering into this holy place, is a sentiment of terror, of silence, and profound recollection, of internal humiliation, on viewing the majesty of the Most High and our own meanness; to be occupied with God alone who showeth himself to us; to feel all the weight of his glory and of his presence; to collect all our attention, all our thoughts, all our desires, our whole soul, to pay him the homage of it, and to cast it wholly at the feet of the God whom we worship; to forget all the grandeurs of the earth; to see only him; to be occupied only with him; and, by our profound humiliation, to confess, like the blessed in heaven, that he alone is almighty, alone immortal, alone great, alone worthy of all our love and of our homages.

But, alas! my brethren, where, in our temples, are those respectful souls, who, seized with a holy dread at the sight of these sacred places, feel all the weight of the majesty of the God who dwelleth in them, and are incapable of supporting the splendour of his presence, otherwise than in the immobility of a humiliated body, and the profound religion of a soul who adores? Where are those who, losing sight of all the grandeurs of the earth, are here occupied with that of God alone? Let us boldly say it before a king, whose profound respect, at the foot of the altar, does equal honour to religion and to himself; it is not to honour the God who dwelleth here that too many enter into this holy temple; it is to cover themselves with the cloak of piety, and to make it instrumental toward views and interests which sincere piety condemns. They come to bow the knee, as Haman bowed it before the profane altar, to attract the regards and to follow the example of the prince who worships; they come here to seek another God than he who appears on our altars; to make their court to another master than the Supreme Master; to seek other favours than the grace of Heaven; and to attract the kindness of another paymaster than the immortal Rewarder. Amid a crowd of worshippers, he is an unknown God in his own temple, as he formerly was in the pagan Athens. Every look here is for the prince, who hath none himself but for God: all wishes are addressed to him; and his profound humiliation at the foot of the altar, far from teaching us to respect here the Lord, before whom a great king bows his

head and forgets all his greatness, teaches us only to take advantage of his religion, and of the favours with which he honours virtue, to adopt their semblance, and, through that deception, to exalt ourselves to new degrees of greatness upon the earth. O my God! is not this what thou announcedst to thy disciples—that times would come when faith should be extinguished, when piety would become an infamous traffic, and when men, living without God upon the earth, would no longer acknowledge thee but in order to make thee subservient to their iniquitous desires?

A spirit of prayer is also comprised in this disposition of humiliation; for the more we are struck here with the greatness and with the power of the God whom we worship, the more do our endless wants warn us to have recourse to him from whom alone we can obtain relief and deliverance from them. Thus the temple is the house of prayer, where every one ought to come to lay his secret wants before the Lord; where, in public calamities, he is appeased by the general prayers; where the assembled ministers lift up their hands for the sins of the people; and where the eyes of the Lord are ever open to our wants, and his ears attentive to our cries.

Not but we may address ourselves to him, as the apostle says, in every place; but the temple is the spot where he is more propitious, and where he hath promised to be always present to receive our homages, and to lend a favourable ear to our requests. Yes, my brethren, it is here that we ought to come to join in lamentation with the church, over the scandals with which she is afflicted, over the divisions with which she is torn, and over the dangers which surround her; over the obstinacy of sinners, and the coldness of charity among believers: we come, with her, to solicit the mercies of the Lord upon his people; to intreat of him the cessation of wars and other public scourges; the extinction of schisms and errors; the knowledge and the love of righteousness and of truth for sinners; and perseverance for the just. You ought, therefore, to come with an attentive and collected mind, a prepared heart, and which offers nothing to the eyes of God that may avert the favours solicited by the church for you, and to appear with that exterior of a suppliant, which, of itself, shows that he prays and that he worships.

Nevertheless, my brethren, while the ministers are lifting up their hands here for you; are supplicating the Lord for the prosperity of your families, for abundance to your lands, for the preservation of your relations and children, who perhaps expose themselves for the welfare of their country, for the end of wars, dissensions, and all the miseries with which we are afflicted; while they are entreating remedies for your backslidings, and aids for your weakness; while they are speaking to the holy God in your favour, you deign not even to accompany their prayers

with your attention and your respect. You dishonour the holy gravity of the church's lamentations by a spirit of inattention, and by indecencies which would hardly become even those criminal resorts where you listen to profane songs; and the only difference in your behaviour is, that, in the one, you are touched and rendered attentive by a lascivious harmony, while here you endure, with impatience, the divine songs in thanksgiving and in praise of the Lord.

Thus, my brethren, in place of the public prayers arresting the arm of the Lord, so long impending over our heads; in place of the supplications, which resound in every part of our temples, being able, as formerly, to suspend the scourges of Heaven, to bring back days of peace and of tranquillity, to reconcile nations and kings, and to attract peace from heaven to the earth; alas! the days of evil still endure; the times of trouble, of mourning, and of desolation, cease not; war and fury seem to have for ever taken up their abode among men; the desolate widow demands her husband; the afflicted father in vain looks out for his child; brother is divided from brother; even our successes shed mourning and sorrow through our families, and we are forced to weep over our own victories. Whence comes this? Ah! it is that the prayers of the church, the only sources of the favours which God sheddeth upon kingdoms and upon empires, are no longer listened to; and that you force the Lord, through the irreverence with which you accompany them, to avert his ears, and to turn his attention from them, and which thereby renders them useless to the earth.

But, not only ought you to appear here as suppliants, and in a spirit of prayer, since it is here that the Lord dealeth out his favours and his grace; as it is here, likewise, that every thing renews to you the remembrance of those already received, you ought also to bring here a spirit of gratitude and of thanksgiving, seeing that, on whichever way you turn your eyes, every thing recalls to you the remembrance of God's blessings, and the sight of his eternal mercies upon your soul.

And, first, it is here where, in the sacrament by which we are regenerated, you have become believers: it is here that the goodness of God, in associating you, through baptism, to the hope of Jesus Christ, hath discerned you from so many heathens who know him not: it is here that you have engaged your faith to the Lord; your written promises are still preserved under the altar. Here is the book of the covenant which you have made with the God of your fathers: you should no longer, then, appear here but to ratify the engagements of your baptism, and to thank the Lord for the inestimable blessing which hath associated you with his people, and honoured you with the name of Christian; you ought to feel all the tenderness and respect of a child, for the blessed womb which hath

brought you forth in Jesus Christ, and the glory of this house ought to be your glory.

What are you then, when, in place of bringing your thanksgivings to the feet of the altar for so singular and so distinguished a blessing, you come to dishonour it by your irreverences? You are an unnatural child, who profane the place of your birth according to faith; a perfidious Christian, who come to retract your promises before the very altars which witnessed them; who come to break the treaty on the sacred spot where it was concluded; to blot yourself out of the book of life, where your name was written with those of the faithful; to abjure the religion of Jesus Christ on the very fonts where you had received it; to make a pompous display of all the vanities of the age, at the feet of the altar where you had solemnly renounced them; and to profess worldliness where you had made professions of Christianity.

Nor is this all; for, secondly, it is here that Jesus Christ hath so often said to you, through the mouth of his ministers, "My son, thy sins are forgiven thee; go, and sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee." It is here, that, melting in tears, you have so often said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee." Now, my brethren, on the very spot where you have so often experienced the grace of forgiveness, not only you forget the blessing, but you come to give new subject of offence; on the very spot where you have so often appeared penitent, you proclaim yourselves still worldly and profane. Ah! far from coming to these holy tribunals to recapitulate the disorders of your life; far from coming to renew those promises of penitence, those sentiments of compunction, those emotions of shame and of confusion, of which they have so often been the depositories; you boldly appear before them with an unblushing countenance, your eyes wandering here and there, full, perhaps, of guilt and adultery, as the apostle says, had to renew in their presence the same infidelities that your tears had once expiated, and to render them ocular witnesses of the same prevarications of which they had been the secret confidants and the blessed purgers!

What more shall I say, my brethren?—In the third place, the temple is the house of doctrine and of truth; and it is here that, through the mouth of the pastors, the church announces to you the maxims of salvation, and the mysteries of the heavenly kingdom, concealed from so many infidel nations:—fresh motive of gratitude on your part. But, alas! it is rather a fresh subject of condemnation; and even here, where, from these Christian pulpits, we are continually telling you from Jesus Christ that the unclean shall never enjoy the kingdom of heaven, you come to form profane desires; even here, where you are warned that you shall one day have to render account of an idle word, you permit yourselves criminal ones: lastly, even

here, where you so often hear repeated that evil to him that scandalizeth, you become yourself a stumbling-block and a subject of scandal. Thus, my brethren, why do you believe that the word of the gospel, which we preach to princes and to the grandees of the earth, is no longer but a tinkling brass, and that our ministry is now become almost unnecessary? It may be that our private weaknesses place a bar to the fruit and to the progress of the gospel, and that God bless not a ministry, the ministers of which are not pleasing in his sight: but, besides this reason, so humiliating for us, and which we cannot, however, either dissemble from you, or even conceal from ourselves, it is, doubtless, the profanation of the temples, and the indecent and disrespectful manner in which you listen to us, that deprive the word, of which we are the ministers, of all its energy and virtue. The Lord, estranged from this holy place through your profanations, no longer giveth increase to our toils, nor sheddeth his grace, which alone causeth his doctrine and his word to fructify: he no longer looketh upon these assemblies, formerly so holy, but as an assembly of worldly-minded, of voluptuous, of ambitious, and of profane. And how would you, that he turn not his countenance from them, and that the word of his gospel fructify there? Reconcile, in the first place, with him, by your homages, by your collected behaviour, and by your piety, these houses of the doctrine and of truth: then will he compensate for your deficiencies; he will open your hearts to our instructions, and his word shall no longer return empty to him.

But a final reason, which renders your irreverential behaviour still more criminal and more disgraceful to religion, is, that it is in the temple where you come to offer up, in one sense, with the priest, the awful sacrifice, to renew the oblation of the cross, and to present to God the blood of his Son as the propitiation of your sins. Now, my brethren, while mysteries so august are celebrating; during these awful moments when heaven opens above our altars; in a time when the affair of your salvation is agitated between Jesus Christ and his Father; while the blood of the Lamb is flowing upon the altar to wash you from stain; while the angels of heaven tremble and adore; while the solemnity of the ministers, the majesty of the ceremonies, and even the piety of the true believers, all inspire fear, gratitude, and respect, scarcely do you bow the knee, scarcely do you cast a look upon the holy altar, where mysteries so blessed for you are consummating. It is even with reluctance that you are in the temple; you measure the duration and the fatiguing length of the salutary sacrifice; you count the moments of a time so precious to the earth, and so replete with wonders and grace for men. You who are so embarrassed with your time, who sacrifice it to an eternal inutility and circle of nothings, and who are even difficulted in contriving to kill it; you complain of the pious solemnity of the minister, and of the circumspection

with which he treats the holy things. Ah! you require such respect and such precaution in those who serve you; and you would that a priest clothed in all his dignity, that a priest representing Jesus Christ, and performing his office of mediator and high-priest with his Father, should treat the holy mysteries with precipitation, and dishonour the presence of the God whom he serves, and whom he immolates, by a shameful carelessness and haste? In what times, O my God, are we come? And was it to be expected that thy most precious and most signal kindnesses should become a burden to the Christians of our ages?

Alas! the first believers, who met in the temple at stated hours of the day, to celebrate, in hymns and songs with their pastor, the praises of the Lord, they almost never quitted these sacred abodes, and that only with regret, when obliged to attend to the affairs of the age, and to the duties of their station. How beautiful, my brethren, to see in those happy times the holy assembly of believers in the house of prayer, each in the place adapted to his station; on one side, the recluse, the holy confessors, the common believers; on the other, the virgins, the widows, the married women,—all attentive to the holy mysteries, all beholding, with tears of joy and of religion, to flow upon the altar, the blood still reeking, as I may say, of the Lamb, and so lately crucified before their eyes; praying for the princes, for the Cæsars, for their persecutors, for their brethren; mutually exhorting each other to martyrdom; tasting all the consolation of the divine writings explained by their holy pastors, and retracing, in the church of the earth, the joy, the peace, the innocence, and the profound meditation of the heavenly church! How beautiful and splendid were then the tents of Jacob, although the church was yet under oppression and obscurity; and the enemies of faith, even the prophets of the idols, in viewing their good order, their innocence, and their majesty, with what difficulty did they refuse to them their admiration and their homages! Alas! and at present the rapid moments which you consecrate here to religion, and which ought to sanctify the remainder of the day, often become themselves the greatest guilt of it.

Lastly, my brethren, to all these inward dispositions of prayer, of adoration, and of gratitude, which the sanctity of our temples exacts of you, there is likewise to be added the external modesty, and the decency of ornaments and of dress—last disposition of the blessed in the heavenly temple: but on this part I shall be very brief.

And, in effect, should any instruction on our part be necessary to you on this point, O, worldly women? for it is you whom this part of my discourse principally regards. To what purpose all that display, I say not only of ostentation and of vanity, but of immodesty and of impudence, with which you make your appearance in this house of tears and of prayer? Do you come here to

dispute with Jesus the looks and the homages of those who worship him? Do you come to insult the mysteries which operate the salvation of believers, by seeking to corrupt their heart at the feet even of the altars, where these mysteries take place for them? Are you determined that innocence shall in no place of the earth, not even in the temple, that asylum of religion and piety, be protected from your profane and lascivious nakedness? Doth the world not sufficiently furnish you with impure theatres, with assemblies of dissipation, where you may make a boast of being a stumbling-block to your brethren? Even your houses, open to dissipation and to riot, do they not suffice for you to figure with an indecency which would formerly have been suited only to houses of debauchery and of guilt; and which is the cause that, not respecting yourselves, that respect is lost for you, of which the national politeness hath always been so jealous? For modesty alone is estimable, as St. Paul formerly reproached to believers. Must the holy temple be also stained by your immodesties? Ah! when you appear before your earthly sovereign, you mark, by the dignity and by the propriety of your deportment, the respect which you know to be due to his presence; and, before the Sovereign of heaven and of the earth, you make your appearance, not only without precaution, but even without decency or modesty; and you display under his eyes an effrontery which wounds even the eyes of the wise and respectable! You come to disturb the attention of the believers who had expected to have found here a place of peace and of silence, and an asylum against all the objects of vanity; to disturb even the deep meditation and the holy gravity of the ministers, and to sully, by the indecency of your dress, the purity of their looks attentive to the holy things.

Thus the apostle desired, that the Christian woman should be covered with a veil in the temple, on account of the angels; that is to say, of the priests, who are continually present there before God, and whose innocence and purity ought to equal that of the heavenly spirits. True it is, that thou thereby warnest us, O my God, what ought, in our temples, to be the holy gravity, and the inviolable sanctity of thy ministers; that it is for us to bear here, stamped upon our countenance, the holy dread of the mysteries which we offer up, and the lively and intimate sense of thy presence; that it is for us to inspire here the people around us with respect, by the sole appearance of our modesty; that it is for us not to appear around the altar, and employed in the holy ministry, often more wearied, more careless, and more in haste than even the assisting multitude; and not to authorize their irreverences by our own. For, O my God! the desolation of the holy place hath commenced with the sanctuary itself; the respect of the people there hath become weakened only in consequence of being no longer supported by the holy gravity of the worship and the majesty of the ceremonies; and thy house hath begun to be a house

of dissipation and of scandal, only since thy ministers have made of it a house of traffic, of weariness, and of avarice. But our examples, in authorizing your profanations, do not excuse them, my brethren.

And, in effect, it seems that God hath never left them unpunished. The shameful indecencies of the children of Levi, which had so long profaned his house, were followed with the most dismal calamities: the holy ark became a prey to the Philistines; it was placed at the side of Dagon, in an infamous temple; the glory of Israel was blasted; the Lord withdrew himself from amidst his people; the lamp of Judah was extinguished; there was no high-priest, and Jacob was, all of a sudden, without altar and without sacrifice.

There is little doubt, my brethren, but that the miseries of the last age have been the fatal consequences of the profanations and of the irreverences of our fathers. It was just that the Lord should abandon temples where he had so long been insulted. Dread, my brethren, lest we prepare for our posterity the same calamities, in imitating the disorders of those who have preceded us. Dread, lest an irritated God should one day abandon these temples which we profane, and lest they, in their turn, become the asylum of error. What do I know but that he is already preparing all these evils for us, in permitting the purity and the simplicity of faith to be adulterated in the minds, in multiplying those men so wise in their own conceit, and so common in this age, who measure every thing by the lights of a weak reason, who would wish to fathom the secrecies of God, and who, far from making religion the subject of their worship and of their thanksgivings, make it the subject of their doubts and of their censures? Thou art terrible in thy judgments, O my God! and thy punishments are sometimes so much the more rigorous, as they have been tardy and slow.

Let us reflect, then, my brethren, on all these grand motives of religion; let us bring into this holy place a tender and an attentive piety, a spirit of piety, of compunction, of collection, of thanksgiving, of adoration, and of praise; let us never quit our temples without bearing from them some new grace, since here is the throne of mercy from whence they are shed upon men; never quit them without an additional relish for heaven, without new desires of terminating your errors, and of attaching yourselves solely to God; without envying the happiness of those who serve him, who have it in their power to be continually worshipping him at the feet of the altar, and whose station and functions particularly consecrate them to this holy ministry. Say to him, as the queen of Sheba formerly said to Solomon, "Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom." And, should the duties of your station not permit you to come here to worship the Lord at the different hours of the day, when his ministers assemble

to praise him; ah! continually turn, at least, toward the holy place, like the Israelites formerly, your longings and your desires. Let our temples be the sweetest consolation of your troubles, the only asylum of your afflictions, the only resource of your wants, the most certain recreation from the confinements, the fatiguing attentions, and the painful subjections of the world: in a word, find there the beginning of that unalterable peace, the plenitude and the consummation of which you will find only with the blessed, in the eternal temple of the heavenly Jerusalem.

SERMON XXII.

THE TRUTH OF RELIGION.

“Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel.”

MATTHEW viii. 10.

WHENCE came, then, the incredulity with which Jesus Christ a present reproaches the Jews; and what cause could they still have for doubting the sanctity of his doctrine and the truth of his ministry? They had demanded miracles, and, before their eyes, he had wrought such evident ones that no person before him had done the like. They had wished that his mission were authorized by testimonies; Moses and the prophets had amply borne them to him; the precursor had openly proclaimed, Behold the Christ and the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world; a Gentile renders glory in our gospel to his almightiness; the heavenly Father had declared from on high, that it was his well-beloved Son; lastly, the demons themselves, struck with his sanctity, quitted the bodies, confessing that he was the Holy, and the Son of the living God. What could the incredulity of the Jews still oppose to so many proofs and prodigies?

Behold, my brethren, what, with much greater surprise, might be demanded of those unbelieving minds, who, after the fulfilment of all that had been foretold, after the consummation of the mysteries of Jesus Christ, the exaltation of his name, the manifestation of his gifts, the calling of his people, the destruction of idols, the conversion of Cæsars, and the agreement of the universe, still doubt,

and take upon themselves to confute and to overthrow what the toils of the apostolic men, the blood of so many martyrs, the prodigies of so many servants of Jesus Christ, the writings of so many great men, the austerities of so many holy anchorites, and the religion of seventeen hundred years, have so universally and so divinely established in the minds of almost all people.

For, my brethren, amid all the triumphs of faith, children of unbelief still privately spring up among us, whom God hath delivered up to the vanity of their own thoughts, and who blaspheme what they know not; impious men, who change, as the apostle says, the grace of our God into wantonness, defile their flesh, contemn all rule, blaspheme majesty, corrupt all their ways like the animals not gifted with reason, and are set apart to serve one day as an example of the awful judgments of God upon men.

Now, if, among so many believers assembled here through religion, any soul of this description should happen to be, allow me, you, my brethren, who preserve with respect the sacred doctrine which you have received from your ancestors and from your pastors, to seize this opportunity either of undeceiving them or of confuting their incredulity. Allow me for once to do here what the first pastors of the church so often did before their assembled people, that is to say, to take upon myself the defence of the religion of Jesus Christ against unbelief; and, before entering into the particulars of your duties during this long term, allow me to begin by laying the first foundations of faith. It is so consoling for those who believe to find how reasonable their submission is, and to be convinced that faith, which is apparently the rock of reason, is, however, its only consolation, guide, and refuge!

Here, then, is my whole design. The unbeliever refuses submission to the revealed truths, either through a vain affectation of reason, or through a false sentiment of pride, or through an ill-placed love of independence.

Now, I mean at present to show, that the submission which the unbeliever refuses, through a vain affectation of reason, is the most prudent use which he can make even of reason: that the submission which he refuses through a false sentiment of pride, is the most glorious step of it; and, lastly, that the submission which he rejects through an ill-placed love of independence, is the most indispensable sacrifice of it. And from thence I shall draw the three great characters of religion:—it is reasonable, it is glorious, it is necessary.

O my Saviour, eternal author and finisher of our faith, defend thyself, thy doctrine. Suffer not that thy cross, by which the universe hath been submitted to thee, be still the folly and the scandal of proud minds. Once more triumph at present, through the secret wonders of thy grace, over that same unbelief which thou formerly triumphedst over through the striking operations of thy power; and by those lively lights, which enlighten

hearts, more efficacious than all our discourses, destroy every sentiment of pride which may still rise up against the knowledge of thy mysteries.

PART I.—Let us begin with admitting that it is faith, and not reason, which makes Christians; and that the first step exacted of a disciple of Jesus Christ, is to captivate his mind, and to believe what he may not comprehend. Nevertheless, I say, that we are led to that submission by reason itself; that the more even our lights are superior, the more do they point out the necessity of our submission; and that unbelief, far from being the result of strength of mind and of reason, is, on the contrary, that of error and weakness.

In faith, reason hath therefore its uses, as it hath its limits: and as the law, good and holy in itself, served only to conduct to Jesus Christ, and there stopped as at its term; in the same way, reason, good and just in itself, since it is the gift of God, and a participation of the sovereign reason, ought only to serve, and is given to us for the sole purpose of preparing the way for faith. It is forward, and quits the bounds of its first institution, when it attempts to go beyond these sacred limits.

This taken for granted, let us see which of the two, namely, the believer or the unbeliever, makes the most prudent use of his reason. Submission to things held out to our belief, perhaps suspected of credulity, either on the side of the authority which proposes them; if it be light, it is weakness to give credit to them: or on the side of the things of which they wish to persuade us; if they be in opposition to the principles of equity, of honour, of society, and of conscience, it is ignorance to receive them as true: or, lastly, on the side of the motives which are employed to persuade us; if they be vain, frivolous, and incapable of determining a wise mind, it is imprudence to give way to them. Now, it is easy to prove that the authority which exacts the submission of the believer, is the greatest, the most respectable, and the best established, which can possibly be upon the earth; that the truths proposed to his belief are the only ones conformable to the principles of equity, of honour, of society, and of conscience; and, lastly, that the motives employed to persuade him are the most decisive, the most triumphant, and the most proper to gain submission from the least credulous minds.

When I speak of the authority of the Christian religion, I do not pretend to confine the extent of that term to the single authority of its holy assemblies, in which, through the mouths of its pastors, the church makes decisions, and holds out to all believers the infallible rules of worship and of doctrine. As it is not heresy, but unbelief, which this discourse concerns, I do not here so much consider religion as opposed to the sects which the spirit of error hath separated from the unity, that is to say, as confined to the sole catholic

church, but as forming, since the beginning of the world, a society apart, sole depository of the knowledge of a God, and of the promise of a Mediator; always opposed to all the religions which have arisen in the universe; always contradicted, and always the same; and I say that its authority bears along with it such shining characters of truth, that it is impossible, without folly, to refuse submission to it.

In the first place, in matters of religion, antiquity is a character which reason respects; and, we may say, that a prepossession is already formed in favour of that belief, consecrated by the religion of the first men, and by the simplicity of the primitive times. Not but what falsehood is often decked out with the same titles, and that old errors exist among men, which seem to contest the antiquity of their origin with the truth; but it is not difficult, to whoever wishes to trace their history, to go back even to their origin. Novelty is always the constant and most inseparable character of error; and the reproach of the prophet may alike be made to them all: "They sacrifice to new gods that come newly up, whom their fathers feared not."

In effect, if there be a true religion upon the earth, it must be the most ancient of all; for, if there be a true religion upon the earth, it must be the first and the most essential duty of man toward the God who wishes to be honoured by it. This duty must therefore be equally ancient as man; and, as it is attached to his nature, it must, as I may say, be born with him. And this, my brethren, is the first character by which the religion of Christians is at once distinguished from superstitions and sects. It is the most ancient religion in the world. The first men, before an impious worship was carved out of divinities of wood and of stone, worshipped the same God whom we adore, raised up altars, and offered sacrifices to him, expected from his liberality the reward of their virtue, and from his justice, the punishment of their disobedience. The history of the birth of this religion is the history of the birth of the world itself. The divine books which have preserved it down to us, contain the first monuments of the origin of things. They are themselves more ancient than all those fabulous productions of the human mind which afterward so miserably amused the credulity of the following ages; and, as error ever springs from the truth, and is only a faulty imitation of it, all the fables of Paganism are founded on some of the principal features of that divine history; insomuch, that it may be affirmed that every thing, even to error itself, renders homage to the antiquity and to the authority of our holy Scriptures.

Now, my brethren, is there not already something respectable in this character alone? The other religions, which have vaunted a more ancient origin, have produced nothing, in support of their antiquity, but fabulous legends, which sunk into nothing of themselves. They have disfigured the history of the world by

a chaos of innumerable and imaginary ages, of which no event hath been left to posterity, and which the history of the world hath never known. The authors of these gross fictions did not write till many ages after the actions which they relate, and it is saying every thing to add, that that theology was the fruit of poesy, and the inventions of that art the most solid foundations of their religion.

Here, it is a train of facts, reasonable, natural, and in agreement with itself. It is the history of a family continued from its first head down to him who writes it, and authenticated in all its circumstances. It is a genealogy in which every chief is characterised by his own actions, by events which still subsisted then, by marks which were still known in the places where they had dwelt. It is a living tradition, the most authenticated upon the earth, since Moses hath written only what he had heard from the children of the patriarchs, and they related only what their fathers had seen. Every part of it is coherent, hangs properly together, and tends to clear up the whole. The features are not copied, nor the adventures drawn from elsewhere, and accommodated to the subject. Before Moses, the people of God had nothing in writing. He hath left nothing to posterity but what he had verbally collected from his ancestors, that is to say, the whole tradition of mankind; and the first he hath comprised in one volume, the history of God's wonders and of his manifestations to men, the remembrance of which had till then composed the whole religion, the whole knowledge, and the whole consolation of the family of Abraham. The candour and sincerity of this author appear in the simplicity of his history. He takes no precaution to secure belief, because he supposes that those for whom he writes require none to believe; and all the facts which he relates being well known among them, it is more for the purpose of preserving them to their posterity than for any instruction in them to themselves.

Behold, my brethren, which way the Christian religion begins to acquire influence over the mind of men. Turn on all sides, read the history of every people and of every nation, and you will find nothing so well established upon the earth. What do I say?—you will find nothing more worthy the attention of a rational mind. If men be born for a religion, they are born for this one alone. If there be a Supreme Being who hath manifested the truth to men, this alone is worthy of men and of him. Every where else the origin is fabulous; here it is equally certain as all the rest; and the latter ages, which cannot be disputed, are, however, only the proofs of the certitude of the first. Therefore, if there be an authority upon the earth to which reason ought to yield, it is to that of the Christian religion.

To the character of its antiquity must be added that of its perpetuity. Figure to yourselves here that endless variety of sects and of religions which have successively reigned upon the earth.

Follow the history of the superstitions of every people and of every country; they have flourished a few years, and afterward sunk into oblivion along with the power of their followers. Where are the gods of Emath, of Arphad, and of Sepharvaim? Recollect the history of those first conquerors: in conquering the people, they conquered the gods of the people; and, in overturning their power, they overturned their worship. How beautiful, my brethren, to see the religion of our fathers alone maintaining itself from the first, surviving all sects; and, notwithstanding the diverse fortunes of those who have professed it, alone passing from father to son, and braving every exertion to efface it from the heart of men! It is not the arm of flesh which hath preserved it. Ah! the people of God hath, almost always, been weak, oppressed, and persecuted. No: it is not, says the prophet, by their own sword that our fathers got the land in possession; but thy right hand, O Lord, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them. One while slaves, another fugitives, another tributaries of various nations; they a thousand times saw Chaldea, Assyria, Babylon, the most formidable powers of the earth, the whole universe, conspire their ruin and the total extinction of their worship; but this people, so weak, oppressed in Egypt, wandering in the desert, and afterward carried in captivity into a foreign land, no power hath ever been able to exterminate, while so many others, more powerful, have followed the destiny of human things; and its worship hath always subsisted with itself, in spite of all the efforts made by almost every age to destroy it.

Now, whence comes it, that a worship so contradicted, so arduous in its observances, so rigorous in its punishments upon transgressors, and even so liable to be established or to be overthrown, through the mere inconstancy and ignorance of the people who was its first depository; whence comes it that it alone hath been perpetuated amid so many revolutions, while the superstitions supported by all the power of empires and of kingdoms, have sunk into their original oblivion? Ah! is it not God, and not man, who hath done all these things? Is it not the arm of the Almighty which hath preserved his work? And since every thing invented by the human mind has perished, is it not to be inferred that what hath always endured was alone the work of the divine wisdom?

Lastly, if, to its antiquity and to its perpetuity, you add its uniformity, no pretext for resistance will be left to reason. For, my brethren, every thing changes upon the earth, because every thing follows the mutability of its origin. Occasions, the difference of ages, the diverse humours of climates, and the necessity of the times, have introduced a thousand changes in all the human laws. Faith alone hath never changed. Such as our fathers received it, such have we it at present, and such shall

our descendants one day receive it. It hath been unfolded through the course of ages, and likewise, I confess, through the necessity of securing it from the errors which have been attempted to be introduced into it; but every thing which once appeared to belong to it, hath always appeared as appertaining to it. There is little wonder in the duration of a religion, when accommodations are made to times and to conjunctures, and when they may add or diminish according to the fancy of the ages, and of those who govern; but never to relax, in spite of the change of manners and of times; to see every thing change around, and yet be always the same, is the grand privilege of the Christian religion. And by these three characters, of antiquity, of perpetuity, and of uniformity, which exclusively belong to it, its authority is the only one upon the earth capable of determining a wise mind.

But if the submission of the believer be reasonable on the part of the authority which exacts it, it is not less so on the part of the things which are proposed to his belief. And here, my brethren, let us enter into the foundation of the Christian worship. It is not afraid of investigation, like those abominable mysteries of idolatry, the infamy and horror of which were concealed by the darkest obscurity. A religion, says Tertullian, which would shun examination, and would dread being searched into, should ever be suspected. The more the Christian worship is investigated, the more are beauties and hidden wonders found in it. Idolatry inspired men with foolish sentiments of the Divinity; philosophy, with very unreasonable ones of himself; cupidity, with iniquitous ones toward the rest of men. Now, admire the wisdom of religion, which remedies all these three evils, which the reason of all ages had never been able either to eradicate or even to find out.

And, first, what other legislator hath spoken of the Divinity, like that of the Christians? Find elsewhere, if you can, more sublime ideas of his power, of his immensity, of his wisdom, of his grandeur, and of his justice, than those which are given us in our Scriptures. If there be over us a supreme and eternal Being, in whom all things live, he must be such as the Christian religion represents him. We alone compare him not to the likeness of man. We alone worship him seated above the cherubim, filling every where with his presence, regulating all by his wisdom, creating light and darkness, author of good, and punisher of vice. We alone honour him as he wishes to be honoured; that is to say, we make not the worship due to him, to consist in the multitude of victims, nor in the external pomp of our homages; but in adoration, in love, in praise, and in thanksgiving. We refer to him the good which is in us, as to its principal; and we always attribute vice to ourselves, which takes its rise only in our corruption. We hope to find in him the reward of a fidelity which is the gift of his grace, and the punishment of transgressions, which are

always the consequence of the bad use which we make of our liberty. Now, what can be more worthy of the Supreme Being than all these ideas!

Secondly. A vain philosophy either had degraded man to the level of the beast, by centering his felicity in the senses; or had foolishly exalted him even to the likeness of God, by persuading him that he might find his own happiness in his own wisdom. Now, the Christian morality avoids these two extremes: it withdraws man from carnal pleasures, by discovering to him the excellency of his nature and the holiness of his destination; it corrects his pride, by making him sensible of his own wretchedness and meanness.

Lastly. Cupidity rendered man unjust toward the rest of men. Now, what other doctrine than that of Christians hath ever so well regulated our duties on this head. It instructs us to yield obedience to the powers established by God, not only through fear of their authority, but through an obligation of conscience: to respect our superiors, to bear with our equals, to be affable toward our inferiors, to love all men as ourselves. It alone is capable of forming good citizens, faithful subjects, patient servants, humble masters, incorruptible magistrates, clement princes, and zealous friends. It alone renders the honour of marriage inviolable, secures the peace of families, and maintains the tranquillity of states. It not only checks usurpations, but it prohibits even the desire of other's property; it not only requires us not to view with an envious eye the prosperity of our brother, but it commands us to share our own riches with him, if need require; it not only forbids to attempt his life, but it requires us to do good, even to those who injure us; to bless those who curse us, and to be all only of one heart and of one mind. Give me, said formerly St. Augustine to the heathens of his time, a kingdom all composed of people of this kind: good God, what peace! what felicity! what a representation of heaven upon the earth! Have all the ideas of philosophy ever come near to the plan of this heavenly republic? And is it not true, that if a God hath spoken to men, to lay open to them the ways of salvation, he could never have held any other language?

To all these maxims, so worthy of reason, it is true that religion adds mysteries which exceed our comprehension. But, besides that good sense should induce us to yield thereon to a religion so venerable through its antiquity, so divine in its morality, so superior to every thing on the earth in its authority, and alone worthy of being believed, the motives it employs for our persuasion are sufficient to conquer unbelief.

First. These mysteries were foretold many ages before their accomplishment, and foretold with every circumstance of times and places; nor are the vague prophecies, referred to the credulity of the vulgar alone, uttered in a corner of the earth, of the same age as the events, and unknown to the rest of the universe.

They are prophecies which, from the beginning of the world, have constituted the religion of an entire people; which fathers transmitted to their children as their most precious inheritance; which were preserved in the holy temple as the most sacred pledge of the divine promises; and, lastly, to the truth of which the nation most inveterate against Jesus Christ, and their first depository, still at present bears witness in the face of the whole universe: prophecies, which were not mysteriously hidden from the people, lest their falsehood should be betrayed; like those vain oracles of the Sybils, carefully shut up in the capitol, fabricated to support the Roman pride, exposed to the view of the pontiffs alone, and produced, piece-meal, from time to time, to authorize, in the mind of the people, either a dangerous enterprise or an unjust war. On the contrary, our prophetic books were the daily study of a whole people. The young and the old, women and children, priests and men of all ranks, princes and subjects, were indispensably obliged to have them continually in their hands; every one was entitled to study his duties there, and to discover his hopes. Far from flattering their pride, they held forth only the ingratitude of their fathers; in every page they announced misfortunes to them as the just punishment of their crimes; to kings they reproached their dissipations, to the pontiffs their profusion, to the people their inconstancy and unbelief; and, nevertheless, these holy books were dear to them; and, from the oracles which they saw continually accomplishing in them, they awaited with confidence the fulfilment of those which the whole universe hath now witnessed. Now, the knowledge of what is to come is the least suspicious character of the Divinity.

Secondly. These mysteries are founded upon facts so evidently miraculous, so well known in Judea, so agreed to then, even by those whose interest it was to reject them, so signalized by events which interested the whole nation, so often repeated in the cities, in the country, in the temple, and in the public places, that the eyes must be shut against the light to call them in question. The apostles have preached them, have written them, even in Judea, a very short time after their fulfilment; that is to say, in a time when the pontiffs, who had condemned Jesus Christ, still living, might so easily have controverted and proclaimed their imposture, had they really been a deception upon mankind. Jesus Christ, by fulfilling his promise of rising again, confirmed his gospel, and it is not to be supposed, either that the apostles could be deceived on a fact so decisive and so essential for them,—on that fact so often foretold, and looked forward to, as the principal point on which all the rest was to turn; that fact so often confirmed, and that before so many witnesses; nor that they themselves wished to deceive us, and to preach a falsehood to men at the expense of their own ease, honour, and life, the only return which they had to expect for their imposture. Would these men, who have left to us only such pious

and wise precepts, have given to the earth an example of folly hitherto unknown to every people, and, without view, interest, or motive, have coolly devoted themselves to the most excruciating tortures, and to a death suffered with the most heroic piety, merely to maintain the truth of a thing of which they themselves knew the falsehood? Would these men have all tranquilly submitted to death for the sake of another man who had deceived them, and who, having failed in his promise of rising again from the grave, had only imposed, during life, upon their credulity and weakness? Let the impious man no longer reproach to us, as a credulity, the incomprehensible mysteries of faith. He must be very credulous himself to be able to persuade himself of the possibility of suppositions so absurd.

Lastly. The whole universe hath been docile to the faith of these mysteries; the Cæsars, whom it degraded from the rank of gods; the philosophers, whom it convicted of ignorance and vanity; the voluptuous, to whom it preached self-denial and sufferance; the rich, whom it obliged to poverty and humility; the poor, whom it commanded to love even their abjection and indigence; all men, of whom it combated all the passions. This faith, preached by twelve poor men, without learning, talents, or support, hath subjected emperors, the learned equally as the illiterate, cities and empires; mysteries, apparently so absurd, have overthrown all the sects, and all the monuments of a proud reason, and the folly of the cross hath been wiser than all the wisdom of the age. The whole universe hath conspired against it, and every effort of its enemies hath only added fresh confirmation to it. To be a believer, and to be destined to death, were two things inseparable; yet the danger was only an additional charm; the more the persecutions were violent, the more progress did faith make; and the blood of the martyrs was the seed of believers. O God! who doth not feel thy finger here? Who, in these traits, would not acknowledge the character of thy work? Where is the reason which doth not feel the vanity of its doubts to sink into nothing here, and which still blushes to submit to a doctrine to which the whole universe hath yielded? But not only is this submission reasonable, it is likewise glorious to men?

PART II.—Pride is the secret source of unbelief. In that ostentation of reason, which induces the unbeliever to contemn the common belief, there is a deplorable singularity which flatters him, and occasions him to suppose in himself more vigour of mind and more light than in the rest of men, because he boldly ventures to cast off a yoke to which they have all submitted, and to stand up against what all the rest had hitherto been contented to worship.

Now, in order to deprive the unbeliever of so wretched a con-

solution, it is only necessary to demonstrate, in the first place, that nothing is more glorious to reason than faith; glorious on the side of its promises for the future; glorious from the situation in which it places the believer for the present; lastly, glorious from the grand models which it holds out to his imitation.

Glorious on the side of the promises contained in it. What are the promises of faith, my brethren? The adoption of God, an immortal society with him, the complete redemption of our bodies, the eternal felicity of our souls, freedom from the passions, our hearts fixed by the possession of the true riches, our minds penetrated with the ineffable light of the sovereign reason, and happy in the clear and always durable view of the truth. Such are the promises of faith; it informs us that our origin is divine, and our hopes eternal.

Now, I ask, Is it disgraceful to reason to believe truths which do such honour to the immortality of its nature? What, my brethren, would it then be more glorious to man to believe himself of the same nature as the beasts, and to look forward to the same end? What, the unbeliever would think himself more honoured by the conviction that he is only a vile clay, put together by chance, and which chance shall dissolve, without end, destination, hope, or any other use of his reason and of his body, than that of brutally plunging himself, like the brutes, into carnal gratifications! What! he would have a higher opinion of himself, when viewed in the light of an unfortunate wretch, accidentally placed upon the earth, who looks forward to nothing beyond life, whose sweetest hope is that of sinking back to nonentity, who relates to nothing but himself, and is reduced to find his felicity in himself, though he can there find only anxieties and secret terrors! Is this, then, that miserable distinction by which the pride of unbelief is so much flattered? Great God! how glorious to thy truth, to have no enemies but men of this character! For my part, as St. Ambrose formerly said to the unbelievers of his time, I glory in believing truths so honourable to man, and in expecting the fulfilment of promises so consolatory. To refuse belief to them is sordidly to punish one's self. Ah! if I be deceived, in preferring the hope of one day enjoying the eternal society of the righteous in the bosom of God, to the humbling belief of being of the same nature as the beasts, it is an error dear to me, which I delight in, and upon which I wish never to be undeceived.

But if faith be glorious on the side of its promises for the future, it is not less so from the situation in which it places the believer for the present. And here, my brethren, figure to yourselves a truly righteous man, who lives by faith, and you will acknowledge that there is nothing on the earth more sublime. Master of his desires and of all the movements of his heart; exercising a glorious empire over himself; in patience and in equanimity enjoying his soul, and regulating all his passions by the bridle of temperance;

humble in prosperity, firm under misfortunes, cheerful in tribulations, peaceful with those who hate peace, callous to injuries, feeling for the afflictions of those who trespass against him, faithful in his promises, religious in his friendships, and unshaken in his duties; little affected with riches, which he contemns; fatigued with honours, which he dreads; greater than the world, which he considers only as a mass of earth—what dignity!

Philosophy conquered one vice only by another. It pompously taught contempt of the world, merely to attract the applauses of the world; it sought more the glory of wisdom than wisdom itself. In destroying the other passions, it continually, upon their ruins, raised up one much more dangerous; I mean to say pride: like that prince of Babylon who overthrew the altars of the national gods, merely to exalt upon their wrecks his own impious statue, and that monstrous colossus of pride which he wanted the whole earth to worship.

But faith exalts the just man above even his virtue. Through it he is still greater in the secrecy of his heart, and in the eyes of God, than before men. He forgives without pride; he is disinterested without show; he suffers without wishing it to be known; he moderates his passions without perceiving it himself; he alone is ignorant of the glory and of the merit of his actions; far from graciously looking upon himself, he is ashamed of his virtues much more than the sinner is of his vices; far from courting applause, he hides his works from the light, as if they were deeds of darkness; love of duty is the sole source of his virtue; he acts under the eyes of God alone, and as if there were no longer men upon the earth—what dignity! Find, if you can, any thing greater in the universe. Review all the various kinds of glory with which the world gratifies the vanity of men; and see, if, all together, they can bestow that degree of dignity to which the godly are raised by faith.

Now, my dear hearer, what more honourable to man than this situation? Do you consider him as more glorious, more respectable, more grand, when he follows the impulses of a brutal instinct; when he is the slave of hatred, revenge, voluptuousness, ambition, envy, and all those other monsters which alternately reign in his heart?

For, are you, who make a boast of unbelief, thoroughly acquainted with what is an unbeliever? He is a man without morals, probity, faith, or character, who owns no rule but his passions, no law but his iniquitous thoughts, no master but his desires, no check but the dread of authority, no God but himself: an unnatural child, seeing he believes that chance alone hath given him fathers; a faithless friend, seeing he looks upon men, merely as the wretched fruits of a wild and fortuitous concurrence, to whom he is connected only by transitory ties; a cruel master, seeing he is convinced that the strongest and the most

fortunate have always reason on their side. For, who could henceforth place any dependence upon you? You no longer fear a God; you no longer respect men; you look forward to nothing after this life; virtue and vice are merely prejudices of education in your eyes, and the consequences of popular credulity. Adulteries, revenge, blasphemies, the blackest treacheries, abominations which we dare not even to name, are no longer, in your opinion, but human prohibitions, and regulations established through the policy of legislators. According to you, the most horrible crimes, or the purest virtues, are all equally the same, since an eternal annihilation shall soon equalize the just and the impious, and for ever confound them both in the dreary mansion of the tomb. What a monster must you then be upon the earth! Does this representation of you highly gratify your pride, or can you support even its idea?

Besides, you pride yourself upon irreligion, as springing from your superiority of mind; but trace it to its source. What hath led you to free-thinking? Is it not the corruption of your heart? Would you have ever thought of impiety had you been able to ally religion with your pleasures? You began to hesitate upon a doctrine which incommoded your passions; and you have marked it down as false from the moment that you found it irksome. You have anxiously sought to persuade yourself what you had such an interest to believe; that all died with us; that eternal punishments were merely the terrors of education; that inclinations born with us could never be crimes;—what know I? And all those maxims of free-thinking originating from hell. We are easily persuaded of what we wish. Solomon worshipped the gods of foreign women only to quiet himself in his debaucheries. If men had never had passions, or if religion had countenanced them, unbelief would never have appeared upon the earth. And a proof that what I say is true, is, that in the moments when you are disgusted with guilt, you imperceptibly turn toward religion; in the moments when your passions are more cool, your doubts diminish; you render, as if in spite of yourself, a secret homage in the bottom of your heart to the truth of faith: in vain you try to weaken it, you cannot succeed in extinguishing it; at the first signal of death, you raise your eyes toward heaven, you acknowledge the God whose finger is upon you, you cast yourself upon the bosom of your Father and the Author of your being; you tremble over a futurity which you had vaunted not to believe; and, humbled under the hand of the Almighty, on the point of falling upon and crushing you like a worm of the earth, you confess that he is alone great, alone wise, alone immortal, and that man is only vanity and lies.

Lastly. If fresh proofs were necessary to my subject, I could prove to you how glorious faith is to man, on the side of the grand models which it holds out for our imitation. Consider Abra-

ham, Isaac, and Jacob, said formerly the Jews to their children. Consider the holy men who have gone before you, to whom their faith hath merited so honourable a testimony, said formerly St. Paul to the faithful, after having related to them, in that beautiful chapter of his Epistle to the Hebrews, their names, and the most wonderful circumstances of their history, from age to age.

Behold the excellency of the Christian faith. Recollect all the great men who, in all ages, have submitted to it; such magnanimous princes, such religious conquerors, such venerable pastors, such enlightened philosophers, such estimable learned men, wits so vaunted in their age, such noble martyrs, such penitent anchorites, such pure and constant virgins, heroes in every description of virtue. Philosophy preached a pompous wisdom; but its sage was no where to be found. Here what a cloud of witnesses! What an uninterrupted tradition of Christian heroes from the blood of Abel down to us!

Now, I ask, shall you blush to tread in the steps of so many illustrious names? Place on the one side all the great men whom, in all ages, religion hath given to the world, and on the other that small number of black and desperate minds whom unbelief hath produced. Doth it appear more honourable for you to rank yourself among the latter party? To adopt for guides, and for your models, those men whose names are only recollected with horror, those monsters whom it hath pleased Providence to permit that nature should, from time to time, bring forth; or the Abrahams, the Josephs, the Moseses, the Davids, the apostolic men, the righteous of the ancient and of modern times? Support, if you can, this comparison. Ah! said formerly St. Jerome, on a different occasion, if you believe me in error, it is glorious for me to be deceived with such guides.

And here, my brethren, leaving unbelievers for a moment, allow me to address myself to you. Avowed unbelief is a vice perhaps rare among us, but the simplicity of faith is not perhaps less so. We would feel a horror at quitting the belief of our fathers; but we wish to refine upon our sincerity. We do not permit ourselves to doubt upon the main part of the mysteries; but obedience is philosophically given, by imposing our own yoke, by weighing the holy truths, receiving some as reasonable, reasoning upon others, and measuring them by our own feeble lights; and our age, more than any other, is full of these half believers, who, under the pretext of taking away from religion all that credulity or prejudice may have added to it, deprive faith of the whole merit of submission.

Now, my brethren, sanctity ought only to be spoken of with a religious circumspection. Faith is a virtue almost equally delicate as modesty: a single doubt, a single word injures it; a breath, as I may say, tarnishes it. Yet, nevertheless, what license do they not allow themselves in modern conversations on all that is most respectable in the faith of our fathers? Alas! the terrible name of the Lord could not be even pronounced under

the law by the mouth of man; and, at present, all that is most sacred and most august in religion is become a common subject of conversation; there every thing is talked over, and freely decided upon. Vain and superficial men, whose only knowledge of religion consists of a little more temerity than the illiterate and the common people; producing, as their whole stock of learning, some common-place and hackneyed doubts, which they have picked up, but never had formed themselves; doubts which have so often been cleared up, that they seem now to exist no longer but to glorify the truth; men who, amid the most dissolute manners, have never devoted an hour of serious attention to the truth of religion;—act the philosopher, and boldly decide upon points which a whole life of study, accompanied with learning and piety, could scarcely clear up.

Even persons of a sect, in whom ignorance on certain points would be meritorious, and who, though knowing, good-breeding and decency require that they should affect to be ignorant; persons who are better acquainted with the world than with Jesus Christ; who even know not of religion what is necessary to regulate their manners,—pretend doubts, wish to have them explained, are afraid of believing too much, have suspicions upon the whole, yet have none upon their own miserable situation and the visible impropriety of their life. O God! it is thus that thou deliverest up sinners to the vanity of their own fancies, and permittest that those who pretend to penetrate into thine adorable secrecies know not themselves. Faith is therefore glorious to man: this has just been shown to you: it now remains for me to prove that it is necessary to him.

PART III.—Of all the characters of faith, the necessity of it is the one which renders the unbeliever most inexcusable. All the other motives which are employed to lead him to the truth, are foreign, as I may say, to him; this one is drawn from his own ground-work,—I mean to say, from the nature itself of his reason.

Now, I say that faith is absolutely necessary to man, in the gloomy and obscure paths of this life; for his reason is weak, and it requires to be assisted; because it is corrupted, and it requires to be cured; because it is changeable, and it requires to be fixed. Now, faith alone is the aid which assists and enlightens it, the remedy which cures it, the bridle and the rule which retains and fixes it. Yet a moment of attention; I shall not misemploy it.

I say, first, that reason is weak, and that an aid is necessary to it. Alas! my brethren, we know not, neither ourselves, nor what is external to us. We are totally ignorant how we have been formed, by what imperceptible progressions our bodies have received arrangement and life, and what are the infinite springs, and the divine skill, which give motion to the whole machine. “I

cannot tell," said that illustrious mother, mentioned in the Maccabees, to her children, "how ye came into my womb; for I neither gave you breath nor life, neither was it I that formed the members of every one of you: but doubtless the Creator of the world, who formed the generation of man, and found out the beginning of all things, will also, of his own mercy, give you breath and life again, as ye now regard not your own selves for his law's sake." Our body is itself a mystery, in which the human mind is lost and overwhelmed, and of which the secrets shall never be fathomed; for there is none but him alone who hath presided at its formation, who is capable of comprehending them.

That breath of the Divinity which animates us, that portion of ourselves which renders us capable of loving and of knowing, is not less unknown to us; we are entirely ignorant how its desires, its fears, its hopes, are formed, and how it can give to itself its ideas and images. None have yet been able to comprehend how that spiritual being, so different in its nature from matter, hath possibly been united in us with it by such indissoluble ties, that the two substances no longer form but one whole, and the good and evil of the one become the good and evil of the other. We are a mystery therefore to ourselves, as St. Augustine formerly said; and it would be difficult to say, what is even that vain curiosity which pries into every thing, or how it hath been formed in our soul.

In all around us we still find nothing but enigmas; we live as strangers upon the earth, and amid objects which we know not. To man, nature is a closed book; and the Creator, to confound, it would appear, human pride, hath been pleased to overspread the face of this abyss with an impenetrable obscurity.

Lift up thine eyes, O man! consider those grand luminaries suspended over thy head, and which swim, as I may say, through those immense spaces in which thy reason is lost. Who, says Job, hath formed the sun, and given a name to the infinite multitude of stars? Comprehend, if thou canst, their nature, their use, their properties, their situation, their distance, their revolutions, the equality or the inequality of their movements. Our age hath penetrated a little into their obscurity, that is to say, it hath a little better conjectured upon them than the preceding ages; but what are its discoveries when compared to what we are still ignorant of?

Descend upon the earth, and tell us, if thou knowest, what it is that keeps the winds bound up; what regulates the course of the thunders and of the tempests; what is the fatal boundary which places its mark, and says to the rushing waves, "Here you shall go, and no farther;" and how the prodigy so regular of its movements is formed? Explain to us the surprising effects of plants, of metals, of the elements; find out in what manner gold is purified in the bowels of the earth; unravel, if thou canst,

the infinite skill employed in the formation of the very insects which crawl before us; give us an explanation of the various instincts of animals—turn on every side; nature in all her parts offers nothing to thee but enigmas. O man! thou knowest nothing of the objects, even under thine eyes, and thou wouldst pretend to fathom the eternal depths of faith! Nature is a mystery to thee, and thou wouldst have a religion which had none! Thou art ignorant of the secrets of man, and thou wouldst pretend to know the secrets of God! Thou knowest not thyself, and thou wouldst pretend to fathom what is so much above thee! The universe, which God hath yielded up to thy curiosity and to thy disputes, is an abyss in which thou art lost; and thou wouldst that the mysteries of faith, which he hath solely exposed to thy docility and to thy respect, should have nothing which surpasses thy feeble lights!—O, blindness! Were every thing, excepting religion, clear and evident, thou then, with some show of reason, mightest mistrust its obscurities; but, since every thing around thee is a labyrinth in which thou art bewildered, ought not the secret of God, as Augustine formerly said, to render thee more respectful and more attentive, far from being more incredulous?

The necessity of faith is therefore founded, in the first place, upon the weakness of reason; but it is likewise founded upon its profound depravity. And, in effect, what was more natural to man than to confess his God, the author of his being and of his felicity, his end and his principle; than to adore his wisdom, his power, his goodness, and all those divine perfections of which he hath engraved upon his work such profound and evident marks? These lights were born with us. Nevertheless, review all those ages of darkness and of superstition which preceded the gospel, and see how far man had degraded his Creator, and to what he had likened his God. There was nothing so vile in the created world but his impiety erected into gods, and man was the noblest divinity which was worshipped by man.

If, from religion, you pass to the morality, all the principles of natural equity were effaced, and man no longer bore, written in his heart, the work of that law which nature has engraven on it. Plato, even that man so wise, and who, according to St. Augustine, had so nearly approached to the truth, nevertheless abolishes the holy institution of marriage; and, permitting a brutal confusion among men, he for ever does away all paternal names and rights, which, even in animals, nature hath so evidently respected; and gives to the earth men all uncertain of their origin, all coming into the world without parents, as I may say; and, consequently, without ties, tenderness, affection, or humanity; all in a situation to become incestuous, or parricides, without even knowing it.

Others came to announce to men, that voluptuousness was the

sovereign good; and whatever might have been the intention of the first author of this sect, it is certain that his disciples sought no other felicity than that of brutes; the most shameful debaucheries became philosophical maxims. Rome, Athens, Corinth, beheld excesses, where, it may be said, that man was no longer man. Even this is nothing; the most abominable vices were consecrated there: temples and altars were erected to them: lasciviousness, incest, cruelty, treachery, and other still more abandoned crimes, were made divinities of: the worship became a public debauch and prostitution: and gods, so criminal, were no longer honoured but by crimes; and the apostle, who relates them to us, takes care to inform us, that such was not merely the licentiousness of the people, but of sages and philosophers who had erred in the vanity of their own thoughts, and whom God had delivered up to the corruption of their own heart.—O God! in permitting human reason to fall into such horrible errors, thou intendedst to let man know, that reason, when delivered up to its own darkness, is capable of every thing, and that it can never take upon itself to be its own guide, without plunging into abysses from which thy law and thy light are alone capable of withdrawing him.

Lastly. If the depravity of reason so evidently expose the necessity of a remedy to cure it, its eternal inconstancies and fluctuations yet more instruct man that a check and a rule are absolutely necessary to fix it.

And here, my brethren, if the brevity of a discourse would permit all to be said, what vain disputes, what endless questions, what different opinions, have formerly engrossed all the schools of the heathen philosophy! And think not that it was upon matters which God seems to have yielded up to the contestation of men; it was upon the nature even of God, upon his existence, upon the immortality of the soul, upon the true felicity.

Some doubted the whole; others believed that they knew every thing. Some denied a God; others gave us one of their own fashioning; that is to say, some of them slothful, an indolent spectator of human things, and tranquilly leaving to chance the management of his own work, as a care unworthy of his greatness, and incompatible with his conveniency: some others made him the slave of fates, and subject to laws which he had no hand in imposing upon himself: others again incorporated, with the whole universe, the soul of that vast body, and composing, as it were, a part of that world which is entirely his work. Many others of which I know nothing, for I pretend not to recapitulate them all; but as many schools, so many were the sentiments upon so essential a point. So many ages, so many fresh absurdities upon the immortality and the nature of the soul: here, it was an assemblage of atoms; there, a subtile fire; in another place, a minute and penetrating air; in another school, a portion of the Divinity. Some made it to die with the body; others would have

it to have existed before the body: some again made it to pass from one body to another; from man to the horse, from the condition of a reasonable being to that of animals without reason. There were some who taught, that the true happiness of man is in the senses; a greater number placed it in the reason; others again found it only in fame and glory; many in sloth and indolence. And what is the most deplorable here is, that the existence of God, his nature, the immortality of the soul, the destination and the happiness of men, all points so essential to his destiny, so decisive with regard to his eternal misery or happiness, were, nevertheless, become problems, every where destined merely to amuse the leisure of the schools and the vanity of the sophists; idle questions, in which they were never interested for the principle of truth, but solely for the glory of coming off conqueror. Great God! it is in this manner that thou sportest with human wisdom.

If from thence we entered into the Christian ages, who could enumerate that endless variety of sects which, in all times, hath broken the unity, in order to follow strange doctrines? What were the abominations of the Gnostics, the extravagant follies of the Valentiniens, the fanaticism of Montanus, the contradictions of the Manicheans? Follow every age; as, in order to prove the just, it is necessary that there be heresies. You will find that in every age the church hath always been miserably rent with them.

Recall to your remembrance the sad dissensions of only the past age. Since the separation of our brethren, what a monstrous variety in their doctrine! What endless sects sprung from only one sect! What numberless particular assemblies in one same schism!—O faith! O gift of God! O divine torch, which comes to clear up darkness, how necessary art thou to man! O infallible rule, sent from heaven, and given in trust to the church of Jesus Christ, always the same in all ages, always independent of places, of times, of nations, and of interests, how requisite it is that thou served as a check upon the eternal fluctuations of the human mind! O pillar of fire, at the same time so obscure and so luminous, of what importance it is that thou always conducted the camp of the Lord, the tabernacle and the tents of Israel, through all the perils of the desert, the rocks, the temptations, and the dark and unknown paths of this life!

For you, my brethren, what instruction should we draw from this discourse, and what should I say to you in concluding? You say that you have faith; show your faith by your works. What shall it avail you to have believed, if your manners have belied your belief? The gospel is yet more the religion of the heart than of the mind. That faith which makes Christians is not a simple submission of the reason; it is a pious tenderness of the soul; it is a continual longing to become like unto Jesus Christ; it is an in-

defatigable application in rooting out from ourselves whatever may be inimical to a life of faith. There is an unbelief of the heart equally dangerous to salvation as that of the mind. A man who obstinately refuses belief, after all the proofs of religion, is a monster, whom we contemplate with horror; but a Christian who believes, yet lives as though he believed not, is a madman, whose folly surpasseth comprehension: the one procures his own condemnation, like a man desperate; the other, like an indolent one, who tranquilly allows himself to be carried down by the waves, and thinks that he is thereby saving himself. Make your faith then certain, my brethren, by your good works; and if you shudder at the sole name of an impious person, have the same horror at yourselves, seeing we are taught by faith that the destiny of the wicked Christian shall not be different from his, and that his lot shall be the same as that of the unbeliever. Live conformably to what you believe. Such is the faith of the righteous, and the only one to which the eternal promises have been made.

SERMON XXIII.

DOUBTS UPON RELIGION.

“Howbeit we know this man, whence he is; but when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he is.”—JOHN vii. 27.

SUCH is the grand pretext opposed by the unbelief of the Jews to the doctrine and to the ministry of Jesus Christ; doubts upon the truth of his mission. We know who thou art, and whence thou comest, said they to him; but the Christ whom we expect, when he cometh, no man knoweth whence he is. It is far from clear, then, that thou art the Messiah promised to our fathers; perhaps it is an evil spirit which, through thee, operates these wonders before our eyes, and imposes upon the credulity of the vulgar; so many deceivers have already appeared in Judea, who, giving themselves out for the great Prophet who is to come, have seduced the people, and at last drawn down upon themselves the punishment due to their imposture. Keep us no longer in doubt: if thou be the Christ, tell us plainly, and in such a way as that room shall no longer be left either for doubt or for mistake.

I would not dare to say this here, my brethren, were the language of doubts upon faith not become so common now among us, that precaution is needless in undertaking to confute it: behold the almost universal pretext employed in the world to authorize a life altogether criminal. We every where meet with sinners who coolly tell us, that they would be converted were they well assured that all we tell them of religion were true; that perhaps there is nothing after this life; that they have doubts and difficulties upon our mysteries, to which they can find no satisfactory answer; that, after all, the whole appears very uncertain; and that, before engaging to follow all the rigid maxims of the gospel, it would be proper to be well assured that our toils shall not be lost.

Now, my intention, at present, is not to overthrow unbelief, by the grand proofs which establish the truth of the Christian faith. Setting aside that elsewhere we have already established them, it is a subject far too extensive for a Discourse, and often beyond even the capacity of the majority of those who listen to us; it is frequently paying too much deference to the frivolous objections of those who give themselves out as free-thinkers in the world, to employ the gravity of our ministry in refuting and overthrowing them.

We must take a shorter and more easy way, therefore, at present. My design is not to enter into the foundation of the proofs which render testimony to the truth of faith; I mean only to expose the falsity of unbelief: I mean to prove, that the greatest part of those who call themselves unbelievers, are not so; that almost all those sinners who vaunt, and are continually alleging to us their doubts, as the only obstacle to their conversion, have actually none; and that, of all the pretexts employed as an excuse for not changing their life, that of doubts upon religion, now the most common, is the least true and the least sincere.

It appears surprising at first, that I should undertake to prove to those who believe to have doubts upon religion, and are continually objecting them to us, that they have actually none: nevertheless, with a proper knowledge of men, and, above all, with a proper attention to the character of those who make a boast of doubting, nothing is more easy than this conviction. I say, to their character, in which are always to be found licentiousness, ignorance, and vanity; and such are the three usual sources of their doubts: they give the credit of them to unbelief, which has scarcely a share in them.

First. It is licentiousness which proposes, without daring to believe them. First reflection.

Secondly. It is ignorance which adopts, without comprehending them. Second reflection.

Lastly. It is vanity which boasts, without being able to succeed in drawing any resource from them. Last reflection.

That is to say, that the greatest part of those who call themselves unbelievers, are licentious enough to wish to be so; too ignorant to be so in reality; and, nevertheless, sufficiently vain to wish to appear so. Let us unfold these three reflections, now become so important among us; and let us overthrow licentiousness rather than unbelief, by laying it open to itself.

PART I.—It must at once be admitted, my brethren, and it is melancholy for us that we owe this confession to the truth,—it must be admitted, I say, that our age and those of our fathers have seen real unbelievers. In that depravity of manners in which we live, and amid all the scandals which have so long afflicted the church, it is not surprising that men have sometimes been found who have denied the existence of a God; and that faith, so weakened in all, should in some be at last wholly extinguished. As chosen and extraordinary souls appear in every age, whom the Lord filleth with his grace, his lights, and his most shining gifts, and upon whom he delighteth in liberally pouring forth all the riches of his mercy; so, likewise, are seen others in whom iniquity is, as I may say, consummate, and whom the Lord seems to have marked out, to display in them the most terrible judgments of his justice, and the most fatal effects of his neglect and wrath.

The church, where all these scandals are to increase even to the end, cannot therefore boast of being entirely purged from the scandal of unbelief: she hath, from time to time, her stars which enlighten, and her monsters who disfigure her; and, along with those great men, celebrated for their lights and for their sanctity, who in every age have served as her support and ornament, she hath also witnessed a list of impious men, whose names are still at present the horror of the universe, who have dared, in writings full of blasphemy and impiety, to attack the mysteries of God, to deny salvation and the promises made to our fathers, to overturn the foundation of faith,^s and to preach free-thinking among believers.

I do not pretend, therefore, to say, that, among so many wretches who speak the language of unbelief among us, there may not perhaps be found some one sufficiently corrupted in mind and in heart, and so far abandoned by God, as actually, and in effect, to be an unbeliever: I mean only to establish, that these men, grounded in impiety, are rare; and that, among all those who are continually vaunting their doubts and their unbelief, and make a deplorable ostentation of them, there is not perhaps a single one upon whose heart faith doth not still preserve its rights, and who doth not inwardly dread that God whom he apparently refuses to acknowledge. To overthrow, it is not always necessary to combat our pretended unbelievers; it would often be combating only phantoms; they require only to be displayed such as they are: the wretched declaration of unbelief quickly

tumbles down, and nothing remains but their passions and their debaucheries.

And, behold the first reason upon which I have established the general proposition, that the majority of those who make a boast of their doubts have actually none; it is, that their doubts are those of licentiousness, and not of unbelief. Why, my brethren? Because it is licentiousness which hath formed their doubts, and not their doubts licentiousness; because that, in fact, it is to their passions and not to their doubts that they hold: lastly, because that, in general, they attack in religion only those truths inimical to their passions. Behold reflections which, in my opinion, are worthy of your attention; I shall lay them before you without ornament, and in the same order in which they presented themselves to my mind.

I say, in the first place, because their doubts have sprung from licentiousness, and not licentiousness from their doubts. Yes, my brethren: not one of all those who affect to profess themselves unbelievers has ever been seen to begin by doubts upon the truths of faith, and afterward from doubts to fall into licentiousness: they begin with the passions; doubts come afterward: they first give way to the irregularities of the age and to the excesses of debauchery; and when attained to a certain length, and they find it no longer possible to return upon their steps, they then say, in order to quiet themselves, that there is nothing after this life, or at least, they are well pleased to find people who say so. It is not, therefore, the little certainty they find in religion, which authorizes their conclusion that we ought to yield ourselves up to pleasure, and that self-denial is needless, since every thing dies with us: it is the yielding of themselves up to pleasure which creates doubts upon religion, and, by rendering self-denial next to impossible, leads them to conclude that consequently it is needless. Faith becomes suspected only when it begins to be troublesome; and to this day unbelief hath never made a voluptuary, but voluptuousness hath made almost all the unbelievers.

And a proof of what I say, you whom this Discourse regards, is, that while you have lived with modesty and innocence, you never doubted. Recollect those happy times when the passions had not yet corrupted your heart: the faith of your fathers had then nothing but what was august and respectable; reason bent without pain to the yoke of authority; you never thought of doubts or difficulties: from the moment your manners changed, your views upon religion have no longer been the same. It is not faith, therefore, which hath found new difficulties in your reason; it is the practice of duties which hath encountered new obstacles in your heart. And, should you tell us, that your first impressions, so favourable to faith, sprung solely from the prejudices of education and of childhood; we shall answer, that the second, so favourable to impiety, have sprung solely from the prejudices of the passions

and of debauchery; and that, prejudices for prejudices, it appears to us, that it is still better to keep by those which are formed in innocence and lead us to virtue, than to those which are born in the infamy of the passions, and preach up only free-thinking and guilt.

Thus nothing is more humiliating for unbelief than recalling it to its origin; it bears a false name of learning and of light: and it is a child of iniquity and of darkness. It is not the strength of reason which has led our pretended unbelievers to scepticism; it is the weakness of a corrupted heart, which has been unable to surmount its infamous passions; it is even a mean cowardliness, which, unable to support and to view with a steady eye the terrors and the threatenings of religion, endeavours to shake off their thoughts by continually repeating, that they are childish terrors: it is a man who, afraid of the night, sings as he goes along, to prevent himself from thinking; debauchery always makes us cowardly and fearful; and it is nothing but an excess of fear of eternal punishments, which occasions a sinner to be continually preaching up and singing to us that they are doubtful; he trembles, and wishes to strengthen himself against himself; he cannot support, at the same time, the view of his crimes and that of the punishment which awaits them; that faith, so venerable, and of which he speaks with such contempt, nevertheless terrifies and disquiets him still more than those other sinners, who, without doubting its punishments, yet are frequently not less unfaithful to its precepts; it is a coward, who hides his fear under a false ostentation of bravery. No, my brethren, our pretended free-thinkers give themselves out as men of courage and firmness; examine them narrowly, and they are the weakest and most cowardly of men.

Besides, it is not surprising that licentiousness leads us to doubt of religion: the passions require the aid of unbelief; for they are too feeble and too unreasonable to maintain their own cause. Our lights, our feelings, our conscience, all struggle within us against them: we are under the necessity, therefore, of seeking a support for them, and of defending them against ourselves; for, it is a matter of satisfaction to justify to one's self whatever is pleasing. We would neither wish that passions which are dear to us should be criminal, nor that we should continually have to support the interests of our pleasures against those of our conscience: we wish tranquilly to enjoy our crimes, and to free ourselves from that troublesome monitor which continually espouses the cause of virtue against ourselves: while remorse contests the pleasure of our enjoyments, they must be very imperfectly tasted; it is paying too great a price for guilt, to purchase it at the expense of that quiet which is sought in it: we must either terminate our debaucheries, or try to quiet ourselves in them; and as it is impossible to enjoy peace of mind in them, and next to impossible to terminate them, the only refuge seems

that of doubting the truths which disquiet us; and, in order to attain to tranquillity, every effort is used to inculcate the persuasion of unbelief.

That is to say, that the great effort of licentiousness is that of leading us to the desire of unbelief; the horrible security of the unbeliever is coveted; total hardness of heart is considered as a happy state; it is unpleasant to have been born with a weaker and more fearful conscience; the lot of those, apparently firm and unshaken in impiety, is envied: while they, in their turn, perhaps a prey to the most gloomy remorse, and vaunting a courage they are far from having, view our lot with envy; for, judging of us from the language we hold upon free-thinking, they take us for what we take them; that is to say, for what we are not, and for what both they and we would wish to be. And it is thus, O my God! that these false heroes of impiety live in a perpetual illusion, continually deceive themselves, and appear what they are not, only because they would wish to be it. They would willingly have religion to be but a dream; they say in their heart, "There is no God;" that is to say, this impious language is the desire of their heart; they would ardently wish no God; that that Being, so grand and so necessary, were a chimera; that they were the sole masters of their own destiny; that they were accountable only to themselves for the horrors of their life and the infamy of their passions; that all finished with them; and that, beyond the grave, there were no supreme and eternal Judge, the punisher of vice and the rewarder of virtue: they wish it; they destroy as much as they can, through the impious wishes of their heart, but they cannot efface from the foundation of their being, the idea of his power and the dread of his punishments.

In effect, it would be too vulgar for a man, vain and plunged in debauchery, inwardly to say to himself, I am still too weak, and too much abandoned to pleasure, to quit it, or to lead a more regular and Christian life. That pretext would still leave all his remorse. It is much sooner done to say to himself, It is needless to live otherwise, for there is nothing after this life. This pretext is far more convenient, for it puts an end to every thing; it is the most favourable to indolence, for it estranges us from the sacraments, and from all the other slaveries of religion. It is much shorter to say to himself, "There is nothing," and to live as if he were in effect persuaded of it; it is at once throwing off every yoke and all restraint; it puts an end to all the irksome measures which sinners of another description still guard with religion and with the conscience. This pretext of unbelief, by persuading us that we actually doubt, leaves us in a certain state of indolence on every thing regarding religion, which prevents us from searching into ourselves and from making too melancholy reflections on our passions. We meanly allow ourselves to be swept away by the fatal course, upon the general prepossession that we believe nothing; we have few

remorses, for we think ourselves unbelievers, and because that supposition leaves us almost the same security as impiety : at least, it is a diversion which dulls and suspends the sensibility of the conscience; and, by operating so as to make us always take ourselves for what we are not, it induces us to live as if we actually were what we wish to be.

That is to say, that the greatest part of these pretended free-thinkers, and of these debauched and licentious unbelievers, ought to be considered as weak and dissolute men, who, not having the force to live christianly, nor even the hardiness to be atheists, remain in that state of estrangement from religion, as the most convenient to indolence; and, as they never try to quit it, they fancy that they actually hold to it; it is a kind of neutrality between faith and irreligion, contrived by indolence for its own ease; for it requires exertion to adopt a side; and, in order to remain neuter, nothing more is required than not to think, and to live by habit; thus they never fathom, nor take any resolution upon themselves. Hardened and avowed impiety hath something, I know not what, which strikes with horror: religion, on the other hand, presents objects which alarm and are by no means convenient to the passions. What is to be done in these two extremities, of which the one shocks reason, and the other the senses? They rest wavering and undecided; in the mean time they enjoy the calm which is left by that state of indecision and indifference: they live without wishing to know what they are; for it is much more convenient to be nothing, and to live without thinking, or any knowledge of themselves. No, my brethren, I repeat it, these are not unbelievers, they are cowards, who have not the courage to espouse a side; who know only to live voluptuously, without rule, without morality, and often without decency; and who, without being atheists, live however without religion, for religion requires consistency, reason, elevation of mind, firmness, noble sentiments; and of all these they are incapable. Such, however, are the heroes of whom impiety boasts; behold the suffrages upon which it grounds its defence, and opposes to religion by insulting us; behold the partisans with whom it thinks itself invincible; and weak and wretched must its resources indeed be, since it is reduced to seek them in men of this description.

First reason, which proves that licentiousness springs not from doubts, but doubts from licentiousness. The second reason is only a fresh proof of the first; it is that actually, if they do not change their life, it is not to their doubts, but solely to their passions, that they hold.

For I ask nothing of you here but candour, you who continually allege your doubts upon our mysteries. When you sometimes think of quitting that sink of vice and debauchery in which you live, and when the passions, more tranquil, allow you to re-

flect, do you then oppose your uncertainties upon religion? Do you say to yourselves, "But if I return, it will be necessary to believe things which seem incredible?" Is this the grand difficulty? Ah! you inwardly say, but if I return, it will be necessary to break off this connexion, to deny myself these excesses, to terminate these societies, to shun these places, to proceed to things which I shall never support, and to adopt a manner of life to which all my inclinations are repugnant. These are what check you; these are the wall of separation which removes you from God. You speak so much to others of your doubts; how comes it that you never speak of them to yourselves? This is not a matter, therefore, of reason and of belief; it is a matter of the heart and of licentiousness; and the delay of your conversion springs not from your uncertainties upon faith, but from the sole doubt in which the violence and the empire of your passions leave you of ever being able to free yourselves from their subjection and infamy. Such, my brethren, are the true chains which bind our pretended unbelievers to their own wretchedness.

And this truth is more evident from this, that the majority of those who profess themselves unbelievers, live, nevertheless, in perpetual variations upon the point even of unbelief. In certain moments they are affected with the truths of religion: they feel themselves torn with the keenest remorse; they even apply to the servants of God most distinguished for their learning and piety, to hold converse with, and receive instructions from them: in others, they make game of these truths; they treat the servants of God with derision, and piety itself as a chimera: there is scarcely one of these sinners, even of those who make the greatest ostentation of their unbelief, whom the spectacle of an unexpected death, a fatal accident, a grievous loss, or a reverse of fortune, hath not cast into gloomy reflections on his situation, and excited desires of a more Christian life: there is hardly one who, in these trying situations, seeks not consolation in the support of the godly, and takes not some step which leaves hopes of amendment. It is not to their companions in impiety and licentiousness that they then have recourse for consolation; it is not by those impious raileries upon our mysteries, and by that horrible philosophy, that they try to alleviate their sufferings: these are discourses of festivity and dissipation, and not of affliction and sorrow: it is the religion of the table, of pleasures, of riotings; it is not that of solemn adversity and sadness: the relish of impiety vanishes with that of pleasures. Now, if their unbelief were founded in real uncertainties upon religion, so long as these uncertainties existed, unbelief should be the same; but, as their doubts spring only from their passions, and as their passions are not always the same, nor equally violent and masters of their heart, so their doubts continually fluctuate like their passions; they increase, they diminish, they are eclipsed, they re-appear, they are

mutable, exactly in the same degree as their passions. In a word, they share the lot of the passions, for they are nothing but the passions themselves.

In effect, to leave nothing unsaid on this subject, and to make you thoroughly feel how much this vaunted profession of unbelief is despicable, observe this: reply to every difficulty of the boasting sinner, reduce him to have nothing more to say, and yet still he does not yield; you have not thereby gained him; he retires within himself, as if he had still more overpowering reasons which he disdains to bring forward: he keeps firm, and opposes a mysterious and decisive air to all those proofs which he cannot resolve. You then pity his madness and obstinacy: you are mistaken; be touched only for his libertine life, and his want of candour; for, let a mortal disease strike him on quitting you; approach his bed of anguish, ah! you will find this pretended unbeliever convinced; his doubts cease, his uncertainties end, all that deplorable display of unbelief vanishes and tumbles in pieces; there is no longer even question of it: he has recourse to the God of his fathers, and trembles at the judgments he made a show of not believing. The minister of Jesus Christ, called in, has no occasion to enter into controversy to undeceive him on his impiety: the dying sinner anticipates his cares and his ministry: he is ashamed of his past blasphemies, and repents of them; he acknowledges their falsity and deception; he makes a public reparation of them to the majesty and to the truth of religion; he no longer demands proofs, he asks only consolations. Nevertheless, this disease hath not brought new lights upon faith; the blow which strikes his flesh hath not cleared up the doubts of his mind; ah! it is because it touches his heart, and terminates his riots; in a word, it is that his doubts were in his passions, and that whatever tends to extinguish his passions, tends, at the same time, to extinguish his doubts.

It happens, I confess, that sinners are sometimes found, who push their madness and impiety even to that last moment: who expire in vomiting forth, with their impious souls, blasphemies against the God who is to judge them, and whom they refuse to acknowledge. For, O my God! thou art terrible in thy judgments, and sometimes permittest that the atheist die in his impiety. But such examples are rare; and you well know, my brethren, that an entire age scarcely furnishes one of these shocking spectacles. But view, in that last moment, all the others who vaunted their unbelief; see a sinner on the bed of death, who had hitherto appeared the firmest in impiety, and the most resolute in denying all belief; he even anticipates the proposal of having recourse to the church remedies: he lifts up his hands to heaven, and gives striking and sincere marks of a religion which was never effaced from the bottom of his heart: he no longer rejects, as childish bugbears, the threatenings and chas-

tisements of a future life: what do I say?—this sinner, formerly so firm, so stately in his pretended unbelief, so much above the vulgar fears, then becomes weaker, more fearful, and more credulous, than the lowest of the people; his fears are more excessive, his very religion more superstitious, his practices of worship more silly, and more extravagant than those of the vulgar; and, as one excess borders on its opposite excess, he is seen to pass in a moment from impiety to superstition; from the firmness of the philosopher to all the weakness of the ignorant and simple.

And here it is, that, with Tertullian, I would appeal to this dying sinner, and let him hold forth, in my stead, against unbelief; it is here that, to the honour of the religion of our fathers, I would wish no other testimony of the weakness and of the insincerity of the pretended atheist, than this expiring soul, who, surely, now can speak only the language of truth; it is here that I would assemble all unbelievers around his bed of death; and, to overthrow them by a testimony which could not be suspicious, would say to him, with Tertullian, “O soul! before thou quittest this earthly body, which thou art so soon to be freed from, suffer me to call upon thy testimony: speak, in this last moment, when vanity is no more, and thou owest all to the truth: say, if thou considerest the terrible God, into whose hands thou goest, as a chimerical being with whom weak and credulous minds are alarmed? Say, if, all now disappearing from thine eyes, if, for thee, all creatures returning to nothing, God alone doth not appear to thee immortal, unchangeable, the being of all ages and of eternity, and who filleth the heavens and the earth? We now consent, we, whom thou hast always considered as superstitious and vulgar minds, we consent that thou judge between us and unbelief, to which thou hast ever been so partial. Though, with regard to faith, thou hast hitherto been as a stranger and the enemy of religion, religion refers its cause to thee, against those with whom the shocking tie of impiety had so closely united thee. If all die with thee, why does death appear so dreadful? Why these uplifted hands to heaven, if there be no God who may listen to thy prayers and be touched by thy groanings? If nothing thyself, why belie the nothingness of thy being, and why tremble upon the sequel of thy destiny? Whence come, in this last moment, these feelings of dread and of respect for the Supreme Being? Is it not, that they have ever been in thee, that thou hast imposed upon the public by a false ostentation of impiety, and that death only unfolds those dispositions of faith and of religion, which, though dormant, have never ceased during life?”

Yes, my brethren, could the passions be destroyed, all unbelievers would soon be recalled; and a final reason, which fully proves it, is, that, if they seem to rise up against the incomprehensibility of our mysteries, it is solely for the purpose of com-

bating what touches them, and of attacking the truths which interest the passions; that is to say, the truth of a future state, and the eternity of future punishments; this is always the favourite conclusion and fruit of their doubts.

In effect, if religion, without adding maxims and truths which restrain the passions, proposed only mysteries which exceed reason, we may boldly say, that unbelievers would be rare; almost no one is interested in those abstruse truths or errors, which it is indifferent to believe or to deny. You will find few real votaries of truth who become partisans and zealots in support of merely speculative and unimportant points, because they believe them to be true. The abstruse truths of mathematics have found, in our days, some zealous and estimable followers, who have devoted themselves to the elucidation of what is held as most impenetrable in the infinite secrets and profound obscurities of that science; but these are rare and singular men; the infection was little to be dreaded, nor, in truth, has it spread; they are admired, but few would wish to follow their example. If religion proposed only truths equally abstruse, equally indifferent to the felicity of the senses, equally uninteresting to the passions and to self-love, the atheists would be still more rare than the mathematicians. The truths of religion are objected to, merely because they threaten us; no objections are made to the others, because their truth or their falsity is alike indifferent.

And tell us not that it is not through self-interest, but the sole love of truth, that the unbeliever rejects mysteries which reason rejects. This, I well know, is the boast of the pretended unbeliever, and he would wish us to think so; but of what consequence is the truth to men, who, so far from either seeking, loving, or knowing it, wish even to conceal it from themselves? What matters to them a truth beyond their reach, and to which they have never devoted a single serious moment; which, having nothing flattering to the passions, can never be interesting to these men of flesh and blood, plunged in a voluptuous life? Their object is to gratify their irregular desires, and yet have nothing to dread after this life; this is the only truth which interests them; give up that point, and the obscurity of all the other mysteries will not occupy even a thought; let them but tranquilly enjoy their crimes, and they will agree to every thing.

Thus the majority of atheists, who have left in writing the wretched fruits of their impiety, have always striven to prove there was nothing above us; that all died with the body, and that future punishments or rewards were fables; to attract followers it was necessary to secure the suffrage of the passions. If ever they attacked the other points of religion, it was only to come to the main conclusion, that there is nothing after this life; that vices or virtues are names invented by policy to restrain the people; and that the passions are only natural and innocent

inclinations, which every one may follow, because every one finds them in himself.

Behold why the impious, in the Book of Wisdom, the Sadducees themselves, in the gospel, who may be considered as the fathers and predecessors of our unbelievers, never took any pains to refute the truth of the miracles related in the books of Moses, and which God formerly wrought in favour of his people, nor the promise of the Mediator made to their fathers: they attacked only the resurrection of the dead, and the immortality of the soul: that point decided every thing for them. "Man dies like the beast," said they in the Book of Wisdom; "we know not if their nature be different, but their end and their lot are the same: trouble us no more, therefore, with a futurity which is not: let us enjoy life; let us refuse ourselves no gratification: time is short; let us hasten to live, for we shall die to-morrow, and because all shall die with us." No, my brethren, unbelief hath always originated in the passions. The yoke of faith is never rejected but in order to shake off the yoke of duties; and religion would never have an enemy, were it not the enemy of licentiousness and vice.

But, if the doubts of our unbelievers are not real, in consequence of being formed solely by licentiousness, they are also false, because it is ignorance which adopts without comprehending them, and vanity which makes a boast without being able to make a resource of them: this is what now remains to me to unfold.

PART II.—The same answer might be made to the majority of those who are continually vaunting their doubts upon religion, and find nothing but contradictions in what faith obliges us to believe, that Tertullian formerly made to the heathens, upon all the reproaches they invented against the mysteries and the doctrine of Jesus Christ. They condemn, said he, what they do not understand: they blame what they have never examined, and what they know only by hearsay; they blaspheme what they are ignorant of, and they are ignorant of it because they hate it too much to give themselves the trouble of searching into and knowing it. Now, continues this father, nothing is more indecent and foolish than boldly to decide upon what they know not; and all that religion would require of these frivolous and dissolute men, who so warmly rise up against it, is, not to condemn before they are well acquainted with it.

Such, my brethren, is the situation of almost all who give themselves out in the world as unbelievers; they have investigated neither the difficulties nor the respectable proofs of religion; they know not even enough to doubt of them. They hate it; for how is it possible to love our condemnation? And upon that hatred are founded their doubts and their only arguments to oppose it.

In effect, when I glance my eye over all that the Christian ages have had of great men, elevated geniuses, profound and enlightened scholars, who, after an entire life of study and indefatigable application, have, with a humble docility, submitted to the mysteries of faith; have found the proofs of religion so strong, that the proudest and most untractable reason might, in their opinion, without derogation, comply; have defended it against the blasphemies of the pagans; have silenced the vain philosophy of the sages of the age, and made the folly of the cross to triumph over all the wisdom and erudition of Rome and Athens; it strikes me, that, in order to renew the attack against mysteries so long and so universally established; that, in order to be heard in appeal, if I may venture to say so, from the submission of so many ages, from the writings of so many great men, from so many victories achieved by faith, from the consent of the universe; in a word, from a prescription so long and so well strengthened, it would require either new proofs that had never yet been controverted, or new difficulties that had never yet been started, or new methods which discovered a weak side in religion, as yet never found out. It seems to me, that, singly to rise up against so many testimonies, so many prodigies, so many ages, so many divine monuments, so many famous personages, so many works which time hath consecrated, and which, like pure gold, have quitted the ordeal of unbelief only more resplendent and immortal; in a word, so many surprising, and, till then, unheard of events, which establish the faith of Christians, it would require very decisive and very evident reasons, very rare and new lights, to pretend even to doubt, much less to oppose it. Would not that man be deservedly considered as out of his senses, who should go to defy a whole army, merely to make an ostentation of a vain defiance, and to pride himself upon a burlesque bravery?

Nevertheless, when you examine the majority of those who call themselves unbelievers, who are continually clamouring against the popular prejudices, who vaunt their doubts, and defy us to satisfy or to answer them; you find that their only knowledge consists of some hackneyed and vulgar doubts, which, in all times, have been, and still continue to be, argued in the world; that they know nothing but a certain jargon of licentiousness which goes from hand to hand, which they receive without examination, and repeat without understanding: you find that their whole skill and study of religion are reduced to some licentious sayings, which, if I may descend so low, are the proper language of the streets; to certain maxims which, through mere repetition, begin to relish of proverbial meanness. You will find no foundation, no principle, no sequence of doctrine, no knowledge even of the religion which they attack; they are men immersed in pleasure, and who would be very sorry to have a spare moment to devote to the investigation of wearisome truths which they are

indifferent whether they know or not; men of a light and superficial character, and wholly unfitted for a moment's serious meditation or investigation; let me again repeat, men drowned in voluptuousness, and in whom even that portion of penetration and understanding, accorded by nature, hath been debased and extinguished by debauchery.

Such are the formidable supports of unbelief against the knowledge of God: behold the frivolous, dissipated, and ignorant characters who dare to tax, with credulity and ignorance, all that the Christian ages have had, and still have, of learned, able, and celebrated personages; they know the language of doubts; but they have learned it by rote, for they have never formed them; they only repeat what they have heard: it is a tradition of ignorance and impiety: they have no doubts; they only preserve, for those to come, the language of irreligion and doubts; they are not unbelievers, they are only the echoes of unbelief; in a word, they know how to express a doubt, but they are too ignorant to doubt themselves.

And a proof of what I advance is, that, in all other doubts, we hesitate only in order to be instructed; every thing is examined which can elucidate the concealed truth. But here the doubt is merely for doubting's sake; a proof that we are equally uninterested in the doubt as in the truth which conceals it from us; they would be very sorry were they under the necessity of clearing up either the falsity or the truth of uncertainties which they pretend to have on our mysteries. Yes, my brethren, were the punishment of doubters to be that of an indispensable obligation to seek the truth, no one would doubt; no one would purchase, at such a price, the pleasure of calling himself an unbeliever; few indeed would be capable of it; decisive proof that they do not doubt, and that they are as little attached to their doubts, as to religion (for their knowledge in both is much about the same); but only that they have lost those first feelings of discretion and of faith which left us still some vestige of respect for the religion of our fathers. Thus, it is doing too much honour to men, so worthy both of pity and contempt, to suppose that they have taken a side, that they have embraced a system; you honour them too much by ranking them among the impious followers of a Socinus, by ennobling them with the shocking titles of deists or atheists: alas! they are nothing; they are of no system; at least, they neither know themselves what they are, nor can they tell us what that system is; and, strange as it may appear, they have found out the secret of forming a state more despicable, more mean, and more unworthy of reason, than even that of impiety; and it is even doing them credit to call them by the shocking title of unbeliever, which had hitherto been considered as the shame of humanity and the highest reproach of man.

And, to conclude this article with a reflection which confirms

the same truth, and is very humiliating for our pretended unbelievers, I observe, that they who affect to treat us as weak and credulous minds, who vaunt their reason, who accuse us of grounding a religion upon the popular prejudices, and of believing solely because our predecessors have believed; they, I say, are unbelievers, and doubt upon the sole and deplorable authority of a debauchee, whom they have often heard to say that futurity is a bugbear, and made use of as a scarecrow to frighten only children and the common people; such is their only knowledge and their only use of reason. They are impious, as they accuse us of being believers without examination, and through credulousness, but through a credulity which can find no excuse but in madness and folly; the authority of a single impious discourse, pronounced in a bold and decisive tone, hath subjugated their reason, and ranked them in the lists of impiety. They call us credulous, in yielding to the authority of the prophets, of the apostles, of men inspired by God, of the shining miracles wrought to establish the truth of our mysteries, and to that venerable tradition of holy pastors, who, from age to age, have transmitted to us the charge of doctrine and of truth, that is to say, to the greatest authority that hath ever been on the earth; and they think themselves less credulous, and it appears to them more worthy of reason, to submit to the authority of a freethinker, who, in a moment of debauchery, pronounces, with a firm tone, that there is no God, yet most likely inwardly belies his own words!—Ah! my brethren, how much does man degrade and render himself contemptible when he arrogates a false glory from being no longer in the belief of a God!

Thus, why is it, think you, that our pretended unbelievers are so desirous of seeing real atheists confirmed in impiety; that they seek and entice them even from foreign countries, like a Spinoza, if the fact be, that he was called into France to be heard and consulted? It is because our unbelievers are not firm in unbelief, nor can they find any who are so; and, in order to harden themselves, they would gladly see some one actually confirmed in that detestable cause; they seek, in precedent, resources and defences against their own conscience; and, not daring of themselves to become impious, they expect from an example what their reason and even their heart refuses; and, in so doing, they surely fall into a credulity much more childish and absurd than that with which they reproach believers. A Spinoza, that monster, who, after embracing various religions, ended with none, was most anxious to find out some professed freethinker who might confirm him in the cause of irreligion and atheism: he formed to himself that impenetrable chaos of impiety, that work of confusion and darkness in which the sole desire of not believing in God can support the weariness and disgust of those who read it; in which, excepting the impiety, all is unintelligible, and which would, from its birth, have sunk into oblivion, had it

not, to the shame of humanity, attacked the Supreme Being: that impious wretch, I say, lived concealed, retired, tranquil: his dark productions were his only occupation, and, to harden himself he needed only himself. But those who so eagerly sought him, who longed to consult and see him, those frivolous and dissolute men were fools who wished to become impious; and who, not finding sufficient authority to remain believers in the testimony of all ages, of all nations, and of all the great men who have honoured religion, sought, in the single testimony of an obscure individual, of a deserter from every religion, of a monster obliged to hide himself from the eyes of men, a deplorable and monstrous authority which might confirm them in impiety, and defend them from their own conscience. Great God! let the impious here hide their faces; let them cease to make an ostentation of an unbelief which is the fruit of their depravity and ignorance, and no longer speak, but with blushes, of the submission of believers: it is all a language of deceit; they give to vanity what we give to truth.

I say vanity; and this is the grand and final reason which more clearly exposes all the falsity and weakness of unbelief. Yes, my brethren, all our pretended unbelievers are bullies, who give themselves out for what they are not: they consider unbelief as conveying the idea of something above the common; they are continually boasting that they believe nothing, and, by dint of boasting, they at last persuade themselves of it: like certain mushroom characters among us, who, though touching the obscurity and vulgarity of their ancestors, have the deplorable vanity of wishing to be thought of an illustrious birth, and descended from the greatest names; by dint of blazoning and repeating it, they attain almost to the belief of it themselves. It is the same with our pretended unbelievers; they still touch, as I may say, that faith which they have received at their birth, which still flows with their blood, and is not yet effaced from their heart; but they think it a vulgarity and meanness, at which they blush; by dint of saying and boasting that they believe nothing, they are convinced that they really do not believe, and have consequently a much higher opinion of themselves.

First. Because that deplorable profession of unbelief supposes an uncommon understanding, strength, and superiority of mind, and a singularity which is pleasing and flattering; on the contrary, that the passions infer only licentiousness and debauchery, of which all men are capable, though they are not so of that wonderful superiority attributed to itself by impiety.

Secondly. Because faith is so weakened in our age, that we find few in the world who pique themselves upon wit and a little more knowledge or erudition than others, who do not allow themselves doubts and difficulties upon the most august and most sacred parts of religion. It would be a disgrace, therefore, in their company to appear religious and believers: they are

men high in the public esteem, and any resemblance to them is flattering; in adopting their language, their talents and reputation are thought likewise to be adopted; and not to dare to follow or to copy them would, it seems, be making a public avowal of weakness and mediocrity: miserable and childish vanity! Besides, because they have heard say that certain characters, distinguished in their age, did not believe, and as the memory of their talents and great actions has been preserved only with that of their irreligion, they vaunt these grand examples; after such illustrious models, it appears dignified to believe nothing; their names are constantly in their mouths: it is a false embroidery, where a laughable vanity and littleness of mind alone are conspicuous, since nothing can be more miserable or mean than to give ourselves out for what we are not, or to assume the personage of another.

Thirdly, and lastly. Because the language of impiety is in general the consequence of licentious society. We wish to appear the same as our companions in debauchery; for it would be a shame to be dissolute, and yet seem to believe, in the very presence of our accomplices in riot. It is a sorry cause, that of a debauchee who still believes; impiety and licentiousness are the only colour for debauchery; without these he would only be a novice in profligacy: the dread of punishments and of a hell is left to those yet unexercised in guilt; that remnant of religion seems to savour too much of childhood and the college. But when attained to a certain length in debauchery, ah! these vulgar weaknesses must all be soared above; their opinion of themselves is raised in proportion as they can persuade others that they are now above all these fears; they even mock those who appear still to dread: like the wife of Job, they say, with a tone of irony and impiety, "Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Art thou so simple as to believe all these tales with which thy childhood hath been alarmed? Thou seest not that all these are merely the visions of weak minds, and that the more knowing, who preach them up so much, believe not a word of them themselves!"

O my God! how mean and despicable is the impious man, who seems so proudly to contemn thee! He is a coward, who outwardly insults, yet inwardly fears thee; he is a vain boaster, who makes a show of unbelief, but tells not what passes within; he is an impostor, who, wishing to deceive us, cannot succeed in deceiving himself; he is a fool, who, without a single inducement, adopts all the horror of impiety; he is a madman, who, unable to attain irreligion, or to extinguish the terrors of his conscience, extinguishes in himself all modesty and decency, and endeavours to make an impious merit of it in the eyes of men; who madly sacrifices, to the deplorable vanity of being thought an unbeliever, his religion which he still preserves, his God whom he dreads, his conscience which he feels, his eternal salvation

which he hopes. What a desertion of God, and what a sink of madness and folly!

And could you, my brethren, (and in this wish I comprise the whole fruit of this Discourse,) who still feel a reverence for the religion of our fathers, but be sensible of the contemptibility of those men who give themselves out as freethinkers, and whom you often so much esteem, you would then comprehend how much the profession of unbelief, now so fashionable among us, is, of all other characters, the most frivolous, cowardly, and worthy of laughter; you would then know, that every thing mean and shameful, even according to the world, is concealed under this ostentation of impiety, which the corruption of our manners hath now rendered so common even to both sexes.

First, of licentiousness. They reach the avowal of impiety only when the heart is profoundly corrupted; when they actually live in private in the most shameful debauchery; and, were they known for what they are, they would for ever be dishonoured even in the eyes of men.

Secondly, of meanness. They act the philosopher and the wit; while, in secret, they are the most sneaking, the most dissolute, the most abandoned, and weakest of sinners, the veriest slaves of every passion, unworthy of modesty, and even of reason.

Thirdly, of deceit and imposition. They act a borrowed character; they give themselves out for what they are not; and, while so loudly exclaiming against the godly, and treating them as impostors and hypocrites, they are themselves the very cheat they decry, and the hypocrite of impiety and freethinking.

Fourthly, of ostentation and wretched vanity. They act the hero, while inwardly trembling; for, on the first signal of death, they betray more cowardice than even the commonest of the people; they make a show of openly insulting that God whom they still inwardly dread and even hope to render favourable one day to themselves; a character of childishness and buffoonery, which the world itself hath always considered as the lowest, the vilest, and the most risible of all characters.

Fifthly, of temerity. Without erudition or knowledge, they dare to set up as deciders upon what they are totally ignorant of; to condemn the greatest characters of every age; and to decide upon important points to which they have never given, and, indeed, to which they are incapable of giving, a single moment of serious attention: an indecency of character which can accord only with men who have nothing more to lose on the side of honour.

Sixthly, of folly. They pride themselves in appearing without religion; that is to say, without character, morals, probity, fear of God and of man, and capable of every thing excepting virtue and innocence.

Seventhly, of superstition. We have seen these pretended freethinkers, who refuse to consult the oracles of the holy prophets,

consulting conjurors; admitting in men that knowledge of futurity which they refuse to God; giving in to every childish credulity, while rising up against the majesty of faith; expecting their aggrandisement and fortune from a deceitful oracle, and unwilling to hope their salvation from the oracles of our holy books; and, in a word, ridiculously believing in demons, while they make a boast of disbelieving a God.

Lastly, what, in my opinion, is most deplorable in these characters, is, that they are in a situation which precludes almost every hope of salvation. For an actual unbeliever, if such there be, may in a moment be stricken of God, and overwhelmed, as it were, under the weight of that glory and majesty which he unknowingly had blasphemed: the eyes of this unfortunate wretch may still be opened by the Lord in his mercy; he may make his light to shine through his darkness, and reveal that truth which he resists only because he knows it not: he has still resources, such as perhaps rectitude, consistency, principles (of error and illusion, I confess, but still they are principles): he will be equally warm for his God when known, as he was his enemy when unknown. But the unbelievers, of whom I speak, have scarcely a way left of returning to God; they insult the Lord whom they know; they blaspheme that religion which they still preserve in their heart: they resist the impressions of conscience, which still inwardly espouse the cause of faith against themselves; in vain does the light of God shine upon their heart, it serves only to render more inexcusable the treachery of their impiety. Were they, saith Jesus Christ, absolutely blind, they would be worthy of pity, and their sin would be less: but at present they see, and consequently the guilt of their irreligion is blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, which dwelleth for ever upon their head.

Let us repair, then, my brethren, by our respect for the religion of our fathers; by a continual gratitude toward the Lord, who hath permitted us to be born in the way of salvation, into which so many nations have not as yet been deemed worthy to enter,—let us repair, I say, the scandal of unbelief so common in this age, so countenanced among us, and which, become more bold through the number and quality of its partisans, no longer hides its head, but openly shows itself, and braves, as it were, the religion of the prince and the zeal of the pastors. Let us have in horror those impious and despicable men, who pride themselves in turning into ridicule the majesty of the religion they profess: let us fly them as monsters unworthy to live, not only among believers, but even among those connected together by honour, probity, and reason; far from applauding their impious discourses, let us cover them with shame by that contempt which they merit. It is so low and so mean, even according to the world, to dishonour that religion in which one lives; it is so beautiful, and there is so much real dignity in making a pride of respecting and of

defending it, even with an air of authority and of indignation, against the silly speeches which attack it. By despising unbelief, let us deprive it of the deplorable glory it seeks. From the moment they are despised, unbelievers will be rare among us; and the same vanity which forms their doubts will soon annihilate or conceal them, when it shall be a disgrace among us to appear impious, and a glory to be a believer. It is thus that this scandal shall be done away, and that altogether we shall glorify the Lord in the same faith, and in the expectation of the eternal promises. Amen.

SERMON XXIV.

EVIDENCE OF THE LAW OF GOD.

“ And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me ? ” — JOHN viii. 46.

JESUS CHRIST had hitherto confuted the incredulity of the Jews by his works and by his miracles; at present he recalls them to the judgment of their own conscience and to the evidence of the truth, which, in spite of themselves, rendered testimony to his doctrine and to his ministry. Nevertheless, as they shut their eyes against the evidence of his miracles, in accusing him of operating them through the ministry of devils; so they likewise harden themselves against the evidence of his doctrine and of his mission, so clearly foretold in the Scriptures, by alleging pretended obscurities, which rendered them, in their eyes, still doubtful and suspicious.

For, my brethren, however evident may be the truth, that is to say, the law of God, whether in our heart, where it is written in shining and ineffaceable characters, or in the rules which Jesus Christ hath left to us; we would always, either that our conscience see nothing in it but what our passions see, or that these rules be not so explicit but what we may always be able to find out some favourable interpretation and mollification of them.

In effect, two pretexts are commonly opposed by the sinners of the world against the evidence of truths the most terrible of the law of God.

First. In order to calm themselves on a thousand abuses,

authorized by the world, they tell us that they believe themselves to be in safety in that state; that their conscience reproaches them with nothing on that head; and that, could they be persuaded that they were in the path of error, they would instantly quit it.—First pretext which is opposed to the evidence of the law of God: candour and tranquillity of conscience.

Secondly. They oppose that the gospel is not so clear and so explicit on certain points as we maintain it to be; that each interprets it in his own way, and makes it to say whatever he wishes; that what appears so positive to us, appears not so to all the world.—Second pretext: the obscurity and uncertainty of the rules.

Now, I say that the law of God hath a two-fold mark of evidence, which shall overthrow these two pretexts, and shall condemn, at the day of judgment, all the vain excuses of sinners.

First. It is evident in the conscience of the sinner: first reflection. Secondly, it is evident in the simplicity of the rules: second reflection.—The evidence of the law of God in the conscience of men: first character of the law of God, which shall judge the false security and pretended candour of worldly souls. The evidence of the law of God in the simplicity of its rules: second character of the law of God, which shall judge the affected uncertainties and the false interpretations of sinners. And thus it is, O my God! that thy holy law shall judge the world, and that the criminal conscience shall one day be confounded before thy tribunal, both by the lights of his own conscience and by the perspicuity of thy heavenly maxims.

PART I.—It is rather surprising that the greatest part of worldly souls, in justification of the abuses of the world, and the danger of its maxims, allege to us the candour and the tranquillity of their conscience. Besides, that peace and security, in the false paths of iniquity, are rather their punishment than their excuse; and that, were it even true that the conscience should reproach them with nothing in manners regulated solely according to the false judgments of the world, that state would still be only so much the worse, and more hopeless of salvation. It appears that, of all tribunals, that of conscience is the last to which an unbelieving soul should appeal; and that nothing is less favourable to the errors of a sinner than the sinner himself.

I know that there are hardened souls, to whom no ray of grace or of light can carry conviction; who live without remorse and without anxiety in the horrors of an infamous licentiousness; in whom all conscience seems extinguished, and who carry the excess of their blindness, says St. Augustine, so far as even to glory in their blindness. But these are only dreadful examples of God's justice upon men; and if such have appeared upon the

earth, they only prove how far his neglect and the power of his wrath may sometimes go.

Yes, my brethren, whether we affect boldly and openly to cast off the authority of the law, like the impious and the licentious; whether we endeavour to mollify and artificially to reconcile it with our passions, by favourable interpretations, like the greatest part of worldly souls and common sinners; our conscience renders a two-fold testimony within us to this divine law: a testimony of truth to the equity and to the necessity of its maxims, and a testimony of severity to the exactitude of its rules.

I say, in the first place, a testimony of truth to the equity of its maxims. For, my brethren, God is too wise not to love order; and he is, at the same time, too good not to wish our welfare. His law must consequently bear these two characters,—a character of equity, and a character of goodness: a character of equity, which regulates all the duties; a character of goodness, which makes us to find our peace and our happiness here below, in duty and in regularity.

Thus we feel, in the bottom of our hearts, that these rules are just and reasonable; that the law of God commands nothing but what is consistent with the real interests of man; that nothing is more consonant to the reasonable creature than gentleness, humanity, temperance, modesty, and all the virtues recommended in the gospel; that the passions prohibited by the law are the sole source of all our troubles; that the more we deviate from the precept, and from the law, the more do we remove ourselves from peace and tranquillity of heart; and that the Lord, in forbidding us to yield ourselves up to impetuous and iniquitous passions, hath only forbidden us to yield ourselves up to our own tyrants, and that his only intention hath been to render us happy in rendering us believers.

Behold a testimony which the law of God finds in the bottom of our hearts. Hurried away by the delusion of the senses, we vainly cast off the yoke of the holy rules; we can never succeed in justifying, even to ourselves, our own irregularities; we always internally adopt the interests of the law against ourselves; we always find within us a justification of the rules against the passions. We cannot corrupt this internal witness of the truth, which pleads within us for virtue; we always feel a secret misunderstanding between our inclinations and our lights: the law of God, born in our heart, incessantly struggles there against the law of the flesh foreign to man; it maintains its truths there in spite of ourselves, if it cannot maintain its authority; it officiates as a censor, if it cannot serve as a director: in a word, it renders us unhappy, if it cannot render us believers.

Thus, in vain do we sometimes give way to all the bitterness of hatred and of revenge; we immediately feel that this cruel pleasure is not made for the heart of man; that to hate, is, in fact, to

punish ourselves; and, in returning to ourselves after the transports of passion, we find within us a principle of humanity which disavows their violence, and clearly points out to us, that gentleness and kindness were our first inclinations; and that, in commanding us to love our brethren, the law of God hath only done so, as to consult the right and most reasonable feelings of our heart, and to reconcile us with ourselves. Thou art more righteous than I, said Saul to David, in the time of his strongest hatred against him. That goodness, born in the heart of all men, forced from him that confession, and inwardly disavowed the injustice and the cruelty of his revenge.

In vain do we plunge ourselves into brutal and sensual gratifications, and madly range after whatever may satisfy the insatiable desires of pleasure: we quickly feel that debauchery leads us too far to be agreeable to nature: that whatever enslaves and tyrannizes over us, overturns the order of our first institution: and that the gospel, in prohibiting the voluptuous passions, hath provided for the tranquillity of our heart, and for restoring to us all its elevation and nobility. How many hired servants of my father's, said the prodigal, still bound in the chains of vice, have bread enough, and to spare, and I consume my days in weariness and in shame! It was a remnant of reason and of nobility which still spake in the bottom of his heart.

Lastly. Investigate all the precepts of the law of God, and you will feel that they have a necessary connexion with the heart of man; that they are rules founded upon a profound knowledge of what takes place within us; that they solely contain the remedies of our most secret evils, and the succours of our most righteous inclinations; and that none but Him alone who knoweth the bottom of hearts, could be capable of laying down such maxims to men. The heathens themselves, in whom all truth was not yet extinguished, rendered this glory to the Christian morality; they were forced to admire the wisdom of its precepts, the necessity of its restraints, the sanctity of its counsels, the good sense and sublimity of all its rules; they were astonished to find, in the discourses of Jesus Christ, a more sublime philosophy than in the Roman or Grecian schools; and they could not comprehend how the Son of Mary should be better acquainted with the duties, the desires, and all the secret folds of the human heart, than Plato and all his disciples.

Will you tell us, after this, that nature is our first law, and that tendencies to pleasures, inherent in our being, can never be crimes? I have often said it; it is an impiety only of conversation; it is an ostentation of freethinking, of which vanity makes a boast, but which truth inwardly belies. Augustine in his errors had spared no pains to efface, from the bottom of his heart, those remains of faith and of conscience which still recalled him to the truth; he had eagerly sought, in the most impious opinions

and in the most shocking errors, wherewithal to comfort himself against his crimes; his mind, flying the light which pursued him, wandered from impiety to impiety and from error to error: nevertheless, in spite of all his efforts and flights, the truth, always victorious in the bottom of his soul, proclaimed its triumph in spite of himself: he could succeed neither in seducing nor in quieting himself in his disorders: "I bore, O my God," says he, "a conscience racked, and still bleeding, as it were, from the grievous wounds which my passions incessantly made there: I was a burden to myself; I could no longer sustain my own heart; I turned myself on every side, and no where could it find ease; I knew not where to lay it, that I might be delivered from it, and that mine anxiety might be comforted."

Behold the testimony which a sinner, who, to all the keenness of the passions, added the impiety of opinions and the abuse of lights, renders of himself. And these examples are of every age: our own has beheld famous and avowed sinners who made an infamous boast of not believing in God, and who were looked upon as heroes in impiety and freethinking: we have seen them touched at last with repentance, like Augustine, and recalled from their errors; we have seen them, I say, make an open avowal, that they had never been able to succeed in effacing the rules and truth from their soul; that, amidst all their most shocking impieties and excesses, their heart, still Christian, inwardly belied their derisions and blasphemies; that before men they vaunted a strength of mind which forsook them in private; that that apparent unbelief concealed the most cruel remorse and the most gloomy fears; and that they had never been firm and tranquil in guilt.

Yes, my brethren, guilt, always timorous, every where bears a witness of condemnation against itself. Every where you render homage, by your inward anxieties and remorse, to the sanctity of that law which you violate; every where a fund of weariness and of sorrow, inseparable from guilt, makes you to feel that regularity and innocence are the only happiness which was intended for you on the earth; you vainly display an affected intrepidity: the guilty conscience always betrays itself. Cruel terrors march every where before you: solitude disquiets, darkness alarms you; you fancy to see phantoms coming from every quarter to reproach you with the secret errors of your soul; unlucky dreams fill you with black and gloomy fancies; and guilt, after which you run with so much relish, pursues you afterward like a cruel vulture, and fixes itself upon you, to tear your heart, and to punish you for the pleasure which it had formerly given you.—O my God! what resources hast thou not left in our heart to recall us to thee! and how powerful is the protection which the goodness and the righteousness of thy law finds in the bottom of our being!—First testimony which the conscience

renders to the law of God, a testimony of truth to the sanctity of its maxims.

But it also renders a testimony of severity to the exactitude of its rules. For a second illusion of the greatest part of worldly souls, who live exempted from great irregularities, but who otherwise live amidst all the pleasures, all the abuses, all the sensualities, and all the dissipations authorized by the world, is, that of wishing to persuade themselves that the gospel requires no more, and to persuade us that their conscience reproaches them with nothing, and that they believe themselves safe in that state. Now, I say, that here the worldly conscience is again not candid, and is deceived; and that, in spite of all those mollifications which they endeavour to justify to themselves, it renders, in the bottom of our hearts, a testimony of severity to the law of God.

In effect, order requires that all our passions be regulated by the bridle of the law. All our inclinations, corrupted in their source, have occasion for a rule to rectify and correct them: we confess this ourselves; we feel that our corruption pervades the smallest as well as the greatest things; that self-love infects all our proceedings; and that we every where find ourselves weak, and in continual opposition to order and duty; we feel, then, that the rule ought, in no instance, to be favourable to our inclinations; that we ought every where to find it severe, because it ought every where to be in opposition to us; that the law cannot be in unity with us; that whatever favours our inclinations, can never be the remedy intended to cure them; that whatever flatters our desires, can never be the bridle which is to restrain them: in a word, that whatever nourishes self-love, is not the law which is established for the sole purpose of destroying and annihilating it. Thus, by an inward feeling, inseparable from our being, we always discriminate ourselves from the law, our inclinations from its rules, our pleasures from its duties; and, in all dubious actions where we decide in favour of our inclinations, we perfectly feel that we are deviating from the law of God, always more rigid than ourselves.

And allow me here, my brethren, to appeal to your conscience itself, which you always allege, and to which you continually refer us. Are you, honestly speaking, at your ease, as you wish to persuade us, in this life, altogether of pleasures, of dissipation, of indolence, and of sensuality: in a word, in this worldly life, of which you constantly maintain the innocence, have you hitherto been able to succeed in persuading yourselves that it is the path which leads to salvation? Do you not feel that something more is required of you by the gospel than you perform? Would you wish to appear before God with nothing to offer to him but these pleasures, these amusements which you call innocent, and of which the principal groundwork of your life is composed? I put the question to you, in those moments when, more warmly affected perhaps by grace, you purpose seriously

to think upon eternity, do you not place, in the plan which you then form of a new life, the privation of almost all the very things in which you are continually telling us that you see no harm? Do you not begin by promising to yourselves, that, solely occupied then with your salvation, you will renounce the excesses of gaming, the theatres, the vanities and indecencies of dress, the dissipation of public assemblies and pleasures; that you will devote more time to prayer, to retirement, to holy reading, and to the duties of religion? Now, what is it that you hereby acknowledge, unless it be, that, while you renounce not all these abuses,—that you devote not more time to all these pious duties, you think not seriously upon your salvation; you ought to have no pretension to it; you are in the path of death and perdition?

But, besides, you who carry so far the severity of your censures against the godly, recollect all the rigour of your maxims, and of your derisions upon their conduct; do you not blame, do you not continually censure those persons who wish to connect with a public profession of piety those abuses, those amusements, of which you are the daily apologists, and who wish to enjoy the reputation of virtue without losing any of the pleasures of the world? Do you not mock their piety as a piece of mere grimace? Here it is that you emphatically display all the austerity of the Christian life. Do you not say, that it is necessary either totally to renounce the world, or continue to live as the world lives; and that all these ambiguous virtues serve only to decry the true virtue? I agree with you in this; but I reply to you, Your conscience dictates to you that it is not safe to give yourself partially to God, and your conscience reproaches you nothing, as you say, in a life in which God enters not at all? You condemn those mistaken souls whom, at least, an apparent division between the world and Jesus Christ may comfort? And you justify to us your conduct, you who have nothing in its justification but the abuses of the world and the danger of its habits? Do you then believe that the path of salvation is more rugged for those who profess piety than for you;—that the world hath privileges thereon, which are forfeited from the moment that we mean to serve God? Be consistent, then, with yourselves, and either condemn no more a worldly virtue, or no longer justify the world itself; since whatever you blame in that virtue is only that portion of it which the world supplies.

And, in order to make you more sensibly feel how far you are from being candid on this head, you continually take a pride in repeating that we despair of human weakness; that in order to act up to all that we say in these Christian pulpits, it would be necessary to withdraw to the deserts, or to be angels rather than men: nevertheless, render glory to the force of truth. If a minister of the gospel were to deliver to you from this place

a doctrine quite opposite to that which we teach; were he to announce to you the same maxims which you daily hold forth in the world; were he to preach to you in this place of the truth, that the gospel is not so severe as it is published; that we may love the world, and yet serve God; that there is no harm in gaming, in pleasures, in theatres, except what we ourselves occasion; that we must live like the world while we live in the world; that all that language of the cross, of penitence, mortification, and self-denial, is more calculated for cloisters than for the court, and for persons of a certain rank; and, lastly, that God is too good to consider as crimes a thousand things which are become habitual, and of which we wish you to make a matter of conscience;—were he, I say, to preach these maxims to you in this holy place, what would you think of him? What would you say to his new doctrine? What idea would you have of this new apostle? Would you consider him as a man come down from heaven to announce to you this new gospel? Would you believe him to be better instructed than we in the holy truths of salvation, and in the rules of the Christian life? You would laugh at his ignorance or his folly; you would perhaps be struck with horror at the profanation which he would make of his ministry.

And what, my brethren, these maxims announced before the altars would appear to you as blasphemy or madness; and, promulgated in your daily conversations, would they become rules of reason and of wisdom? In the mouth of a minister of the gospel you would look upon them as the speeches of a madman; and, in your mouth, should they appear more solid and more weighty? You would laugh, or rather you would be struck with horror, at a preacher who should announce them to you; and you wish to persuade us that you speak seriously, and that you are consistent with yourselves, when with so much confidence you hold them forth to us.

Ah! my brethren, how treacherous we are to God! and how terrible will he be when he shall come to avenge upon the lights of our own heart the honour of his holy law! Our apparent obstinacy for the abuses of the world, of which we maintain the innocence, is a secret persuasion that the world and its abuses are a path of perdition: we publicly justify what we condemn in private: we are the hypocrites of the world and of its pleasures; and, through a most deplorable destiny, our life passes away in dissembling with ourselves, and in obstinately determining to perish in spite of ourselves. And surely, says the apostle John, if our heart, notwithstanding all our self-blindness, cannot help already condemning us in secret, have we more indulgence to expect from the terrible and sovereign Judge of hearts than from our heart itself?

Thus, my brethren, study the law of God in your own conscience, and you will see that it is not more favourable than we to your passions: consult the lights of your heart, and you will

feel that they perfectly accord with our maxims; listen to the voice of truth, which speaks within you, and you will admit that we only repeat what it is continually whispering to your heart. You have no occasion, says St. Augustine, to apply to able men, in order to have the greatest part of your doubts cleared up; go no farther than yourselves for explanations and answers; apply to yourselves for what you have to do; listen to the decisions of your heart; follow the first impulse of your conscience, and you will always determine for that choice most conformable to the law of God; the first impression of the heart is always for the strictness of the law against the softenings of self-love: your conscience will always go farther, and will be more strict than yourselves; and if you have occasion for our decisions, it will rather be in order to moderate the severity than to expose the false indulgence of it.

Behold the first manner in which the law of God shall one day judge us: that law, manifested in the conscience of the sinner, and, as if born with him, shall rise up against him; our heart, marked with the seal of truth, shall be the witness to depose for our condemnation; our lights shall be opposed to our actions, our remorse to our manners, our speeches to our thoughts, our inward sentiments to our public proceedings, and ourselves to ourselves. Thus we bear, each of us, our condemnation in our own heart. The Lord will not bring other proof than ourselves to determine the decision of our eternal reprobation; and the soul before the tribunal of God, says Tertullian, shall appear at the same time both the criminal condemned and the witness which shall testify against his crimes. He will have nothing to reply, continues this father. You knew the truth, will be said to him, and you iniquitously withheld it: you admitted the happiness of the souls who seek only God, and you sought him not yourselves: you drew shocking pictures of the world, of its wearinesses, of its perfidies, and of its wickednesses, and you were always its slave and blinded worshipper: you inwardly respected the religion of your fathers, and you made a deplorable vaunt of impiety: you secretly dreaded the judgments of God, and you affected not to believe in him. In the bottom of your heart you rendered justice to the piety of the godly; you proposed to resemble them at some future period; and you tore and persecuted them with your derisions and censures: in a word, your lights have ever been for God, and your actions for the world.

O my God! to what do men not carry their ingratitude and folly! Thou hast placed in us lights inseparable from our being, which, by disturbing the false peace of our passions and errors, continually recall us to order and to the truth; and, through an imposition of vanity, we make a boast of being tranquil in our errors; we glory in a peace which thy mercy is still willing to disturb; and, far from publishing the riches of thy grace upon our

soul, which leaves us still open to the truth, we vaunt an obstinacy and a blindness which, sooner or later, shall be realized, and shall at last be the just punishment of an ingratitude and of a deceit so injurious to thy grace.—First character of the evidence of the law of God: it is evident in the conscience of the sinner; but it is likewise so in the simplicity of its rules.

PART II.—Since man is the work of God, man can no longer live but conformably to the will of his author; and since God hath of man made his work, and his most perfect work, he could never leave him to live by chance upon the earth without manifesting to him his will; that is to say, without pointing out to him what he owed to his Creator, to his fellow-creatures, and to himself. Therefore, in creating him, he imprinted in his being a living light, incessantly visible to his heart, which regulated all his duties. But all flesh having perverted its way, and the abundance of iniquity which had prevailed over the earth, (unable, it is true, to efface that light entirely from the heart of men,) no longer permitting them to reflect or to consult it, and apparently no longer even maintaining itself in them, unless to render them more inexcusable; God, whose mercies seem to become more abundant in proportion as the wickedness of men increases, caused to be engraven, on tables of stone, that law which nature, that is to say, which himself, had engraven on our hearts: he placed before our eyes the law which we bear within us, in order to recall us to ourselves. Nevertheless, the people, who were its first depositaries, having again disfigured it by interpretations which adulterated its purity, Jesus Christ, the wisdom and the light of God, came at last upon the earth to restore to it its original beauty; to purge it from the alterations of the synagogue; to dissipate the obscurities which a false learning and human traditions had spread through it; to lay open all its sublimity; to apply its rules to our wants; and, in leaving to us his gospel, no longer to leave an excuse, either to the ignorance or to the wickedness of those who violate its precepts.

Nevertheless, the second pretext which is opposed in the world to the evidence of the law of God, is the pretended ambiguity of its rules; they accuse us of making the gospel to say whatever we wish; they contest, they find answers, they spread obscurities through all, and they darken the law in such a manner that the world itself insists on having the gospel on its side.

Now I say, that, besides the evidence of the conscience, the law of God is also evident in the simplicity of its rules, and consequently that the sinners, who wish thus to justify their iniquitous ways, shall one day be overthrown, both by the testimony of their own heart and by the evidence of the holy rules.

Yes, my brethren, the law of God, says the prophet, is pure, enlightening the eyes even of those who would wish to conceal it from themselves. In effect, Jesus Christ, in coming himself

to give to us a law of life and of truth for the regulation of our manners and our duties, and in which the evidence could not be too great, could never undoubtedly have meant to leave obscurities in it capable of deluding us, and of favouring passions which he expressly came to overthrow. Human laws may be liable to these inconveniences; the mind of man, which hath invented them, being unable to foresee all, it hath also been unable to obviate all the difficulties which might one day arise in the minds of other men, on the strength of its expressions, and even on the nature of its rules. But the Spirit of God, author of the holy rules held out in the gospel, hath foreseen all the doubts which the human mind could oppose to his law; he hath read, in the hearts of all men to come, the obscurities which their corruption might shed over the nature of his rules: consequently, he hath concerted them in a manner so divine and so intelligible, so simple and so sublime, that the most ignorant, equally as the most learned, can never misconstrue his intentions, and be ignorant of the ways of eternal life.

It is true, that sacred obscurities conceal it in the incomprehensible mysteries of faith; but the rules of the manners are explicit and precise; the duties are there evident; and nothing can be more clear, or less equivocal, than the precepts of Jesus Christ. Not but that doubts and difficulties may spring up in the detail of the obligations; that the assemblage of a thousand different circumstances may not in such a manner darken the rule but that it may sometimes escape the most learned; and that, upon all the infinite duties of stations and conditions, all be so decided in the gospel that mistakes cannot often take place.

But I say, (and I entreat of you to pursue these reflections, which to me appear of the utmost consequence, and to comprise all the rules of the manners,) in the first place, that if, upon the detail of duties, the letter of the law be sometimes dubious, the spirit of it is almost never so: that it is easily seen to which side the gospel inclines, and to what the analogy and ruling spirit of its maxims lead us: I say, that they mutually clear up each other; that they all go to the same end; that they are like so many rays, which, uniting in one centre, form so grand a lustre that it is impossible longer to mistake them; that there are principal rules which serve to elucidate every particular difficulty; and, lastly, that if the law appear sometimes equivocal to us, the intention of the legislator, by which we ought to interpret it, never leaves room for either doubt or mistake.

Thus, you would wish to know, you who live at the court, where ambition is, as it were, the virtue of persons of your rank; you would wish to know if it be a crime ardently to long for the honours and the prosperities of the earth, to be never satisfied with your station, continually to wish advancement, and to connect with that single desire, all your views, all your proceedings, all your cares,

the whole foundation of your life. In answer to this, you are there told, that your heart ought to be where your treasure is; that is to say, in the desire and in the hope of eternal riches; and that the Christian is not of this world. Decide thereupon the difficulty yourselves.

You demand, if continual gaming, amusements, theatres, and so many other pleasures, so innocent in the eyes of the world, ought to be banished from the Christian life. You are there told, that blessed are they who weep now; but woe unto those who laugh, and who receive their consolation in this world. Follow the spirit of this rule, and see to what it leads.

You inquire, if, having to live in the world, you ought to live like the world; if we would wish to condemn almost all men who live like you; and if, in order to serve God, it be necessary to affect singularities which excite the ridicule of other men. You are there told, that we are not to conform to this corrupted age; that it is impossible to please men and to be the servant of Jesus Christ; and that the multitude is always the party of the reprobate. You have now to say whether the answer be explicit.

You doubt, if, having pardoned your enemy, you be also obliged to see him, to serve him, to assist him with your wealth and credit; and if it be not more equitable to reserve your favours and preferences for your friends. You are there told, Do good to those who have wished evil to you; speak well of those who calumniate you; love those who hate you. Enter into the spirit of this precept, and say if it doth not shed a light over your doubt, which instantly clears it up, and dissipates it.

Lastly, propose as many doubts as you please upon duties, and it will be easy for you to decide them by the spirit of the law, if the letter say nothing of them; for the letter kills me, says the apostle: that is to say, to stop there, to look upon as duty only what is literally marked, to stop at the rude limits, and to enter no farther into the principle and into the spirit which vivifies it, is to be a Jew, and to be willing to be self-deceived. No longer tell us, then, my brethren, when we condemn so many abuses, which you, without scruple, allow yourselves, "But the gospel says nothing of them." Ah! the gospel says every thing to those who wish to understand it: the gospel leaves nothing undecided to whoever loves the law of God: the gospel is competent to all, to whoever searches it only for instruction; and it goes on much the farther, and says so much the more, as that, without stopping to regulate a particular detail, it regulates the passions themselves; that, without detailing all the actions, it goes to repress those inclinations which are the sources of them; and that, without confining itself to certain external circumstances of the manners, it proposes to us, as rules of duty, only self-denial, hatred of the world, love of sufferance, contempt for

whatever takes place, and the whole extent of its crucifying maxims.—First reflection.

I say, in the second place, that it is not the obscurity of the law, but our passions, still dear, which give rise to all our doubts upon the duties; that the worldly souls are those who find most difficulty and most obscurity in the rules of the manners; that nothing appears clear to those who would wish that nothing were so; that every thing appears doubtful to those who have an interest in its being so. I say, with St. Augustine, that it is a willing spirit alone which gives understanding of the precepts; that unless the rules and duties are loved, they can never be thoroughly known; that we enter into the truth only through charity; and that the sincere desire of salvation is the grand solver of all difficulties: I say, that faithful and fervent souls have almost never any thing to oppose to the law of God; and that their doubts are rather pious alarms upon holy actions, than pretexts and difficulties to authorize profane ones.

Men have learned to doubt upon the rules of the manners, only since they have wished to connect them with their iniquitous passions. Alas! all was almost decided for the first believers. In these happy ages, we see not that the first pastors of the church had many difficulties to resolve upon the detail of the duties. Those immense volumes, which decide their doubts by endless resolutions, have appeared only with the corruption of manners: in proportion as believers have had more passions to satisfy, they have had more doubts to propose; it hath been necessary to multiply volumes upon volumes, in order to resolve difficulties which cupidity alone formed,—difficulties already all resolved in the gospel, and upon which the first ages of faith would have been scandalized that they had dared to form even a doubt. Our ages, still more dissolute than those which preceded us, have still beheld these enormous collections of cases and resolutions increasing and multiplying to infinity: all the most incontestable rules of the morality of Jesus Christ are there become almost problems; there is no duty upon which corruption hath not had difficulties to propose, and to which a false learning hath not found mollifications: every thing has there been agitated, contested, and put in doubt: the mind of man hath there been seen quibbling with the spirit of God, and substituting human doctrines in place of that doctrine which Jesus Christ hath brought to us from heaven; and although we pretend not universally to blame all those pious and able men, who have left to us these laborious masses of decisions, it had been to be wished that the church had never called in such aids; and we cannot help looking upon them as remedies which are themselves become diseases, and as the sad fruits of the necessity of the times, of the depravity of manners, and of the decay of truth among men.

Doubts upon the duties arise, therefore, from the corruption of our hearts, much more than from the obscurities of the rules.

The light of the law, says St. Augustine, resembles that of the sun; but vainly doth it shine, glitter, enlighten, the blind are unaffected by it: now every sinner is that blind person; the light is near to him, surrounds him, penetrates him, enters from every quarter into his soul; but he is always himself far from the light. Purify your heart, continues that holy father; remove from it the fatal bandage of the passions; then shall you clearly see all your duties, and all your doubts shall vanish. Thus we continually see, that, when touched with grace, a soul begins to adopt solid measures for eternity, his eyes are opened upon a thousand truths, which, till then, he had concealed from himself: in proportion as his passions diminish, his lights increase; he is astonished by what means he could so long have shut his eyes upon truths which now appear to him so evident and so incontestable; and far from a sacred guide having then occasion to contest, and to maintain against him the interests of the law of God, his prudence is required to conceal, as I may say, from that contrite soul, the whole extent and all the terrors of the holy truths; to quiet him on the horror of past irregularities, and to moderate the fears into which he is thrown by the novelty and the surprise of his lights. It is not, then, the rules which are cleared up, it is the soul which frees itself from, and quits its blindness: it is not the law of God which becomes more evident, it is the eyes of the heart which are opened to its lustre; in a word, it is not the gospel, but the sinner who is changed.

And a fresh proof of what I advance is, that, upon those points of the law where no particular passion or interest blinds us, we are equitable and clear-sighted. A miser, who hides from himself the rules of faith upon the insatiable love of riches, clearly sees the maxims which condemn ambition or luxury. A voluptuary, who tries to justify to himself the weakness of his inclinations, gives no quarter to the mean desires and to the sordid attachments of avarice. A man, mad for exaltation and fortune, and who considers the eternal exertions which he is under the necessity of making in order to succeed, as weighty and serious cares, and alone worthy his birth and his name, sees all the unworthiness of a life of amusement and pleasure, and clearly comprehends that a man, born with a name, degrades and dishonours himself by laziness and indolence. A woman, seized with the rage of gaming, yet otherwise regular, is inveterate against the slightest faults which attack the conduct, and continually justifies the innocence of excessive gaming, by contrasting it with irregularities of another description, from which she finds herself free. Another, on the contrary, intoxicated with her person and with her beauty, totally engrossed by her deplorable passions, considers that obstinate perseverance in an eternal

gaming as a kind of disease and dérangement of the mind, and, in the shame of her own engagements, sees nothing but an innocent weakness and involuntary inclinations, the destiny of which we find in our hearts.

Review all the passions, and you will see that, in proportion as we are exempted from some one, we see, we condemn it in others : we know the rules which forbid it ; we go even to the rigour against others, upon the observance of duties which interest not our own weaknesses, and we carry our severity beyond even the rule itself. The Pharisees, so instructed in, and so severe upon the guilt of the adulteress, and upon the punishments attached by the law to the infamy of that infidelity, saw not their own pride, their hypocrisy, their implacable hatred, and their secret envy against Jesus Christ. Obscurities are only in our own heart ; and we never begin to doubt upon our duties but when we begin to love those maxims which oppose them.—Second reflection.

In effect, I tell you, in the third place, you believe that the gospel is not so express as we pretend, upon the greater part of the rules which we wish to prescribe to you ; that we carry its severity to excess, and that we make it to say whatever we please. Hear it then itself, my brethren ; we consent that, of all the duties prescribed to you by it, you shall think yourselves obliged to observe only those which are marked there in terms so precise and clear that it is impossible to mistake or misconstrue them : more is not required of you, and we free you from all the rest. Hear it then : “ And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. Whosoever he be of you, that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Woe unto you that are full, for ye shall hunger ; woe unto you that laugh now ; for ye shall mourn and weep. Blessed are they that weep now ; for ye shall laugh. He that loveth his father, his wife, his children, yea, and his life also, better than me, is not worthy of me. I say unto you, that ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice ; and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.”

Do I speak here, my brethren ? Do I come to deceive you by an excess of severity, to add to the gospel, and to bring you only my own thoughts ? Weak creature that I am, I have occasion myself for indulgence ; and if I took, in the weakness of my own heart, the doctrine which I announce to you, alas ! I would speak to you only the language of man : I would tell you that God is too good to punish inclinations which are born, it would appear, with us ; that, to love God, it is not necessary to hate one's self ; that, when rich, we ought to enjoy our wealth, and allow ourselves every gratification. Behold the language which I would hold ; for man, delivered up to himself, can speak only this language of

flesh and blood. But would you believe me, as I have already demanded; would you respect my ministry; would you look upon me as an angel from heaven, who should come to announce to you this new gospel?

That of Jesus Christ speaks another language to you. I have related to you only his own divine words; these are the duties which he prescribes to you in clear and express terms. We consent that you confine your whole piety to these limits, and that you leave all the rest as doubtful, or, at least, commanded in terms less clear, and more susceptible of favourable interpretations. Reckon not among your duties but these holy and incontestable rules; we exact nothing more: limit yourselves to performing what they prescribe to you; and you will see that you shall do more than we even demand of you; and that the most common and most familiar maxims of the gospel go infinitely farther than all our discourses.—Third reflection.

I also say to you, in the fourth place, that if almost all be contested in the world upon the most incontestable duties of Christian piety, it is because the gospel is a book unknown to the greatest part of believers; it is that, through a deplorable abuse, a whole life is passed in acquiring vain learning, equally useless to man, to his happiness, and to his eternity; and the book of the law is never read, in which is contained the knowledge of salvation, the truth which is to deliver us, the light which is to conduct us, the titles of our hopes, the testimony of our immortality, the consolations of our exilement, and the aids of our pilgrimage: it is that, on entering into the world, care is taken to present to us those books in which are explained the rules of that profession to which we are allotted; and that the book of the law, in which the rules of the profession of the Christian are contained, that profession which shall survive all others, alone necessary, and the only one which shall accompany us into eternity; that book, I say, is left in neglect, and enters not into the plan of studies which ought to occupy our earlier years: lastly, it is that fabulous and lascivious histories childishly amuse our leisure; and that the history of God's wonders and mercies upon men, filled with events so grand, so weighty, so interesting, which ought to be the sole occupation, and the whole consolation of our life, does not appear to us worthy even of our curiosity.

I am not surprised, after this, if we have continual occasion to maintain the gospel against the abuses and the prejudices of the world; if we are listened to with the same surprise, when we announce the commonest truths of the Christian morality, as though we announced the belief and the mysteries of those savage and far distant nations, whose countries and manners are hardly known. And if the doctrine of Jesus Christ find the same opposition at present in minds, that it experienced at the birth of faith, it is, that there are Christians to whom the book of the gospel is almost equally unknown as it then was to the

heathens; who scarcely know whether Jesus Christ be come to bring laws to men, and who cannot, for a single moment, support without weariness, the reading of that divine book, the rules of which are so sublime, the promises so consoling, and of which the pagans themselves, who embraced faith, so much admired the beauty and the divine philosophy. Thus, my brethren, read the holy books, and read them with that spirit of faith, of submission, of trust, which the church exacts, and you will soon be as well acquainted with your duties, and with the rules of the manners, as the doctors themselves who teach you.

And, indeed, my brethren, whence comes it, I beg of you, that the first believers carried so far the purity of manners and the holiness of Christianity? Were other maxims announced to them than those which we announce to you? Was another gospel preached to them, more clear and more explicit than that which we preach to you? Nevertheless, they were idolatrous and dissolute nations, who had brought to the truths of faith all the prejudices of the superstitions and of the most infamous voluptuousnesses authorized even by their worship. Did the gospel contain the smallest obscurities favourable to the passions, it surely ought to have been those first disciples of faith who should have made the mistake. Nevertheless, whence comes it they never proposed to the apostles and to their successors the same difficulties which you continually oppose to us, in support of the abuses of the world and of the interests of the passions? Whence comes it, that, with more inclinations and more prejudices than we for pleasures, those blessed believers at once comprehended how far, in order to obey the gospel, it was necessary to deny them to themselves?

Ah! it was that, night and day, they had the book of the law in their hands; it was that patience, and the consolation of the Scriptures, were the sweetest occupation of their faith; it was that the letters of the holy apostles, and the relation of the life and of the maxims of Jesus Christ, were the sole bond and the daily conversations of these infant churches: in a word, it is that, to whoever reads the gospel, whatever regards the duties is quickly decided.—Fourth reflection.

Lastly, I say, even admitting that some obscurities should be found there, doth not the law of God find all its evidence in instruction and in the ministry? The Christian pulpits announce to you the purity of the holy maxims; the pastors publicly preach them; men, full of zeal and of knowledge, convey them down to posterity, in works worthy of the better times of the church: never had the piety of believers more aids; no age ever was more enlightened, or better knew the spirit of faith and the whole extent of duties. We no longer live in those ages of ignorance, in which the rules subsisted only in the abuses which had adulterated them; in which the ministry was often an occasion of error and of scandal

for believers, and in which the priest was considered as more enlightened, whenever he was more superstitious than his people.

It would seem, O my God! that, in order to render us more inexcusable, in proportion as the wickedness of men increases on the one side, the knowledge of the truth, which is to condemn them, augments on the other; in proportion as the manners become corrupted, the rules become more evident; in proportion as faith becomes languid, it is cleared up and purified; like those fires, which, in expiring, give a momentary flash, and never display their lustre with such brilliancy as when on the eve of being extinguished.

Not that there are not still among us many blind guides and prophets who announce their own dreams. But the snare is to be dreaded only by those who are willing to be deceived. When sincerely inclined to seek the Lord, we soon find the hand which knows to lead us to him. It is not, then, properly speaking, the false guides who lead us astray, it is ourselves who seek them, because we wish to err with them: they are not the first authors of our ruin, they are only the encouragers of it: they do not lead us into the path of perdition, they only leave us there; and we are already determined to perish before we apply for their suffrage. In effect, we sensibly feel ourselves the danger and the imprudence of the choice we make: even the more we find the oracle complying, the more we mistrust his lights; the more he respects our passions, the less we respect his ministry; he is frequently made the subject even of our derisions; we turn into ridicule that very indulgence which we have sought; we vaunt the having found a protector so convenient for the human weaknesses; and, through a blindness which cannot be mentioned without tears, the soul and eternal salvation are confided to a man who is believed unworthy, not only of respect, but even of attention and decency; like those Israelites, who, a moment after having bowed the knee to the golden calf, and expected from it their salvation and their deliverance, broke it in pieces with disgrace, and reduced it to ashes.

But, after all, when the ignorance or the weakening of ministers should even be an occasion of error, the examples of the holy undeceive you. You see what, from the beginning, hath been the path of those who have obtained the promises, and whose memory and holy toils we still honour upon the earth: you see that none of them hath accomplished his salvation by that way which the world vaunts as being so safe and so innocent: you see that all the holy have repented, crucified the flesh, desisted the world with its pleasures and maxims: you see that those ages, so opposite to each other for their manners and customs, have never made any change in the manners of the just; that the holy of the first times were the same as those of the last; that the countries, even the most dissimilar for their disposition and behaviour, have produced holy men, all resembling each other; that those of the most distant climates, and the

most different from our own, resemble those of our own nation; that, in every tongue and in every tribe, they have all been the same; lastly, that their situations have been different; that some have wrought out their salvation in obscurity, others in elevation; some in poverty, others in abundance; some in the dissipation of dignities and of public cares, others in silence and in the calm of solitude; in a word, some in the cottage, others on the throne; but that the cross, violence, and self-denial hath been the common path of all.

What then art thou, to pretend to reach heaven by other ways? And thou flatterest thyself that, in that crowd of illustrious servants of the living God, thou alone shalt be privileged. My God! with what lustre hast thou not surrounded the truth, in order to render man inexcusable! His conscience shows it to him; thy holy law guards it for him; the voice of the church makes it to resound in his ears; the example of the holy incessantly places it before his eyes; every thing rises up against guilt; all take the interests of thy holy law against his false peace; from every quarter proceed rays of light which go to bear the truth even to the bottom of his soul: no place, no situation can protect him from those divine sparks emitted from thy bosom, which every where pursue him, and which, in enlightening, rack him: the truth, which ought to deliver him, renders him unhappy; and, unwilling to love its light, he is forced, beforehand, to feel its just severity.

What then, my dear hearer, prevents the truth from triumphing in your heart? Wherefore do you change, into an inexhaustible source of cruel remorse, lights which ought to be, within you, the whole consolation of your sorrows? Since, by a consequence of the riches of God's mercy upon your soul, you cannot succeed, like so many impious and hardened hearts, to stifle that internal monitor which incessantly recalls you to order and duty, why will you obstinately withstand the happiness of your lot? Why so many efforts to defend you from yourself, so many starts and flights to shun yourself? At last, reconcile your hearts with your lights, your conscience with your manners, yourself with the law of God: behold the only secret of attaining to that peace of heart which you seek. Turn yourself on every side, you must always come to that. Observance of the law is the true happiness of man; it is deceiving himself to look upon it as a yoke; it alone places the heart at liberty. Whatever favours our passions, sharpens our ills, increases our troubles, multiplies our bonds, and aggravates our slavery; the law of God alone, in repressing them, places us in order,—quiets, cures, and delivers us. Such is the destiny of sinful man, to be incapable of happiness here below but by overcoming his passions; to attain by violence alone to the true pleasures of the heart, and afterward to that eternal peace prepared for those who shall have loved the law of the Lord.

SERMON XXV.

IMMUTABILITY OF THE LAW OF GOD.

“ And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me ? ”—JOHN viii. 46.

It is not enough to have defended the evidence of the law of God against the affected ignorance of the sinners who violate it ; it is necessary likewise to establish its immutability against all the pretexts which seem to authorize the world to dispense itself from its holy rules.

Jesus Christ is not satisfied with announcing to the Pharisees, that the truth which they knew shall one day judge them : that in vain they concealed it from themselves ; and that the guilt of the truth, known and contemned, would be for ever upon their head. It is through the evidence of the law that he at first recalls them to their own conscience ; he afterward accuses them of having struck even at its immutability ; of substituting human customs and traditions in place of the perpetuity of its rules ; of accommodating them to times, to circumstances, and to interests ; and declares to them that, even to the end of ages, a single iota shall not be changed in his law ; that heaven and earth shall pass away, but that his law and his holy word shall for ever be the same.

And behold, my brethren, the abuses which still reign among us against the law of God. We have shown to you that, in spite of the doubts and the obscurities which our lusts have spread over our duties, the light of the law, always superior to our passions, dissipated, in spite of ourselves, these obscurities, and that we were never hearty in the transgressions which we tried to justify to ourselves. But it is little to be willing, like the Pharisees, to darken the evidence of the law : like them, we likewise strike at its immutability ; and, as if the law of God could change with the manners of the age, the differences of conditions, the necessity of situations, we believe that we can accommodate it to these three different circumstances, and in them find pretexts, either to mollify its severity or altogether to violate its precepts.

First. In effect, the heart of men is changeable ; every age sees new customs spring up among us ; times and the customs always determine our manners. Now, the law of God is immutable in its duration, always the same in all times and in all places ; and,

by this first character of immutability, it alone ought to be the constant and perpetual rule of our manners.—First reflection.

Secondly. The heart of man is vain: whatever levels us with the rest of men, wounds our pride; we love distinctions and preferences; we believe that, in the elevation of rank and of birth, we find privileges against the law. Now, the law of God is immutable in its extent; it levels all stations and all conditions; it is the same for the great and for the people, for the prince and for the subject; and, by this second character of immutability, it ought to recall to the same duties that variety of stations and conditions which spreads so much inequality over the detail of manners and of the rules.—Second reflection.

Lastly. The heart of man connects every thing with itself; he persuades himself that his interests ought to be preferred to the law and to the interests of God himself; the slightest inconveniencies are reasons, in his eyes, against the rule. Now, the law of God is immutable in all situations of life; and, by this last character of immutability, there is neither perplexity, nor inconveniency, nor apparent necessity, which can dispense us from its precepts.—Last reflection.

And behold the three pretexts, which the world opposes to the immutability of the law of God, overthrown: the pretext of manners and customs; the pretext of rank and of birth; the pretext of situations and inconveniencies. The law of God is immutable in its durations; therefore, the manners and the customs can never change it: the law of God is immutable in its extent; therefore, the difference of ranks and of conditions leaves it every where the same: the law of God is immutable in all situations; therefore, inconveniencies, perplexities, never justify the smallest transgression of it.

PART I.—One of the most urgent and most usual reproaches which the first supporters of religion formerly made to the heathens, was the instability of their moral system, and the continual fluctuations of their doctrine. As the fulness of truth was not in vain philosophy, and as they drew not their lights, said Tertullian, from that sovereign reason which enlightens all minds, and which is the immutable teacher of the truth, but from the corruption of their heart and the vanity of their thoughts, they qualified good and evil according to their caprices, and, among them, vice and virtue were almost arbitrary names. Nevertheless, continues this father, the most inseparable character of truth is that of being always the same: good and evil take their immutability from that of God himself, whom they glorify or insult; his wisdom, his holiness, his righteousness, are the only eternal rules of our manners: and it belongs not to men, at their pleasure, to change what men have not established, and what is more ancient than men themselves.

Now, it was not surprising that morality had nothing determinate, in the heathen schools, delivered up to the pride and to the variations of the human mind: it was vanity, and not the truth, which made philosophers; the rules changed with the ages; new times brought new laws: in a word, the tenets did not change the manners; it was the change of manners which drew after it that of the tenets.

But what is astonishing is, that Christians, who have received from heaven the eternal and immutable law which regulates their manners, believe it to be equally changeable as the morality of philosophers: that they persuade themselves that the rigorous duties which the gospel at first prescribed to the primitive ages of the church, are mollified with the relaxation of manners, and are no longer made for the weakness and the corruption of our ages.

In effect, the gospel, the law of Jesus Christ, is immutable in its duration: seeing every thing change around it, it alone changes not; the duties which it prescribes to us, founded upon the wants and upon the nature of man, are, like it, of all times and of all places. Every thing changes upon the earth, because every thing partakes of the mutability of its origin: empires and states have their rise and their fall; arts and sciences fall or spring up with the ages; customs continually change with the taste of the people, and with climates; from on high, in his immutability, God seems to sport with human affairs, by leaving them in an eternal revolution; the ages to come will destroy what we, with so much anxiety rear up; we destroy what our fathers had thought worthy of an eternal duration; and, in order to teach us in what estimation we ought to hold things here below, God permitteth that they have nothing determinate or solid but that very inconstancy which incessantly agitates them.

But, amid all the changes of manners and ages, the law of God always remains the immutable rule of ages and of manners. Heaven and earth shall pass away; but the holy words of the law shall never pass away: such as the first believers received them at the birth of faith, such have we them at present; such shall our descendants one day receive them; lastly, such shall the blessed in heaven eternally love and adore them. The fervour or the licentiousness of ages adds or diminishes nothing to their indulgence, or from their severity; the zeal or the complaisance of men renders them neither more austere nor more accommodating; the intolerant rigour, or the excessive relaxation of opinions and tenets leaves them all the wise sobriety of their rules; and they form that eternal gospel which the angel, in the Revelation, announces from on high in heaven, from the beginning, to every tongue and to every nation.

Nevertheless, my brethren, when, in the manners of the primitive believers, we sometimes represent to you all the duties of the

gospel exactly fulfilled,—their freedom from the world, their absence from theatres and public pleasures, their assiduity in the temples, the modesty and the decency of their dress, their charity for their brethren, their indifference for all perishable things, their continual desire of going to be reunited to Jesus Christ; in a word, that simple, retired, and mortified life, sustained by fervent prayer, and by the consolation of the holy books, and such, in effect, as the gospel prescribes to all the disciples of faith;—when we bring forward to you, I say, these ancient models, in order to make you feel, by the difference between the primitive manners and yours, how distant you are from the kingdom of God; far from being alarmed at finding yourselves dissimilar to such a degree, that hardly could it be believed that you were disciples of the same Master and followers of the same law; you reproach us with continual recalling, even to weariness, these primitive times, of never speaking but of the primitive church, as if it were possible to regulate our manners, upon manners of which every trace hath long been done away; impracticable at present among us, and which the times and customs have universally abolished. You say, that men must be taken as they are; that it were to be wished that the primitive fervour had been kept up in the church; but that every thing becomes relaxed and weakened through time, and that, to pretend to bring us back to the life of the primitive ages, is not holding out means of salvation, but is merely preaching up that nobody can now pretend to it.

But I demand of you, in the first place, my brethren, if the times and the years, which have so much adulterated the purity of Christianity, have adulterated that of the gospel? Are the rules become more pliable and more favourable to the passions, because men are become more sensual and more voluptuous? And hath the relaxation of manners softened the maxims of Jesus Christ? When he hath foretold in the gospel that, in the latter times, that is to say, in the ages in which we have the misfortune to live, faith should almost no longer be found upon the earth; that his name should hardly be known there, that his maxims should be destroyed, that the duties should be incompatible with the customs, and that the just themselves should allow themselves to be almost infected by the universal contagion, and to be dragged away by the torrent of example; hath he then added, that, in order to accommodate himself to the corruption of these latter times, he would relax something of the severity of his gospel; that he would consent that customs, established by the ignorance and the licentiousness of the ages, should succeed to the rules and to the duties of his doctrine; that he would then exact of his disciples infinitely less than he exacted at the birth of faith; and that his kingdom, which, at first, was promised only to force, should then be granted to indolence and laziness? Hath he added this, I demand of you? On the contrary, he warns his disciples that then, in these latter

times, it will more than ever be necessary to pray, to fast, to retire to the mountains, in order to shun the general corruption; he warns them that woe unto those who shall then remain exposed amid the world; that those alone shall be safe who shall divest themselves of all, and who shall fly from amid the cities: and he concludes by exhorting them once more to watch and to pray without ceasing, in order not to be included in the general condemnation.

* And, in effect, my brethren, the more disorders augment, the more ought piety to be fervent and watchful; the more we are surrounded with dangers, the more doth prayer, retreat, and mortification become necessary to us. The licentiousness of the present manners adds still new obligations to those of our fathers; and, far from the path of salvation having become more easy than in those former times, we shall perish with a moderate virtue, which, supported then by the common example, would perhaps have been sufficient to secure our salvation.

Besides, my brethren, I demand of you, in the second place, Do you really believe that the rigorous precepts of the gospel, those maxims of the cross, of violence, of self-denial, of contempt for the world, have been made only for the primitive ages of faith? Do you believe that Jesus Christ hath destined all the rigours of his doctrine for those chaste, innocent, charitable, and fervent men, who lived in these happy times of the church; those men who denied themselves every pleasure, those primitive heroes of religion, who, almost all, preserved, even to the end, the grace of regeneration which had made them Christians? What! my brethren, Jesus Christ would have rewarded their zeal and their fidelity only by aggravating their yoke, and he would have reserved all his indulgence for the corrupted men of our ages? Jesus Christ would have made strict laws of reserve, of modesty, of retirement, only for those primitive Christian women who renounced all to please him; who divided themselves only with the Lord and their husbands; who, shut up in the inclosures of their houses, brought up their children in faith and in piety? And he would exact less at present of those sensual, voluptuous, and worldly women, who continually wound our eyes by the indecency of their dress, and who corrupt the heart by the looseness of their manners, and by the snares which they lay for innocence? And where would here be that so much vaunted equity and wisdom of the Christian morality? More should then be exacted of him who owes less. The transgressions of the law should then dispense from its severity those who violate it. It would suffice to have passions, to be entitled to gratify them. The way of heaven would be rendered easy to sinners, while all its roughness would be kept for the just. And the more vices men should have, the less should they have occasion for virtues.

Again allow me, my brethren, to add, in the last place, if the

change of manners could change the rules, if customs could justify abuses, the eternal law of God should then accommodate itself to the inconstancy of the times, and to the ridiculous taste of men; a gospel would then be necessary for every age and for every nation; for our customs were not established in the times of our fathers, and undoubtedly they shall not pass to our last descendants; they are not common to all the nations, who, like us, worship Jesus Christ. Therefore, these customs cannot either become our rule or change it, for the rule is of all times and of all places; therefore, new manners do not form a new gospel, seeing we should anathematize even an angel who should come to announce to us a new one; and that the gospel would be no longer but a human and little-to-be-trusted law for men, if it could change with men; therefore, the rules and duties are not to be judged by manners and customs, but the manners and customs are to be judged by the duties and rules; therefore, it is the law of God which ought to be the constant rule of the times, and not the variation of times to become even the rule of the law of God.

No longer tell us, then, my brethren, that the times are no longer the same; but the law of God, is it not? That you cannot reform manners universally established: but you are not charged with the reformation of the universe: change yourself; save your own soul with which you are intrusted: behold all that is exacted of you. Lastly, that the Christians of the primitive times had either more force or more grace than we; ah! they had more faith, more constancy, more love for Jesus Christ, more contempt for the world: behold all that distinguished them from us.

Have we not the same sources of grace as they, the same ministry, the same altar, the same victim? Do the mercies of the Lord not flow with the same abundance upon his church? Have we not still among us pure and holy souls, who renew the fervour and faith of the primitive times, and who are living proofs of the possibility of the duties, and of the mercies of the Lord upon his people? "Tell us no longer, then," says the Spirit of God, "that the former days were better than these; for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this." To follow Jesus Christ, sufferance must always be required. In all ages, it hath been necessary to bear his cross, not to conform to the corrupted age, and to live as strangers upon the earth: in all times, the holy have had the same passions as we to resist, the same abuses to shun, the same snares to dread, the same obstacles to surmount: and if there be any difference here, it is, that, in former times, it was not merely arbitrary customs which they had to shun, nor the derisions of the world which they had only to dread in declaring for Jesus Christ; it was the most cruel punishments to which they must expose themselves; it was the power of the Cæsars, and the rage of tyrants, which they must despise; it was superstitions, become respectable

through their antiquity, countenanced by the laws of the empire, and by the consent of almost all the people, which they had to shake off; it was, in a word, the whole universe which they had to arm against themselves. But the faith of these pious men was stronger than punishments, than the tyrants, than the Cæsars, than the whole world; and our faith cannot hold out against the absurdity of customs or the puerility of derision; and the gospel, which could formerly make martyrs, scarcely at present can it form a believer. The law of God is then immutable in its duration; always the same in all times and in all places; but it is likewise immutable in its extent, and the same for all stations and conditions.—This is my second reflection.

PART II.—The most essential character of the law of Jesus Christ, is that of uniting, under the same rules, the Jew and the Gentile, the Greek and the Barbarian, the great and the people, the prince and the subject; in it there is no longer exception of persons. The law of Moses, at least in its customs and in its ceremonies, was given only to a single people: but Jesus Christ is a universal legislator; his law, as his death, is for all men. He came, of all people to make only one people; of all stations and of all conditions to form only one body: it is the same spirit which animates it, the same laws which govern it; different functions may there be exercised, different places, more or less honourable, be occupied; but it is the same spring which rules all the members of it. All these hateful distinctions, which formerly divided men, are destroyed by the church; that holy law knows neither poor nor rich, neither noble nor base-born, neither master nor slave; it sees in men only the title of believer, which equals them all; it distinguishes them not by their names or by their offices, but by their virtues; and the greatest in its sight are those who are the most holy.

Nevertheless, a second illusion, pretty common against the immutability of the law of God, is the persuasion that it changes and becomes mollified in favour of rank and of birth; that its obligations are less rigid for persons born to elevation; and that the obstacles, which high places and the manners attached to grandeur throw in the way of the observance of the strict duties of the gospel, and which render the practice of them almost impossible to the great, likewise render their transgression more innocent. They figure to themselves that the abuses, permitted, in all times, by custom to the great, are likewise accorded to them by the law of God, and that there is another path of salvation for them than for the people. Thence, all the laws of the church violated; the times and the days consecrated to abstinence, confounded with the rest of days, are looked upon as privileges refused to the vulgar, and reserved solely for rank and birth: thence, to live only for the

senses, to be attentive only to satisfy them, to refuse nothing to taste, to vanity, to curiosity, to idleness, to ambition, to make a god of one's self; the same prosperity, which facilitates all these excesses, excuses and justifies them.

But, my brethren, I have already said it, the gospel is the law of all men: high and low, you have all promised, upon the sacred founts, to observe it. The church, in receiving you into the number of her children, hath not proposed to the great other vows to make, and other rules to practise, than to the common people: you have all there made the same promises; all sworn, in the face of the altars, to observe the same gospel. The church hath not then demanded of you, if, by your birth according to the flesh, you were great, or of the common people; but if, by your regeneration in Jesus Christ, you meant to be faithful, and to engage yourself to follow his law: upon the vow which you have made of it, she hath placed the holy gospel upon your head, in order to mark that you submitted yourself to that sacred yoke.

Now, my brethren, all the duties of the gospel are reduced to two points. Some are proposed in order to resist and to weaken that fund of corruption which we bear from our birth; the others in order to perfect that first grace of the Christian which we have received in baptism; that is to say, the one in order to destroy in us the old Adam, the other in order to make Jesus Christ to grow there. Violence, self-denial, and mortification regard the first: prayer, retirement, vigilance, contempt for the world, desire of invisible riches, are comprised in the second: behold the whole gospel. Now, I demand of you, what is there in these two descriptions of duties from which rank or birth can dispense you?

Ought you to pray less than the other believers? Have you fewer favours to ask than they, fewer obstacles to overcome, fewer snares to avoid, fewer desires to resist? Alas! the more you are exalted, the more do dangers augment, the more do occasions of sin spring up under your feet, the more is the world beloved, the more doth every thing favour your passions, the more doth every thing militate against your good desires; it is in a situation so terrible for salvation that you find privileges which render it more mild and more commodious. The more, therefore, that you are exalted, the more doth mortification become necessary to you; for, the more that pleasures corrupt your heart, the more is vigilance necessary, because the dangers are more frequent; the more ought faith to be lively, because every thing around you weakens and extinguishes it; the more ought prayer to be continual, because the grace, in order to support you, ought to be more powerful; humility of heart more heroic, because the attachment to things here below is more unavoidable: lastly, the more you are exalted, the more doth salvation become difficult to you; this is the only

privilege you can expect from elevation. Also, thou often warnest us, great God, that thy kingdom is only for the poor and the lowly: thou speakest not of the difficulty of salvation for the great and the powerful, but in terms which would seem to deprive them of all hope of pretending to it, if we knew not that thou wishest the salvation of all men, and that thy grace is still more powerful for our sanctification than prosperity for our corruption.

And surely, my brethren, if grandeur and elevation were to render our condition more fortunate and more favourable with regard to salvation, in vain would the doctrine of Jesus Christ teach us to dread grandeurs and human prosperities; in vain would it be said to us, that blessed are they who weep, and who suffer here below; that woe unto those who laugh now, for they shall mourn and weep; and unto those who are rich, for they have received their consolation; and that, to receive our reward in this world, through the transitory riches and honours which we there receive, is almost a certain sign that we are not to receive it in the other. On the contrary, grandeur and prosperity would become a state worthy of envy, even according to the rules of faith: against the maxim of Jesus Christ, it would be necessary to call those happy who are immersed in pleasures and in opulence; since, besides the comforts of a smiling fortune, they would likewise find there a way of salvation more mild and more easy than in an obscure state; those who suffer, and who weep here below, would then be the most miserable of all men; since, to all the bitterness of their condition, would likewise be added those of a gospel, more rigorous and more austere for them than for the persons born in abundance. What new gospel would it then be necessary to announce to you, if such were the rules of the morality of Jesus Christ!

But I say not even enough. Granting that prosperity should not exact more rigid precautions in consequence of the dangers which surround it, it would exact, at least, more rigorous reparations; through the crimes and excesses which are inseparable from it. Alas! my brethren, is it not among you that the passions no longer know any bounds; that the jealousies are more keen, the hatreds more lasting, revenge more honourable, evil-speaking more cruel, ambition more boundless, and voluptuousness more shameful? Is it not among the great that the most shocking debauchery even refines upon the common crimes; that dissipations become an art; and that, in order to prevent those disgusts inseparable from licentiousness, resources are sought in guilt against guilt itself? What indulgence, then, can you promise yourselves on the part of religion? If the most righteous be responsible for the whole law, should the greatest sinners be discharged from it? Measure your duties upon your crimes, and not upon your rank; judge of yourselves by the insults which you

have offered to God, and not by the vain homages which are paid to you by men; number the days and the years of your crimes which shall be the eternal titles of your condemnation, and not the years and the ages of the antiquity of your race, which are only vain titles written upon the ashes of your tombs; examine what you owe to God, and not what men owe to you. If the world were to judge you, you might promise yourselves distinctions and preferences; but the world shall itself be judged; and he, who will judge it and you also, shall distinguish men only by their vices or by their virtues. He will not demand the names, he will demand only the deeds: calculate thereupon the distinctions which you ought to expect.

Thus, we see not that Jesus Christ, in the gospel, proposed to the princes of the people, and to the grandees of Jerusalem, other maxims than to the citizens of Judea, and to his disciples, all taken from the lowest ranks of the people; he speaks in the capital of Judea, and before all that Palestine held the most illustrious, as he speaks upon the borders of the sea, or upon the mountains, to that obscure populace which followed him; his maxims are not changed with the rank of those who listened to him. The cross, violence, contempt of the world, self-denial, abstinence from pleasures: behold what he announces at Jerusalem, the seat of kings, as at Nazareth, the most obscure place of Judea; to that young man who was so rich, as to the children of Zebedee, whose only inheritance was their nets; to the sisters of Lazarus, of a distinguished rank in Palestine, as to the woman of Samaria, of a more obscure condition. His enemies themselves confessed that this was his peculiar character, and were forced to render him this justice, that he taught the way of God in truth, and that he had no respect of rank or of persons.

What do I say? Even after his death the gospel seemed a doctrine sent down from heaven, only because that, announcing to the great and to the powerful sorrowful and crucifying maxims, apparently so incompatible with their station, they, nevertheless, submitted to the yoke of Jesus Christ, and embraced a law which, amid all their prosperity and abundance, permitted to them no more pleasures and comforts here below than to the common and simple people. And, in effect, why should the first defenders of faith have regarded the conversions of Cæsars, and of the powerful of the age, as a proof of the truth and of the divinity of the gospel? What would there be so surprising, that the rich and the powerful had embraced a doctrine which would distinguish them from the people by a greater indulgence; which, while it would prescribe tears, fasting, self-denial, to others, would relax in favour of the great, and would consent that profusions, pleasures, sensualities, gaming, public places, all so rigorously forbidden to common believers, become an innocent occupation for them; and that what is a road to perdition for others, should for them alone be a

road of salvation? It would then be the wisdom of the age which would have established the gospel, and not the folly of the cross; it would be the artifices and the deferences of men, and not the arm of the Almighty; it would be flesh and blood, and not the power of God; and the conversion of the universe would have nothing more wonderful, than the establishment of superstitions and of sects.

And candidly, my brethren, if the gospel had distinctions to make, and condescensions to grant; if the law of God could relax something of its severity, would it be in favour of those who are born to rank and to abundance? What! Would it preserve all its rigour for the poor and the unfortunate? Would it condemn to tears, to fastings, to penitence, to poverty, those unfortunate souls whose days are mingled with almost nothing but suffering and sorrow, and whose only comfort is that of eating with temperance the bread earned with the sweat of their brow? And would it discharge from their rigorous duties the grandees of the earth? And would it exact nothing painful of those whose days are only diversified by the variety of their pleasures? And would it reserve all its indulgence for those soft and voluptuous souls, who live only for the senses, who believe they are upon the earth for the sole purpose of enjoying an iniquitous felicity, and who know no other god than themselves?

Great God! It is the blindness which thy justice sheds over human prosperities; after having corrupted the heart, they likewise extinguish all the lights of faith. It rarely happens but that the great, so enlightened upon the interests of the earth, upon the ways to fortune and to glory, upon the secret springs which give motion to courts and empires, live in a profound ignorance of the ways of salvation. They have been so much accustomed to preferences by the world, that they are persuaded they ought likewise to find them in religion. Because men do them credit for the smallest steps taken in their favour, they believe, O my God! that thou regardest them with the same eyes as men; and that, in fulfilling some weak duties of piety, in taking some small steps for thee, they go even beyond what they owe to thee; as if their smallest religious works acquired a new merit from their rank; in place of which, they acquire it, in thy sight, only from that faith and from that charity which animates them.

It is thus that the law of God, immutable in its extent, is the same for all stations, for the great and for the people. But it is likewise immutable in all the situations of life; and it is neither a difficult conjecture, nor perplexity, nor apparent danger, nor pretext of public good, in which to violate, or even to soften it, becomes a legitimate and necessary modification. This was to have been my last reflection; but I abridge and go on.

Yes, my brethren, every thing becomes reason and necessity

against our duties, that is to say, against the law of God ; situations the least dangerous, conjunctures the least embarrassing, furnish us with pretexts to violate it with safety, and persuade us that the law of God would be unjust, and would exact too much of men, if, on these occasions, it were not to use indulgence with regard to us.

Thus, the law of God commands us to render to each that which is his due ; to retrench, in order to pay those debts incurred through our excesses, and not to permit that our unfortunate creditors suffer by our senseless profusions. Nevertheless, the general persuasion is, that, in a grand place, it is necessary to support the éclat of a public dignity ; that the honour of the master requires that mean and sorry externals disgrace not the elevated post which he hath confided to us ; that we are responsible to the sovereign, to the state, and to ourselves, before being so to individuals ; and that public property is then superior to the particular rule.

Thus, the law of God enjoins us to tear out the eye which giveth offence, and to cast it from us ; to separate ourselves from an object which, in all times, hath been the rock of our innocence, and near to which we can never be in safety. Nevertheless, the noise which a rupture would make, the suspicions which it might awaken in the public mind, the ties of society, of relationship, of friendship, which seem to render the separation impossible without éclat, persuade us that it is not then commanded, and that a danger, become as if necessary, becomes a security to us.

Thus, the law of God commands us to render glory to the truth ; not to betray our conscience by iniquitously withholding it ; that is to say, not to dissemble it, through human interests, from those to whom our duty obliges us to announce it. Nevertheless, we persuade ourselves that truths, which would be unavailing, ought to be suppressed ; and that a liberty, of which the only fruit would be that of risking our fortune, and of rendering ourselves hated, without rendering those better to whom we owe the truth, would rather be an indiscretion than a law of charity and of justice.

Thus, the law of God prescribes to us to have in view, in public cares, only the utility of the people, for whom alone the authority is intrusted to us ; to consider ourselves as charged with the interests of the multitude, as the avengers of injustice, the refuge against oppression and poverty. Nevertheless, we believe ourselves to be situated in conjunctures in which it is necessary to shut our eyes upon iniquity, to support abuses which we know to be untenable, to sacrifice conscience and duty to the necessity of the times, and, without scruple, to violate the clearest rules, because the inconveniencies, which would arise from their observance, seem to render their transgression necessary. Lastly, human pretexts, interests, and inconveniencies, always

make the balance to turn to their side; and duty, and the law of God, always yield to conjunctures and to the necessity of the times.

Now, my brethren, I do not tell you, in the first place, that the interest of salvation is the greatest of all interests; that fortune, life, reputation, the whole world itself, put in comparison with your soul, ought to be reckoned as nothing; and that though heaven and the earth should change, that the whole world should perish, and every evil burst upon our head, these inconveniencies would always be infinitely less than the transgression of the law of God.

Secondly. I do not tell you that the law hath always, at least, security in its favour against the pretext, because the obligation of the law is clear and precise, in place of which, the pretext, which introduces the exception, is always doubtful; and that, consequently, to prefer the pretext to the law, is to leave a safe way, and to make choice of another, for which no person can be answerable to you.

Lastly. I do not tell you that, the gospel having been only given to us in order to detach us from the world and from ourselves, and to make us die to all our terrestrial affections, it is deceiving ourselves to consider, as inconveniencies, certain consequences of that divine law, fatal either to our fortune, to our glory, or to our ease, and to persuade ourselves that it is then permitted to us to have recourse to expedients which mollify it, and conciliate its severity with the interests of our self-love. Jesus Christ hath never meant to prescribe to us easy and commodious duties, and which take nothing from the passions; he came to bring the sword and separation to hearts, to divide man from his relations, from his friends, from himself; to hold out to us a way rugged and difficult to keep. Thus, what we call inconveniencies and unheard-of extremities, are, at bottom, only the spirit of the law, the most natural consequences of the rules, and the end that Jesus Christ hath intended in prescribing them to us.

That young man of the gospel regarded, as an inconveniency, the being unable to go to pay the last duties to his father, and to gather in what he had succeeded to, if he followed Jesus Christ; and it was precisely that sacrifice which Jesus Christ exacted of him. Those men invited to the feast looked upon as an inconveniency, the one to forsake his country-house, the other his trade, the last to delay his marriage; and it was in order to break asunder all these ties, which bound them still too much to the earth, that the father of the family invited them to come and seat themselves at the feast. Esther, at first, considered as an inconveniency to go to appear before Ahasuerus, contrary to the law of the empire, and to declare herself a daughter of Abraham, and protectress of the children of Israel; and, nevertheless, as the wise Mordecai represented to her, the

Lord had raised her to that point of glory and prosperity only for that important occasion. Whatever is a constraint to us, appears a reason against the law; and we take for inconveniencies the obligations themselves.

Besides, my brethren, is it not certain that the principal merit of our duties is derived from the obstacles which never fail to oppose their practice; that the most essential character of the law of Jesus Christ is that of exciting against it all the reasons of flesh and blood; and virtue would resemble vice, if outwardly and inwardly it found in us only facilities and conveniencies? The righteous, my brethren, have never been peaceable observers of the holy rules. Abel found inconveniencies in the jealousy of his own brother; Noah in the unbelief of his own citizens; Abraham in the disputes of his servants; Joseph in the dangers to which he was exposed through his love of modesty and the rage of a faithless woman; Daniel in the customs of a profane court; the pious Esdras in the manners of the age; the noble Eleazar in the snares of a specious temperament: lastly, follow the history of the just, and you will see that, in all ages, all those who have walked in the precepts and in the ordinances of the law, have experienced inconveniencies in which righteousness itself seemed to authorize the transgression of the rules; have encountered obstacles in their way, where the lights of human reason seemed to decide in favour of the pretext against the law; in a word, where virtue seemed to condemn virtue itself: and that, consequently, it is not new for the law of God to meet with obstacles; but that it is new to pretend to find in these obstacles legitimate excuses for dispensing ourselves from the law of God.

And the decisive argument which confirms this truth is, that our passions alone form the inconveniencies which authorize us in seeking mollifications to our duties and to the law of God; and that views of fortune, of glory, of favour, engage us in certain proceedings, justify them in our eyes, in spite of the evidence of rules which condemn them, only because we love our glory and our fortune more than the rules themselves.

Let us die to the world and to ourselves, my brethren; let us restore to our heart the sentiments of love and of preference, which it owes to its Lord: then every thing shall appear possible; difficulties shall, in an instant, be done away; and what we call inconveniencies either shall no longer be reckoned as any thing, or we shall consider them as inseparable proofs of virtue, and not as the excuses of vice. How easy is it to find pretexts when we love them! Arguments are never wanting to the passions. Self-love is always ready in placing, at least, appearances on its side; it always changes our weaknesses into duties, and our inclinations soon become legitimate claims; and what in this is most deplorable, says St. Augustine, is, that we call in even religion itself in aid of our passions; that we draw motives from piety, in order to violate

piety itself; and that we have recourse to holy pretexts to authorize iniquitous desires.

It is thus, O my God! that almost our whole life is passed in seducing ourselves; that we employ the lights of our reason only in darkening those of faith; that we consume the few days we have to pass upon the earth only in seeking authorities for our passions, in imagining situations in which we believe ourselves to be enabled to disobey thee with impunity; that is to say, that all our cares, all our reflections, all the superiority of our views, of our lights, of our talents, all the wisdom of our measures and of our counsels, are limited to the accomplishment of our ruin, and to conceal from ourselves our eternal destruction.

Let us shun this evil, my brethren; let us reckon no way safe for us but that of the rules and of the law; and let us remember that there shall be more sinners condemned through the pretexts which seem to authorize the transgressions of the law, than through the avowed crimes which violate it. It is thus that the law of God, after having been the rule of our manners upon the earth, shall be their eternal consolation in heaven.

SERMON XXVI.

FOR CHRISTMAS DAY.

“For, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”—LUKE ii. 10, 11.

BEHOLD, in effect, the grand tidings which, for four thousand years, the world had expected; behold the grand event which so many prophets had foretold, so many ceremonies had figured, so many righteous had awaited, and which all nature seemed to promise, and to hasten by the universal corruption spread through all flesh; behold the grand blessing which God's goodness prepared for men, after the infidelity of their first parent had rendered them all subject to sin and death.

The Saviour, the Christ, the Lord, at last appears this day on the earth. The over-shadowed brings forth the righteous; the star of Jacob appears to the universe; the sceptre is departed from Judah, and he, who was to come, is arrived; the age of darkness

is accomplished; the promised sign of the Lord to Judea hath appeared; a virgin has conceived and brought forth, and out of Bethlehem comes the leader who is to enlighten and govern all Israel.

What new blessings, my brethren, doth this birth not announce to men! It would not, during so many ages, have been announced, awaited, desired; it would not have formed the religion of a whole people, the object of all the prophecies, the unravelling of all the figures, the sole end of all the proceedings of God toward men, had it not been the grandest mark of his love which he could give them. What a blessed night is that which presides at this divine bringing forth! It hath seen the light of the world shine forth in its darkness; the heavens resound with joy and songs of thanksgiving.

But, my brethren, we must participate in the blessings which this birth is meant to bring us, in order to enter into all the transports of delight which it spreads through the heavens and the earth. The common joy is founded only on the common salvation which is offered to us; and if, in spite of this aid, we still obstinately persist in perishing, the church weeps over us, and we mingle mourning and sorrow with that joy with which such blessed tidings inspire it.

Now, what are the inestimable blessings which this birth brings to men? The heavenly spirits come themselves to make it known to the shepherds; it comes to render glory to God, and peace to men; and behold the whole foundation of this grand mystery laid open. To God, that glory of which men had wished to deprive him; to men, that peace of which they had never ceased their struggles to deprive themselves.

PART I.—Man had been placed upon the earth for the sole purpose of rendering, to the Author of his being, that glory and that homage which were his due. All called him to these duties; and every thing, which ought to have called, removed him from them. To his Supreme Majesty he owed his adoration and his homage; to his paternal goodness, his love; to his infinite wisdom, the sacrifice of his reason and of his lights. These duties, engraven on his heart, and born with him, were still also incessantly proclaimed to him by all creatures; he could neither listen to himself, nor to all things around him, without finding them; nevertheless, he forgets, he effaces them from his heart. He no longer saw, in the work, that honour and that worship which were due to the sovereign Architect; in the blessings with which he loaded him, that love which he owed to his benefactor; in the obscurity spread through even natural causes, that impossibility, much less, of fathoming the secrecies of God, and that mistrust, in which he ought to live, of his own lights. Idolatry, therefore, rendered to the creature that worship which the Creator had reserved for him-

self alone: the synagogue honoured him from the lips, and that love, which it owed to him, was confined to external homages totally unworthy of him: philosophy lost itself in its own ideas, measured the lights of God by those of men, and vainly believed that reason, which knew not itself, was able to know all truth: three sores, spread over the face of the whole earth. In a word, God was no longer either known or glorified, and man was no longer known to himself.

And, first, to what excesses had idolatry not carried its profane worship? The death of a person loved, quickly exalted him to a divinity; and his vile ashes, on which his nothingness was stamped in characters so indelible, became themselves the title of his glory and of his immortality. Conjugal love made gods to itself; impure love followed the example, and determined to have its altars: the wife and the mistress, the husband and the lover, had temples, priests, and sacrifices. The folly, or the general corruption, adopted a worship so ridiculous and so abominable; the whole universe was infected with it; the majesty of the laws of the empire authorized it; and the magnificence of the temples, the pomp of the sacrifices, the immense riches of the images, rendered that folly respectable. Every people was jealous in having their gods; in default of man they offered incense to the beast; impure homages became the worship of these impure divinities; the towns, the mountains, the fields, the deserts, were stained with them, and beheld superb edifices consecrated to pride, to lasciviousness, to revenge. The number of the divinities equalled that of the passions; the gods were almost as numerous as the men; all became god with man; and the true God was the only one unknown to man.

The world was plunged, almost from its creation, in the horror of this darkness; every age had added to it fresh impieties. In proportion as the appointed time of the Deliverer drew near, the depravity of men seemed to increase. Rome itself, mistress of the universe, gave way to all the different worships of the nations she had subjugated; and beheld, exalted within her walls, the different idols of so many conquered countries, that they became the public monuments of her folly and blindness, rather than of her victories.

But, after all, though all flesh had corrupted his way, God no longer wished to pour out his wrath upon men, nor to exterminate them by a fresh deluge; he wished to save them. He had placed in the heavens the sign of his covenant with the world; and that sign was not the shining, though vulgar rainbow which appears in the clouds; it was Jesus Christ his only Son, the Word made flesh, the true seal of the eternal covenant, and the sole light which comes to enlighten the whole world.

He appears on the earth, and restores to his Father that glory of which the impiety of a public worship had wished to deprive

him. The homage rendered to him, by his holy soul united to the world, at once makes amends to his Supreme Majesty for all the honours which the universe had hitherto denied him, in order to prostitute them to a creature. A Man-God adorer renders more glory to the Divinity than all idolatrous ages and nations had deprived him of; and such homage must indeed have been agreeable to the sovereign God, seeing it alone effaced idolatry from the earth, made the blood of impure victims cease to flow, overturned the profane altars, silenced the oracles of demons, reduced to dust the vain idols, and changed their superb temples, till then the receptacle of every abomination, into houses of adoration and prayer. Thus was the universe changed: the only God, unknown even in Athens, and in those cities most celebrated for knowledge and polished manners, was worshipped: the world acknowledged its Author: God entered into his rights; a worship worthy of him was established over the whole earth; and he had every where adorers, who worshipped him in spirit and in truth.

Behold the first blessing accruing from the birth of Jesus Christ, and the first glory which he renders to his Father. But, my brethren, is this grand blessing for us? We no longer worship vain idols,—an incestuous Jupiter, a lascivious Venus, a cruel and a revengeful Mars; but is God, therefore, more glorified among us? In their place do we not substitute fortune, voluptuousness, court favour, the world, with all its pleasures? For, whatever we love more than God, that we worship; whatever we prefer to God, that becomes our god: whatever becomes the sole object of our thoughts, of our desires, of our affections, of our fears and hopes, becomes likewise the object of our worship; and our gods are our passions, to which we sacrifice the true God.

Now, what idols of this kind still remain in the Christian world! You, that unfortunate creature, to whom you have prostituted your heart; to whom you sacrifice your wealth, your fortune, your glory, your peace; and from whom neither religious motives, nor even those of the world, can detach you, that is your idol; and what less is she than your divinity, since, in your madness, you do not refuse her even the name? You that court that fortune which engrosses you, to which you devote all your cares, all your exertions, all your movements, in short, your whole soul, mind, will, and life, that is your idol; and what criminal homage do you refuse from the moment that it is exacted of you, and that it may become the price of its favour? You, that shameful intemperance, which debases your name and birth; which no longer accords even with our manners; which has drowned and besotted all your talents in the excesses of wine and debauchery; which, by rendering you callous to every thing else, leaves you neither relish nor feeling but for the brutal pleasures of the table, that is your idol: you think that you live only in those moments given to it; and your

heart renders more homage to that infamous and abject god than your despicable and profane songs. The passions formerly made the gods; and Jesus Christ hath destroyed these idols only by destroying the passions which had raised them up: you exalt them again, by reviving all the passions which had rendered the whole world idolatrous. And what matters it to know a single god, if you elsewhere bestow your homages? Worship is in the heart; and if the true God be not the God of your heart, you place, like the pagans, vile creatures in his place, and you render not to him that glory which is his due.

Thus, Jesus Christ doth not confine himself to manifesting the name of his Father to men, and to establishing, on the ruins of idols, the knowledge of the true God. He raiseth up worshippers, who reckon external homages as nothing, unless animated and sanctified by love; and who shall consider mercy, justice, and holiness, as the offerings most worthy of God, and the most shining attendants of their worship.—Second blessing from the birth of Jesus Christ, and second sort of glory which he renders to his Father.

In effect, God was known, says the prophet, in Judea; Jerusalem beheld no idols in the public places, usurping the homages due to the God of Abraham; “There was neither iniquity in Jacob, nor perverseness in Israel:” that single portion of the earth was free from the general contagion. But the magnificence of its temple, the pomp of its sacrifices, the splendour of its solemnities, the exactitude of its lawful observances, constituted the whole merit of its worship; all religion was confined to these external duties. Its morals were not less criminal. Injustice, fraud, falsehood, adultery, every vice subsisted, and was even countenanced by these vain appearances of worship: God was honoured from the lips; but the heart of that ungrateful people was ever distant from him.

Jesus Christ comes to open the eyes of Judea on an error so gross, so ancient, and so injurious to his Father. He comes to inform them, that man may be satisfied with externals alone, but that God regards only the heart; that every outward homage which withholds it from him, is an insult and a hypocrisy rather than a true worship; that it matters little to purify the external, if the internal be full of infection and putrefaction; and that God is truly worshipped only by loving him.

But, alas! my brethren, is this mistake, so wretched, and so often reproached to the synagogue by Jesus Christ, not still the error of the majority of us? To what, in fact, is the whole of our worship reduced? To some external ceremonies; to fulfilling certain public duties prescribed by the law; and even this is the religion of the most respectable. They come to assist in the holy mysteries; they do not, without scruple, depart from the laws of the church; they repeat some prayers which custom

has consecrated; they go through the solemnities, and increase the crowd which runs to our temples:—behold the whole. But are they, in consequence, more detached from the world and from its criminal pleasures;—less occupied with the cares of a vain dress, or of fortune;—more inclined to break off a criminal engagement, or to fly opportunities which have so often been a rock to their innocence? Do they bring to these external practices of religion, a pure heart, a lively faith, a guileless charity? All their passions submit amid all these religious works, which are given to custom rather than to religion.

And remark, I pray you, my brethren, that they would not dare to dispense themselves altogether from them; to live, like the impious, without any profession of worship, and without fulfilling at least some of its public duties. They would consider themselves as anathematized, and worthy of the thunder of Heaven. And yet they dare to sully these holy duties by the most criminal manners! and yet they do not view themselves with horror, while rendering useless these superficial remains of religion, by a life which religion condemns and abhors! and they dread not the wrath of God, in continuing crimes which attract it on our heads, and in limiting all that is his due to vain homages which insult him!

Nevertheless, as I have already said, of all the worldly, these are the most prudent, and, in the eyes of the world, the most regular. They have not yet thrown off the yoke, like so many others; they do not arrogate to themselves a shocking glory in not believing in God; they blaspheme not what they do not know; they do not consider religion as a mockery and a human invention; they still wish to hold to it by some externals; but they hold not to it by the heart; but they dishonour it by their irregularities; but they are not Christians but in name. Thus, even in a greater degree than formerly under the synagogue, the magnificent externals of religion subsist among us, along with a more profound and more general depravity of manners than ever the prophets reproached to the obstinacy and hypocrisy of the Jews: thus, that religion, in which we glory, is no longer, to the greatest number of believers, but a superficial worship: thus, that new covenant, which ought to be written only in the heart; that law of spirit and life, which ought to render men wholly spiritual; that inward worship, which ought to have given to God worshippers in spirit and in truth,—has given him only phantoms, only fictitious adorers; the mere appearances of worship; in a word, but a people still Jewish, which honours him from the lips, but whose corrupted heart, stained with a thousand crimes, chained by a thousand iniquitous passions, is always far distant from him.

Behold the second blessing of the birth of Jesus Christ, in which we have no part. He comes to abolish a worship wholly external, which was confined to sacrifices of animals and lawful ceremonies,

and which, in not rendering to God the homage of our love, alone capable of glorifying him, rendered not to him that glory which is his due: in place of these appearances of religion, he comes to substitute a law which ought to be fulfilled wholly in the heart; a worship, of which the love of his Father ought to be the first and principal homage. Nevertheless, this holy worship, this new precept, this sacred trust, which he hath confided to us, has miserably degenerated in our hands; we have turned it into a worship wholly pharisaical, in which the heart has no part; which has no influence in changing our irregular propensities; which has no effect upon our manners, and which only renders us so much the more criminal, as we abuse the blessing which ought to wash out and purify all our crimes.

Lastly, men had likewise wished to ravish from God the glory of his providence and of his eternal wisdom. Philosophers, struck with the absurdity of a worship which multiplied gods to infinity, and forced, by the sole lights of reason, to acknowledge one sole Supreme Being, disfigured the nature of that Being by a thousand absurd opinions. Some figured to themselves an indolent god; retired within himself, in full possession of his own happiness, disdainful to abase himself by paying attention to what passes on the earth, reckoning as nothing men whom he had created, equally insensible to their virtues as to their vices, and leaving wholly to chance the course of ages and seasons, the revolutions of empires, the lot of each individual, the whole machine of this vast universe, and the whole dispensation of human things. Others subjected him to a fatal chain of events; they made him a God without liberty and without power; and, while they regarded him as the master of men, they believed him to be the slave of destiny. The errors of reason were then the only rule of religion; and of the belief of those who were considered as even the wisest and most enlightened.

Jesus Christ comes to restore to his Father that glory of which the vain reasonings of philosophy had deprived him. He comes to teach to men that faith is the source of true light; and that the sacrifice of reason is the first step of Christian philosophy. He comes to fix uncertainty, by instructing us in what we ought to know of the Supreme Being, and what, with regard to him, we ought not to know.

It was not, in effect, sufficient that men, in order to render glory to God, should make a sacrifice to him of their life, as to the author of their being, and should, by that avowal, acknowledge the impiety of idolatry; that they should make a sacrifice to him of their love and of their heart, as to their sovereign felicity, and thereby proclaim the insufficiency and the inutility of the external and pharisaical worship of the synagogue; it was likewise required, that to him they should sacrifice their reason, as to their wisdom and to their eternal truth, and thus be un-

deceived with regard to the vain researches and the conceited knowledge of philosophers.

Now, the sole birth of a Man-God, the ineffable union of our nature with a divine person, disconcerts all human reason; and this incomprehensible mystery held out to men as their whole knowledge, their whole truth, their whole philosophy, their whole religion, at once makes them feel that the truth, which they hitherto had in vain sought, must be sought, not by vain efforts, but by the sacrifice of reason and of our feeble lights.

But, alas! where among us are believers who make a thorough sacrifice of their reason to faith; and who, rejecting their own lights, humble their eyes, in a respectful and silent adoration, before the majestic impenetrability of religion? I speak not of those impious, still to be found among us, who deny a God. Ah! we must leave them to the horror and the indignation of the whole universe which knows a Divinity, and which worships him; or rather leave them to the horror of their own conscience, which inwardly invokes and calls upon him in spite of themselves, while outwardly they are glorifying themselves in professing not to know him.

I speak of the majority of believers, who have an idea of the Divinity, almost equally false and equally human, as had formerly the pagan philosophers; who consider him as nothing in all the accidents of life; who live as if chance, or the caprice of men, determined all things here below; and who acknowledge good-luck and bad-luck as two sole divinities which govern the world, and which preside over every thing relative to the earth. I speak of those men of little faith, who, far from adoring the secrecies of futurity in the profound and impenetrable councils of Providence, go to search for them in ridiculous and childish prophecies; attribute to man a knowledge which God hath solely reserved to himself; with a senseless belief await, from the dreams of a false prophet, events and revolutions which are to decide the destiny of nations and empires; found thereupon vain hopes for themselves, and renew either the folly of pagan augurs and soothsayers, or the impiety of the pythoness of Saul, and of the oracles of Delphi and Dodona. I speak of those who wish to penetrate into the eternal ways of God on our lots; and who, being unable, by the sole powers of reason, to solve the insurmountable difficulties of the mysteries of grace with regard to the salvation of men, far from crying out with the apostle, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" are tempted to believe, either that God doth not interfere in our salvation; or, if he do, that it is needless for us to interfere in it ourselves. I speak of those dissolute characters in the world, who always find plausible and convincing, though, in fact, weak and foolish in the extreme, whatever unbelief opposes to faith; who are staggered by the first frivolous doubt proposed by the impious; who appear as if they would be

delighted that religion were false; and who are less touched with that respectable load of proofs which overpowers a conceited reason and its truth, than with a senseless discourse which opposes it, in which there is generally nothing important but the boldness of the impiety and of the blasphemy. - Lastly, I speak of many believers who turn over to the people the belief of so many wonderful actions which the history of religion has preserved to us; who seem to believe that whatever is above the power of man is likewise beyond the power of God; and who refuse credit to the miracles of a religion which is solely founded on them, and which is itself the greatest of all miracles.

Behold how we still snatched from God that glory which the birth of Jesus Christ had rendered to him. It had taught us to sacrifice our own lights to the incomprehensible mystery of his manifestation in our flesh, and no longer to live but by faith; it had fixed the uncertainties of the human mind, and recalled it from the errors and the abyss in which reason had plunged it, to the way of truth and life, and we abandon it: and even under the empire of faith we wish still to walk as formerly, under the standards, if I may venture to speak in this manner, of a weak reason: the mysteries of religion, which we cannot comprehend, shock us; we suspect, we reform all; we would have God to think like man. Without altogether losing our faith, we suffer it to be inwardly weakened; we allow it to remain inactive: and it is this relaxation of faith which has corrupted our manners, multiplied vices, inflamed all hearts with a love of things present; extinguished the love of riches to come; placed trouble, hatred, and dissension among believers, and effaced those original marks of innocence, of sanctity, and of charity, which at first had rendered Christianity so respectable even to those who refused submission to it. But not only doth the birth of Jesus Christ restore to God that glory of which men had wished to deprive him; it likewise restores to men that peace, of which they had never ceased to deprive themselves: "And on earth peace, good-will toward men."

PART II.—A universal peace reigned throughout the universe, when Jesus Christ, the "Prince of Peace," appeared on the earth. All the nations subject to the Roman empire peaceably supported the yoke of those haughty masters of the world. Rome herself, after civil dissensions, which had almost depopulated her walls, filled the islands and deserts with her proscribed, and bathed Europe and Asia with the blood of her citizens, breathed from the horror of these troubles, and reunited under the authority of a Cæsar, experienced, in slavery, a peace which she had never, during the enjoyment of her liberty, been able to accomplish.

The universe was then at rest; but that was but a deceitful calm. Man, the prey of his own violent and iniquitous passions,

experienced within himself the most cruel dissension and war: far from God, delivered up to the agitations and frenzies of his own heart, combated by the multiplicity and the eternal contrariety of his irregular propensities, he was unable to find peace, because he never sought it but in the source of all his troubles and disquiets. Philosophers made a boast of being able to bestow it on their followers; but that universal calm of the passions which they gave hopes of to their sage, and which they so emphatically announced, might suppress their sallies, but it left the whole venom in the heart. It was a piece of pride and ostentation; it masked the outward man; but under that mask of ceremony, man always knew himself to be the same.

Jesus Christ comes to-day upon the earth, to bring that true peace to men which the world had never hitherto been able to give them. He comes radically to cure the evil; his divine philosophy is not confined to the promulgation of pompous precepts, which might be agreeable to reason, but which cured not the wounds of the heart; and, as pride, voluptuousness, hatred, and revenge, had been the fatal sources of all the agitations experienced by the heart of man, he comes to restore peace to him, by draining them off, through his grace, his doctrine, and his example.

Yes, my brethren, I say that pride had been the original source of all the troubles which tore the heart of men. What wars, what frenzies, had that fatal passion not lighted upon the earth! With what torrents of blood had it not inundated the universe! And what is the history of nations and of empires, of princes and of conquerors, of every age and people, but the history of those calamities with which pride from the beginning had afflicted men! The entire world was but a gloomy theatre, upon which that haughty and senseless passion every day exhibited the most bloody scenes. But the external operations were but a faint image of the troubles which the proud man inwardly experienced. Ambition was a virtue: moderation was looked upon as meanness: an individual overthrew his country, overturned the laws and customs, rendered millions miserable, in order to usurp the first place among his fellow-citizens; and the success of his guilt insured him every homage; and his name, stained with the blood of his brethren, acquired only additional lustre in the public annals which preserved its memory: and a prosperous villain became the grandest character of his age. That passion, descending among the crowd, became less striking; but it was neither less animated nor furious: the obscure was not more at his ease than the public man; each wished to carry off the prize from his equals: the orator, the philosopher, wrangled for, and tore from each other that glory, which, in fact, was the sole end of all their toils and watchings; and, as the desires of pride are insatiable, man, to whom it was then honourable totally to yield himself up to it, being unable to

rest in any degree of elevation, was likewise incapable of peace and tranquillity. Pride, become the sole source of human honour and glory, was likewise become the fatal rock of the quiet and happiness of men.

The birth of Jesus Christ, by correcting the world of this error, re-establishes on the earth that peace which pride had banished from it. He might have manifested himself to men, with all the marks of splendour which the prophets attributed to him: he might have assumed the pompous titles of conqueror of Judah, of legislator of the people, of deliverer of Israel: Jerusalem, in these glorious marks, would have recognized him whom she awaited: but Jerusalem, in these titles, saw only a human glory; and Jesus Christ comes to undeceive, and to teach her, that such glory is nothing; that such an expectation had been unworthy of the oracles of so many prophets who had announced him: that the Holy Spirit, which inspired them, could hold out only holiness and eternal riches to men; that all other riches, far from rendering them happy, only increased their evils and crimes; and that his visible ministry was to correspond with the splendid promises, which had, for so many ages, announced him, only by being wholly spiritual, and that he should intend only the salvation of men.

Thus, he is born at Bethlehem, in a poor and abject state, without external state or splendour; he whose birth the songs of all the armies of heaven then celebrated: without title which might distinguish him in the eyes of men; he who was exalted above all principality or power: he suffers his name to be written down among those of the obscurest subjects of Cæsar; he whose name was above all other names, and who alone had the right of writing down the names of his chosen in the book of eternity: vulgar and simple shepherds alone came to pay him homage; he, before whom whatever is mighty on the earth, in heaven, and in hell, ought to bend the knee: lastly, whatever can confound human pride is assembled at the spectacle of his birth. If titles, rank, or prosperity, had been able to render us happy here below, and to shed peace through our heart, Jesus Christ would have made his appearance clothed in them, and would have brought all these riches to his disciples; but he brings peace to us only by holding them in contempt, and by teaching us to hold them equally in contempt: he comes to render us happy, only by coming to suppress desires which hitherto had occasioned all our disquiets: he comes to point out to us more solid and more durable riches, alone capable of calming our hearts, of filling our desires, of easing our troubles; riches of which man cannot deprive us, and which require only to be loved and to be wished for, to be assured of possessing them.

Nevertheless, who tastes of this blessed peace? Wars, troubles, frenzies, are they more rare since his birth? Are those empires and states which worship him, in consequence more peaceful? Does that pride which he came to destroy occasion less commotion and confusion among men? Alas! seek among Christians that peace which ought to be their inheritance, and where shall you find it?—In cities? Pride sets every thing there in motion; every one wishes to soar above the rank of his ancestors: an individual, exalted by fortune, destroys the happiness of thousands who walk in his steps, without being able to attain the same point of prosperity. In the circle of domestic walls? They conceal only distresses and cares: and the father of the family, solely occupied with the advancement rather than the Christian education of his offspring, leaves to them, for inheritance, his agitations and disquiets, which they, in their turn, shall one day transmit to their descendants. In the palaces of kings? But there it is that a lawless and boundless ambition gnaws and devours every heart; it is there that, under the specious mask of joy and tranquillity, the most violent and the bitterest passions are nourished; it is there that happiness apparently resides, and yet where pride occasions the greatest number of discontented and miserable. In the sanctuary? Alas! there ought surely to be found an asylum of peace; but ambition pervades even the holy place; the efforts there are more to raise themselves above their brethren, than to render themselves useful to them; the holy dignities of the church become, like those of the age, the reward of intrigue and caballing; the religious circumspection of the prince cannot put a stop to solicitations and private intrigues; we there see the same inveteracy and rivalships, the same sorrow in consequence of neglect, the same jealousy toward those who are preferred to us; a ministry is boldly canvassed for, which ought to be accepted only with fear and trembling: they seat themselves in the temple of God, though placed there by other hands than his: they head the flock without his consent to whom it belongs, and without his having said, as to Peter, “Feed my sheep;” and as they have taken the charge without call and without ability, the flock are led without edification and without fruit, alas! and often with shame.—O peace of Jesus Christ! which surpasses all sense, sole remedy against the troubles which pride incessantly excites in our hearts, who shall then be able to give thee to man?

But, secondly, if the disquiets of pride had banished peace from the earth, the impure desires of the flesh had not given rise to fewer troubles. Man, forgetting the excellency of his nature, and the sanctity of his origin, gave himself up, like the beasts, without scruple, to the impetuosity of that brutal instinct. Finding it the most violent and the most universal of his propensities, he believed it to be also the most innocent and the most lawful. In order still

more to authorize it, he made it part of his worship, and formed to himself impure gods, in whose temples that infamous vice became the only homage which did honour to their altars : even a philosopher, in other respects the wisest of pagans, dreading that marriage should put a kind of check on that deplorable passion, had wished to abolish that sacred bond ; to permit among men, as among animals, a brutal confusion, and only multiply the human race through crimes. The more that vice became general, the more it lost the name of vice : and, nevertheless, what a deluge of miseries had it not poured out upon the earth ! With what fury had it not been seen to arm people against people, kings against kings, blood against blood, brethren against brethren, every where carrying trouble and carnage, and shaking the whole universe ! Ruins of cities, wrecks of the most flourishing empires, sceptres and crowns overthrown, became the public and gloomy monuments which every age reared up, in order, it would seem, to preserve, to following ages, the remembrance and the fatal tradition of those calamities with which that vice had afflicted the human race. It became itself an inexhaustible source of troubles and anxieties to the man who then gave himself up to a boundless gratification of it : it held out peace and pleasure ; but jealousy, excess, frenzy, disgust, inconstancy, and black chagrin, continually walked in its steps ; till then, that the laws, the religion, and the common example authorizing it, the sole love of ease, even in these ages of darkness and corruption, kept free from it a small number of sages.

But that motive was too feeble to check its impetuous course, and to extinguish its fires in the heart of men ; a more powerful remedy was required, and that is the birth of the Deliverer, who comes to draw men out of that abyss of corruption, in order to render them pure and without stain ; to break asunder those shameful bonds, and to give peace to their hearts, by restoring to them that freedom and innocence, of which the slavery and tyranny of that vice had deprived them. He is born of a virgin-mother, and the purest of all created beings : he thereby gives estimation and honour to a virtue unknown to the world, and which even his people considered as a reproach. Besides, in uniting himself with us, he becomes our head, incorporates us with himself, makes us become members of his mystical body, of that body which no longer receives life and influence but from him, of that body whose every ministry is holy, which is to be seated at the right hand of the living God, and to glorify him for ever.

Behold, my brethren, to what height of honour Jesus Christ, in this mystery, exalts our flesh ; he makes of it the temple of God, the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit, the portion of a body in which the fulness of the Divinity resides, the object of the kindness and the love of his Father. But do we not still profane this holy temple ? Do we not still turn to shame the mem-

bers of Jesus Christ? Do we, in a higher degree, respect our flesh since it is become a holy portion of his mystical body? Does that shameful passion not still exercise the same tyranny over Christians, that is to say, over the children of sanctity and liberty? Does it not still disturb the peace of the universe, the tranquillity of empires, the harmony of families, the order of society, the confidence of marriage, the innocence of social intercourse, the lot of every individual? Are not the most tragical spectacles still every day furnished to the world by it? Does it respect the most sacred ties and the most respectable character? Does it not reckon as nothing every duty? Does it pay attention even to decency? And does it not turn all society into a frightful confusion, where custom has effaced every rule? Even you, who listen to me, from whence have arisen all the miseries and unhappinesses of your life? Is it not from that deplorable passion? Is it not that which has overturned your fortune, which has cast trouble and dissension through the heart of your family, which has swallowed up the patrimony of your fathers, which has dishonoured your name, which has ruined your health, and now makes you to drag on a gloomy and disgraceful life on the earth? Is it not, at least, that which actually rends your heart, at present filled with it? What goes on within you but a tumultuous revolution of fears, desires, jealousies, mistrusts, disgusts, and frenzies? And since that passion has stained your soul, have you enjoyed a moment of peace? Let Jesus Christ again be born within your heart; he alone can be your true peace: chase from it the impure spirits, and the mansion of your soul will be at rest; become once more a child of grace: innocence is the only source of tranquillity.

Lastly, the birth of Jesus Christ reconciles men to his Father; it reunites the Gentile and the Jew; it destroys all those hateful distinctions of Greek and Barbarian, of Roman and Scythian; it extinguishes all animosities and hatreds: of all nations it makes only one people, of all his disciples only one heart and one soul: last kind of peace which it brings to men. Formerly they were united together neither by worship, a common hope, nor by the new covenant, which, in an enemy, holds out to us a friend. They considered each other almost as creatures of a different species: the diversity of religions, of manners, of countries, of languages, of interests, had, it would appear, as if diversified in them the same nature: scarcely did they recognise each other by that figure of humanity which was the only sign of connexion still remaining to them. Like wild beasts, they mutually exterminated each other: they centred their glory in depopulating the lands of their fellow-creatures, and in carrying in triumph their bloody heads as the splendid memorials of their victories: it might have been said that they held their existence from different irreconcilable creators, always watchful to destroy each other, and who had placed them here below only to revenge their quarrel, and to terminate their

disagreement by the general extinction of one of the two parties; every thing disunited man, and nothing bound them together but interest and the passions, which were themselves the sole source of their divisions and animosities.

But Jesus Christ is become our peace, our reconciliation, the corner-stone which binds and unites the whole fabric, the living head which unites all its members, and makes but one body of the whole. Every thing knits us to him, and whatever knits us to him unites us to each other. It is the same Spirit which animates us, the same hope which sustains us, the same bosom which brings us forth, the same fold which assembles us, and the same Shepherd who conducts us: we are children of the same Father, inheritors of the same promises, citizens of the same eternal city, and members of the same body.

Now, my brethren, have so many sacred ties been successful in binding us together? Christianity, which ought to be but the union of hearts, the tie to knit believers to each other, and Jesus Christ to believers, and which ought to represent upon the earth an image of the peace of heaven; Christianity itself is no longer but a horrible theatre of troubles and dissensions: war and fury seem to have established an eternal abode among Christians; religion itself, which ought to unite, divides them. The unbeliever, the enemy of Jesus Christ, the children of the false prophet, who came to spread war and devastation through men, are at peace; and the children of peace, and the disciples of him who, this day, comes to bring it to men, have their hands continually armed with fire and sword against each other! Kings rise up against kings, nations against nations; the seas, which separate, reunite them for their mutual destruction: a vile morsel of stone arms their fury and revenge; and whole nations go to perish and to bury themselves under its walls, in contesting to whom shall belong its ruins: the earth is not sufficiently vast to contain them and to fix them each one in the bonds which nature herself seems to have pointed out for states and empires; each wishes to usurp from his neighbour; and a miserable field of battle, which is scarcely sufficient to serve as a burial-place to those who have disputed it, becomes the prize of those rivers of blood with which it is for ever stained. O divine Reconciliator of men! return then once more upon the earth, since the peace which thou broughtest to it at thy birth still leaves so many wars and so many calamities in the universe!

Nor is this all: that circle itself, which unites us under the same laws, unites not the heart and affections; hatred and jealousies divide citizens equally as they divide nations; animosities are perpetuated in families, and fathers transmit them to their children, as an accursed inheritance. In vain may the authority of the prince disarm the hand, it disarms not the heart; in vain may the sword be wrested from them, with the

sword of the tongue they continue a thousand times more cruelly to pierce their enemy; hatred, under the necessity of confining itself within, becomes deeper and more rancorous, and to forgive is looked upon as a dishonourable weakness. Oh! my brethren, in vain then hath Jesus Christ descended upon the earth! He is come to bring peace to us; he hath left it to us as his inheritance; nothing hath he so strongly recommended to us as that of loving each other; yet fellowship and peace seem as if banished from among us, and hatred and animosity divide court, city, and families; and those whom the offices, the interests of the state, decency itself, and blood, ought, at least, to unite,—tear, defame, would wish to destroy, and to exalt themselves on the ruins of each other: and religion, which shows us our brethren even in our enemies, is no longer listened to; and that awful threatening, which gives us room to expect the same severity on the part of God which we shall have shown to our brethren, no longer touches or affects us; and all these motives, so capable of softening the heart, still leave it filled with all the bitterness of hatred. We tranquilly live in this frightful state: the justice of our complaints with regard to our enemies calms us on the injustice of our hatred and of our rooted aversion toward them; and if, on the approach of death, we apparently hold out to them the hand of reconciliation, it is not that we love them more, it is because the expiring heart hath no longer the force to sustain its hatred, that almost all our feelings are extinguished, or, at least, that we are no longer capable of feeling any thing but our own weakness and our approaching dissolution. Let us then unite ourselves to the newly-born Jesus Christ; let us enter into the spirit of that mystery; with him let us render to God that glory which is his due; it is the only means of restoring to ourselves that peace, of which our passions have hitherto deprived us.

SERMON XXVII.

FOR THE DAY OF THE EPIPHANY.

“For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.”—MATT. ii. 2.

TRUTH, that light of Heaven, figured by the star which on this day appears to the magi, is the only thing here below worthy of the cares and the researches of man. It alone is the light of our

mind, the rule of our heart, the source of solid joys, the foundation of our hopes, the consolation of our fears, the alleviation of our evils, the cure for all our afflictions: it alone is the refuge of the good conscience, and the terror of the bad; the inward punishment of vice, the internal recompence of virtue: it alone immortalizes those who have loved it, and renders illustrious the chains of those who suffer for it; attracts public honours to the ashes of its martyrs and defenders, and bestows respectability on the abjection and the poverty of those who have quitted all to follow it: lastly, it alone inspires magnanimous thoughts, forms heroical men, souls of whom the world is unworthy, sages alone worthy of that name. All our attentions ought therefore to be confined to know it; all our talents to manifest it; all our zeal to defend it. In men we ought then to look only for truth, to have no wish of pleasing them but by truth, to esteem in them only truth, and to be resolved that they never shall please us but by it. In a word, it would appear that it should have only to show itself, as on this day to the magi, to be loved; and that it shows us to ourselves in order to teach us to know ourselves.

Nevertheless, it is astonishing what different impressions the same truth makes upon men. To some it is a light which directs their steps, and, in pointing out their duty, renders it amiable to them: to others it is a troublesome light, and, as it were, a kind of dazzling, which vexes and fatigues them: lastly, to many it is a thick mist which irritates, inflames them with rage, and completes their blindness. It is the same star which, on this day, appears in the firmament: the magi see it; the priests of Jerusalem know that it is foretold in the prophets; Herod can no longer doubt that it hath appeared, seeing wise men come from the extremities of the east, to seek, guided by its light, the new King of the Jews. Nevertheless, how dissimilar are the dispositions with which they receive the same truth manifested to them!

In the magi it finds a docile and sincere heart: in the priests, a heart mean, deceitful, cowardly, and dissembling: in Herod, a corrupted and hardened heart. Consequently, it forms worshippers in the magi, dissemblers in the priests, and in Herod a persecutor. Now, my brethren, such is still at present among us the lot of truth: it is a celestial light which is shown to us, says St. Augustine; but few receive it, many hide and dim it, and a still greater number contemn and persecute it: it shows itself to all, but how many indocile souls who reject it! How many mean and cowardly souls who dissemble it! How many black and hardened hearts who oppress and persecute it! Let us collect these three marked characters in our gospel, which are to instruct us in all our duties relative to truth: truth received, truth dissembled, truth persecuted. Holy Spirit, Spirit of Truth, destroy in us the spirit of the world, that spirit of error, of dissimulation,

of hatred against the truth; and in this holy place, destined to form ministers, who are to announce it even in the extremities of the earth, render us worthy of loving the truth, of manifesting it to those who know it not, and of suffering all for its sake.

PART I.—I call truth that eternal rule, that internal light incessantly present within us, which, in every action, points out to us what we ought, and what we ought not to do; which enlightens our doubts, judges our judgments; which inwardly condemns or approves us, according as our behaviour is agreeable or contrary to its light; and which, in certain moments more splendid and bright, more evidently points out to us the way in which we ought to walk, and is figured to us by that miraculous light which, on this day, conducts the magi to Jesus Christ.

Now, I say, that the first use which we ought to make of truth being for ourselves, the church, on this day, proposes to us, in the conduct of the magi, a model of those dispositions which alone can render the knowledge of truth beneficial and salutary to us. There are few souls, however they may be plunged in the senses and in the passions, whose eyes are not at times opened upon the vanity of the interests they pursue, upon the grandeur of the hopes which they sacrifice, and upon the ignominy of the life which they lead. But, alas! their eyes are opened to the light, only to be closed again in an instant; and the sole fruit which they reap, from the truth which is visible to, and enlightens them, is that of adding to the misfortune of having hitherto been ignorant of it, the guilt of having afterward known it in vain.

Some confine themselves to vain reasonings upon the light which strikes them, and turn truth into a subject of controversy and vain philosophy: others, with minds yet unsettled, wish, it would appear, to know it; but they seek it not in an effectual way, because they would, at bottom, be heartily sorry to have found it: lastly, others, more tractable, allow themselves to be wrought upon by its evidence, but, discouraged by the difficulties and the self-denials which it presents to them, they receive it not with that delight and that gratitude which, when once known, it inspires. And behold the rocks, which the dispositions of the sages of the east toward that light of Heaven, which comes to show new routes to them, teach us to shun.

Accustomed, in consequence of a public profession of wisdom and philosophy, to investigate every thing, and reduce it to the judgment of a vain reason, and to be far above all popular prejudices, they stop not, however, before commencing their journey, upon the faith of the celestial light, to examine if the appearance of this new star might not be solved by natural causes; they do not assemble from every quarter scientific men, in order to reason on an event so uncommon; they sacrifice no time to vain difficul-

ties, which generally arise, more from the repugnance we feel to truth, than from a sincere desire of enlightening ourselves, and of knowing it. Instructed by that tradition of their fathers which the captive Israelites had formerly carried into the east, and which Daniel and so many other prophets, had announced there, relative to the Star of Jacob which should one day appear, they at once comprehended, that the vain reflections of the human mind have no connexion with the light of heaven; that the portion of light which heaven shows them is sufficient to determine and to conduct them; that grace always leaves obscurities in the ways to which it calls us, in order not to deprive faith of the merit of submission; and that, whenever we are so happy as to catch a single gleam of truth, the uprightness of the heart ought to supply whatever deficiency may yet remain in the evidence of the light.

Nevertheless, how many souls in the world, wavering upon faith, or rather enslaved by passions which render doubtful to them that truth which condemns them; how many souls thus floating, clearly see, that, at bottom, the religion of our fathers hath marks of truth which the most high-flown and proudest reason would not dare to deny to it; that unbelief leads to too much; that, after all, we must hold to something; and, that total unbelief is a choice still more incomprehensible to reason than the mysteries which shock it; who see it, and who struggle, by endless disputes, to lull that worm of the conscience which incessantly reproaches their error and their folly; who resist that truth, which proves itself in the bottom of their heart, under the pretence of enlightening themselves; who apply for advice only that they may say to themselves, that their doubts are unanswerable; who have recourse to the most learned, only to have the power of alleging, as a fresh motive of unbelief, the having had recourse in vain! It would seem that religion is no longer but a matter of discourse; it is no longer considered as that important affair in which not a moment is to be lost; it is a simple matter of controversy, as formerly in the Areopagus; it fills up the idle time; it is one of those unimportant questions which fill up the vacancies of conversation, and amuse the languor and the vanity of general intercourse.

But, my brethren, "the kingdom of God cometh not with observation." Truth is not the fruit of controversy and dispute, but of tears and groanings; it is by purifying our heart in meditation and in prayer that we alone must expect, like the magi, the light of heaven, and to become worthy of distinguishing and knowing it. A corrupted heart, says St. Augustine, may see the truth; but he is incapable of relishing or of loving it; in vain do you enlighten and instruct yourselves: your doubts are in your passions: religion will become evident and clear from the moment that you shall become chaste, temperate,

and equitable; and you will have faith from the moment that you shall cease to have vice. Consequently, from the instant that you cease to have an interest in finding religion false, you will find it incontestable; no longer hate its maxims, and you will no longer contest its mysteries.

Augustine himself, already convinced of the truth of the gospel, still found, in the love of pleasure, a source of doubts and perplexities which checked him. It was no longer the dreams of the Manicheans which kept him removed from faith; he was fully sensible of their absurdity and fanaticism: it was no longer the pretended contradictions of our holy books; Ambrose had explained their purport and their adorable mysteries. Nevertheless, he still doubted; the sole thought of having to renounce his shameful passions in becoming a disciple of faith, rendered it still suspicious to him. He would have wished either that the doctrine of Jesus Christ had been an imposition, or that it had not condemned his voluptuous excesses, without which, indeed, he was then unable to comprehend how either a happy or a comfortable life could be led. Thus, always floating and unwilling to be settled; continually consulting, yet dreading to be instructed; by turns the disciple and admirer of Ambrose, and racked by the perplexities of a heart which shunned the truth, he dragged his chain, as he says himself, dreading to be delivered from it; he continued to start doubts merely to prolong his passions; he wished to be yet more enlightened because he dreaded to be it too much; and, more the slave of his passions than of his errors, he rejected truth, which manifested itself to him, merely because he looked upon it as a victorious and irresistible hand which was at last come to break asunder those fetters which he still loved. The light of Heaven finds, therefore, no doubts to dissipate in the minds of the magi, because it finds no passion in their hearts to overcome; and they well deserve to be the first-fruits of the Gentiles, and the first disciples of that faith which was to subjugate all nations to the gospel.

Not but it is often necessary to add, to our own light, the approbation of those who are established, to distinguish whether it be the right spirit which moves us; fallacy is so similar to truth, that it is not easy to avoid being sometimes deceived. Thus the magi, in order to be more surely confirmed in the truth of the prodigy which guides their steps, come straight to Jerusalem: they consult the priests and the scribes, as the only persons capable of discovering to them that truth which they seek; they boldly and openly demand, in the midst of that great city, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" They propose their question with no palliations calculated to attract an equivocal answer: they are determined to be enlightened, and wish not to be flattered; from their heart they seek the truth, and, for that reason, they find it.

New disposition, sufficiently rare among believers. Alas! we find not truth, because we never seek it with a sincere and upright heart; we diffuse a kind of mist over every attempt to find it, which conceals it from our view: we consult, but we place our passions in so favourable a light, we hold them out in colours so softened, and so similar to the truth, that we procure a reply of its being really so: we wish not to be instructed; we wish to be deceived, and to add, to the passion which enslaves us, an authority which may calm us.

Such is the illusion of the majority of men, and frequently even of those who, become contrite, have quitted the errors of a worldly life. Yes, my brethren, let us search our own hearts, and we shall find, that, however sincere our conversion may otherwise be, yet there is always within us some particular point, some secret and privileged attachment, upon which we are not candid; upon which we never but very imperfectly instruct the guide of our conscience; upon which we seek not with sincerity the truth; upon which, in a word, it would even grieve us to have found it; and from thence it is, that the weaknesses of the pious and good always furnish so many traits to the derision of the worldly; from thence we attract upon virtue continual reproaches and censures, which ought to light only upon ourselves. Nevertheless, to hear us speak, we love the truth; we are desirous of having it shown to us. But a convincing proof of that being only a vain mode of speaking, is, that whatever concerns, or has any allusion to this cherished passion, is carefully avoided by all around us; our friends are silent upon it; our superiors are obliged to use an artful delicacy, not to injure our feelings; our inferiors are upon their guard, and employ continual precautions; we are never spoken to but with lenitives which draw a veil over our sore; we are almost the only persons ignorant of our defect: the whole world sees it, yet no one has the courage to make it known to ourselves: it is clearly seen that we seek not with sincerity the truth; and that, far from curing us, the hand which should dare to probe our sore, would only succeed in making a fresh one.

David knew not, and respected not, the sanctity of Nathan, till after that prophet had spoken to him, with sincerity, of the scandal of his conduct; from that day, and ever afterward, he considered him as his father and deliverer; but, with us, a person loses all his merit from the moment that he has forced us to know ourselves. Before that, he was enlightened, prudent, full of charity; he possessed every talent calculated to attract esteem and confidence; the John the Baptists were listened to with pleasure, as formerly by an incestuous king: but, from the moment that they have undisguisedly spoken to us; from the moment that they have said to us, "It is not lawful for thee," they are stripped, in our opinion, of all their grand qualities:

their zeal is no longer but whim; their charity but an ostentation, or a desire to censure and contradict; their piety but an imprudence or a cheat, with which they cover their pride; their truth but a mistaken phantom. Thus, frequently convinced in our minds of the iniquity of our passions, we would wish others to give them their approbation; forced, by the inward testimony of the truth, to reproach them to ourselves, we cannot endure that they should be mentioned to us by others: we are hurt and irritated that others should join us against ourselves. Like Saul, we exact of the Samuels, that they approve, in public, what we inwardly condemn; and, through a corruption of the heart, perhaps more deplorable than our passions themselves, unable to silence truth in the bottom of our heart, we would wish to extinguish it in the hearts of all who approach us. I was right, therefore, in saying, that we all make a boast of loving the truth, but that few court it, like the magi, with an upright and a sincere heart.

Thus, the little attention which they pay to the difficulties which seemed to dissuade them from that research, is a fresh proof of its sincerity and heartiness. For, my brethren, how singular must not this extraordinary step, which grace proposed to them, have at first appeared to their mind! They alone, of all their nation, among so many sages and learned men, without regard to friends and connexions, in spite of public observations and derisions, while all others either condemn this miraculous star, or consider the attention paid to it, and the design of these three sages, as an absurd undertaking and a popular weakness, unworthy of their mind and knowledge,—they alone declare against the common opinion; they alone intrust themselves to the new guide which Heaven sends them; they alone abandon their country and their children, and reckon as nothing a singularity, the necessity and wisdom of which the celestial light discloses to them.

Last instruction. The cause, my brethren, of truth being always unavailingly shown to us, is, that we judge not of it by the lights which it leaves in our soul, but by the impression which it makes on the rest of men with whom we live: we never consult the truth in our heart; we consult only the opinions which others have of it. Thus, in vain doth the light of Heaven a thousand times intrude upon us, and point out the ways in which we ought to go; the very first glance which we afterward cast upon the example of others who live like us, revives us, and spreads a fresh mist over our heart. In those fortunate moments when we consult the sole truth of our own conscience, we condemn ourselves; we tremble over a futurity; we promise to ourselves a new life; yet, a moment after, when returned to the world, and no longer consulting but the general example, we justify ourselves, and regain that false security which we had lost. We have no confidence in the truth which the common

example disproves; we sacrifice it to error and to the public opinion; it becomes suspicious to us, because it has chosen out us alone to favour with its light, and the very singularity of the blessing is the cause of our ingratitude and opposition. We cannot comprehend, that, to work out our salvation, is to distinguish ourselves from the rest of men; is to live single amidst the multitude; is to be an individual supporter of our own cause, in the midst of a world which either condemns or despises us; is, in a word, to count examples as nothing, and to be affected by our duty alone. We cannot comprehend, that, to devote ourselves to destruction, it requires only to live as others do; to conform to the multitude; to form with it only one body and one world; seeing the world is already judged; that it is that body of the antichrist which shall perish with its head and members; that criminal city, accursed and condemned to an eternal anathema. Yes, my brethren, the greatest obstacle in our hearts, to grace and truth, is the public opinion. How many timid souls, who have not the courage to adopt the righteous side, merely because the world, to whose view they are exposed, would join against them! Thus, the king of Assyria durst not declare himself for the God of Daniel, because the grandees of his court would have reprobated such a step. How many weak souls, who, disgusted with pleasures, only continue to pursue them through a false honour, and that they may not distinguish themselves from those who set an example of them! Thus, Aaron, in the midst of the Israelites, danced around the golden calf, and joined them in offering up incense to the idol which he detested, because he had not the courage, singly, to resist the public error and blindness. Fools that we are! it is the sole example of the public which confirms us against truth; as if men were our truth, or that it were upon the earth, and not in heaven, that we ought, like the magi, to search for that rule and that light which are to guide us.

It is true, that, frequently, it is not respect for the world's opinion, but the sufferings and self-denials it holds out to us, which extinguish truth in our heart: thus, it makes us sorrowful, like that young man of the gospel, and we do not receive it with that delight testified by the magi on seeing the miraculous star. They had beheld the magnificence of Jerusalem, the pomp of its buildings, the majesty of its temple, the splendour and grandeur of Herod's court; but the gospel makes no mention of their having been affected by that vain display of human pomp: they beheld all these grand objects of desire without attention, pleasure, or any exterior marks of admiration or surprise; they express no wish to view the treasures and the riches of the temple, as those ambassadors from Babylon formerly did to Hezekiah: solely taken up with the light of Heaven manifested to them, they have no eyes for any earthly object; feeling to the truth alone which has enlightened them, every thing

else is an object of indifference, or a burden to them; and their heart, viewing all things in their proper light, no longer acknowledges either delight, interest, or consolation to be found in any thing but the truth.

On our part, my brethren, the first rays of truth which the goodness of God shed on our heart, probably excited a sensible delight. The project we at first formed of a new life; the novelty of the lights which shone upon us, and upon which we had not as yet fully opened our eyes; the lassitude itself, and disgust of those passions of which our heart now felt only the bitterness and the punishment; the novelty of the occupations which we proposed to ourselves in a change; all these offered smiling images to our fancy; for novelty itself is pleasing: but this, as the gospel says, was only the joy of a season. In proportion as truth drew near, it assumed to us, as to Augustine, yet a sinner, an appearance less captivating and smiling. When, after our first glance, as I may say, of it, we had leisurely and minutely examined the various duties it prescribed to us; the grievous separations which were now to be a law to us; retirement, prayer, the self-denials which it proved to be indispensable; that serious, occupied, and private life in which we were to be engaged;—ah! we immediately, like the young man of the gospel, began to draw back sorrowful and uneasy; all our passions roused up fresh obstacles to it; every thing now presented itself in gloomy and totally different colours; and that which we had at first thought to be so attractive, when brought near, was no longer in our eyes but a frightful object, a way rugged, terrifying, and impracticable to human weakness.

Where are the souls, who, like the magi, after having once known the truth, never afterward wish to see but it alone; have no longer eyes for the world, for its empty pleasures, or for the vanity of its pompous shows; who feel no delight but in the contemplation of truth; in making it their resource in every affliction, the spur of their indolence, their succour against temptation, and the purest delight of their soul? And how vain, puerile, and disgusting doth the world, with all its pleasures, hopes, and grandeurs, indeed appear to a soul who hath known thee, O my God! and who hath felt the truth of thine eternal promises; to a soul who feels that whatever is not thee is unworthy of him; and who considers the earth only as the country of those who must perish for ever! Nothing is consolatory to him but what opens the prospect of real and lasting riches; nothing appears worthy of his regard but what is to endure for ever; nothing has the power of pleasing him but what shall eternally please him; nothing is longer capable of attaching him but that which he is no more to lose; and all the trifling objects of vanity are no longer, on his part, but the embarrassments of his piety, or gloomy monuments which recall the remembrance of his crimes.

Behold, in the instance of the magi, truth received with submission, with sincerity, and with delight; in the conduct of the priests, let us see the truth dissembled; and, after being instructed in the use which we ought to make of truth with regard to ourselves, let us learn what is our duty, respecting it, to others.

PART II.—The first duty required of us by the law of charity toward our brethren, is the duty of truth. We are not bound to bestow on all men our attentions, our cares, and our officious services: to all we owe the truth. The different situations in which rank and birth place us in the world, diversify our duties with regard to our fellow-creatures: in every situation of life that of truth is the same. We owe it to the great equally as to the humble; to our subjects as to our masters; to the lovers of it, as to those who hate it; to those who mean to employ it against ourselves, as to those who wish it only for their own benefit. There are conjunctures in which prudence permits to hide and to dissemble the love which we bear for our brethren; none can possibly exist in which we are permitted to dissemble the truth: in a word, truth is not our own property, we are only its witnesses, its defenders, and its depositaries. It is that spark, that light of God, which should illuminate the whole world; and, when we dissemble or obscure it, we are unjust toward our brethren, and ungrateful toward the Father of Light who hath spread it through our soul.

Nevertheless, the world is filled with dissemblers of the truth. We live, it would appear, only to deceive each other: and society, the first bond of which ought to be truth, is no longer but a commerce of dissimulation, duplicity, and cunning. Now, in the conduct of the priests of our gospel, let us view all the different kinds of dissimulation of which men render themselves every day culpable toward truth; we shall there find a dissimulation of silence, a dissimulation of compliance and palliation, a dissimulation of disguise and falsehood.

A dissimulation of silence. Consulted by Herod on the place on which the Christ was to be born, they made answer, it is true, that Bethlehem was the place marked in the prophets for the fulfilment of that grand event; but they add not, that the star foretold in the holy books, having at last appeared, and the kings of Saba and of Arabia coming with presents to worship the new chief who was to lead Israel, it was no longer to be doubted that the overshadowed had at last brought forth the righteous. They do not gather together the people, in order to announce this blessed intelligence; they do not run first to Bethlehem, in order, by their example, to animate Jerusalem. Wrapped up in their criminal timidity, they guard a profound silence—they iniquitously retain the truth; and while strangers come from the extremities of the east, loudly to proclaim in Jerusalem that the king of the Jews is born, the priests, the scribes,

are silent, and sacrifice, to the ambition of Herod, the interests of truth, the dearest hope of their nation, and the honour of their ministry.

What a shameful degradation of the ministers of truth! The good-will of the prince influences them more than the sacred deposit of the religion with which they are intrusted; the lustre of the throne stifles, in their heart, the light of Heaven; by a criminal silence, they flatter a king who applies to them for the truth, and who can learn it from them alone; they confirm him in error by concealing that which might have undeceived him; and how, indeed, shall truth ever make its way to the ear of sovereigns, if even the Lord's anointed, who surround the throne, have not the courage to announce it, but join their efforts, with those who dwell in courts, to conceal and stifle it?

But this duty, my brethren, is, in certain respects, common to you as to us; yet, nevertheless, there are few persons in the world, even of those who set an example of piety, who do not, almost every day, render themselves culpable, toward their brethren, of the dissimulation of silence. They think that they render to truth all that they owe to it, when they do not declare against it; when they hear virtue continually decry'd by the worldly, the doctrine of the world maintained, its abuses and maxims justified, those of the gospel opposed or weakened, the wicked often blaspheming what they know not, and setting themselves up as judges of that faith which shall judge them; that they listen to them, I say, without joining in their impiety, is true, but they do not boldly show their disapprobation, and content themselves with merely not authorizing their blasphemies or their prejudices by their suffrage.

Now, I say that, being all individually intrusted with the interests of truth, to be silent when it is openly attacked in our presence, is to become, in a measure, its persecutor and adversary. But, I add, that you, above all whom God hath enlightened, you then fail in that love which you owe to your brethren, seeing your obligations with regard to them augment in proportion to the grace with which God hath favoured you; you also render yourselves culpable toward God of ingratitude; you do not make a proper return for the blessing of grace and of truth with which he hath favoured you in the midst of your extravagant passions. He hath illuminated your darkness; he hath recalled you to himself, while wandering in treacherous and iniquitous ways; he, no doubt, in thus shedding light through your heart, hath not had your benefit alone in view; he hath meant that it should operate as the instruction or as the reproach of your connexions, your friends, your subjects, or your masters; he hath intended to favour your age, your nation, your country, in favouring you; for his chosen are formed only for the salvation or the condemnation of sinners. His design has been to place in you a light which might shine amid

the surrounding darkness, and be a salutary guide to your fellow-creatures; which might perpetuate truth among men, and render testimony to the righteousness and to the wisdom of his law, amidst all the prejudices and all the vain conclusions of a profane world.

Now, by opposing only a cowardly and timid silence to the maxims which attack the truth, you do not enter into the views of God's mercy upon your brethren; you render unavailing to his glory and to the aggrandizement of his kingdom, that talent of the truth which he had intrusted to you, and of which he will one day demand a particular and severe reckoning; I say, more particularly of you who had formerly, with so much eclat, supported the errors and profane maxims of the world, and who had once been its firmest and most avowed apologist. He surely had a right to exact of you, that you should declare yourselves with the same courage in favour of truth; nevertheless, from a zealous partisan of the world, his grace hath only succeeded in making a timid disciple of the gospel. That grand air of confidence and of intrepidity with which you formerly apologised for the passions, has forsaken you ever since you have undertaken the defence of the interests of virtue: that audacity which once imposed silence on truth, is now itself mute in the presence of error; and truth, which, as St. Augustine says, gives confidence and intrepidity to all who have it on their side, has rendered you only weak and timid.

I admit, that there is a time to be silent as well as a time to speak; and that the zeal of truth hath its rules and measures; but I would not that the souls, who know God and serve him continually, hear the maxims of religion subverted, the reputation of their brethren attacked, the most criminal abuses of the world justified, without having the courage to adopt the cause of that truth which they dishonour. I would not that the world have its avowed partisans, and that Jesus Christ have no one to stand up for him. I would not that the pious and good, through a mistaken idea of good-breeding, dissemble upon those irregularities of sinners which they are daily witnessing; while sinners, on the contrary, consider it as giving themselves an important and fashionable air, to defend and to maintain them in their presence. I would that a faithful soul comprehend that he is responsible to the truth alone; that he is upon the earth solely to render glory to the truth: I would that he bear upon his countenance that noble and, I may say, lofty dignity, which grace inspires; that heroic candour which contempt of the world and all its glory produces; that generous and Christian liberty, which expects only eternal riches, which has no hope but in God, which dreads nothing but the internal Judge, which pays court to, and spares nothing but the interests of righteousness and of charity, and which has no wish of making itself agreeable but by the truth. I would that the sole presence of a righteous soul impose

silence on the enemies of virtue; that they respect that character of truth which he should bear engraven on his forehead; that they crouch under his holy greatness of soul, and that they render homage, at least by their silence and their confusion, to that virtue which they inwardly despise. Thus, the Israelites, taken up with their dances, their profane rejoicings, and their foolish and impious shouts around the golden calf, stop all in a moment, and keep a profound silence on the sole appearance of Moses, who comes down from the mountain, armed with the law of the Lord and with his eternal truth. First dissimulation of the truth,—a dissimulation of silence.

The second manner in which it is dissembled, is that of softening it by modifications, and by condescensions which injure it. The magi, no doubt, could not be ignorant that the intelligence which they came to announce to Jerusalem would be highly displeasing to Herod. That foreigner, through his artifices, had seated himself on the throne of David; he did not so peaceably enjoy the fruit of his usurpation, but that he constantly had a dread lest some heir of the blood of the kings of Judah should expel him from the heritage of his fathers, and remount a throne promised to his posterity. With what eye must he then regard men who come to publish, in the midst of Jerusalem, that the King of the Jews is born, and to proclaim him to a people so attached to, and so zealous for the blood of David, and so impatient under every foreign rule! Nevertheless, the magi conceal nothing of what they had seen in the east: they do not soften that grand event by measured expressions less proper to arouse the jealousy of Herod. They might have called the Messiah whom they seek, the messenger of Heaven, or the longed-for of nations; they might have designed him by titles less hateful to the ambition of Herod; but, full of the truth which hath appeared to them, they know none of these timid and servile time-servings; persuaded that those who are determined to receive the truth only through the means of their errors, are unworthy of knowing it. They are unacquainted with the art of covering it with disguises and considerations for individuals, which dishonour it: they boldly come to the point, and demand, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" and, not satisfied with considering him as the Sovereign of Judea, they declare that heaven itself is his birthright; that the stars are his, and make their appearance in the firmament only in obedience to his orders.

The priests and scribes, on the contrary, forced, by the evidence of the Scriptures, to render glory to the truth, soften it by guarded expressions. They endeavour to unite that respect which they owe to the truth, with that complaisance which they wish still to preserve for Herod; they suppress the title of king, which the magi had given to him, and which had so often been bestowed by the prophets upon the Messiah; they design him by a title which

might equally mark an authority of doctrine or of superior power; they announce him rather as a legislator established to regulate the manners, than as a sovereign raised up for the deliverance of his people from bondage. And, notwithstanding that they themselves expect a Messiah, King, and Conqueror, they soften the truth which they wish to announce, and complete the blindness of Herod, with whom they temporise.

Deplorable destiny of the great! The lips of the priests quiver in speaking to them; from the moment that their passions are known, they are temporised with; truth never offers itself to them but with a double face, of which one side is always favourable to them; the servants of God wish not avowedly to betray their ministry and the interests of truth; but they wish to conciliate them with their own interest: they endeavour to save, as it were, both the rule and their passions, as if the passions could subsist with that rule which condemns them. It seldom happens that the great are instructed, because it seldom happens that the intention is not to please in instructing them. Nevertheless, the greater part would love the truth were it once known to them: the passions and the extravagancies of the age, nourished by all the pleasures which surround them, may lead them astray; but a remaining principle of religion renders truth always respectable to them. We may venture to say, that ignorance condemns more princes and persons of high rank than people of the lowest condition; and that the mean complaisance which is paid to them is more dishonourable to the ministry, and is the cause of more reproach to religion, than the most notorious scandals which afflict the church.

The conduct of these priests appears base to you, my brethren: but, if you are disposed to enter into judgment with yourselves, and to follow yourselves through the detail of your duties, of your friendships, of your conversations, you will see that all your discourses and all your proceedings are merely mollifications of the truth, and temporisings, in order to reconcile it with the prejudices or the passions of those with whom it is your lot to live. We never hold out the truth to them but in a point of view in which it may please; in their most despicable vices we always find some favourable side; and, as all the passions have always some apparent resemblance to some virtue, we never fail to save ourselves through the assistance of that resemblance.

Thus, in the presence of an ambitious person, we never fail to hold forth the love of glory, and the desire of exalting one's self, only as tendencies which give birth to great men; we flatter his pride; we inflame his desires with hopes and with false and chimerical predictions; we nourish the error of his imagination by bringing phantoms within his reach, upon which he incessantly feasts himself. We perhaps venture, in general terms, to pity men who interest themselves so deeply for things which

chance alone bestows, and of which death shall perhaps deprive us to-morrow; but we have not the courage to censure the madman, who, to that vapour, sacrifices his quiet, his life, and his conscience. With a vindictive person we justify his resentment and anger; we justify his guilt in his mind, by countenancing the justice of his accusations; we spare his passion in exaggerating the injury and fault of his enemy. We perhaps venture to say, how noble it is to forgive; but we have not the courage to add, that the first step toward forgiveness, is the ceasing to speak of the injury received.

With a courtier equally discontented with his own fortune, and jealous of that of others, we never fail to expose his rivals in the most unfavourable light: we artfully spread a cloud over their merit and their glory, lest they should injure the jealous eyes of him who listens to us; we diminish, we cast a shade over the fame of their talents and of their services; and, by our iniquitous crouchings to his passion, we nourish it, we assist him in blinding himself, and induce him to consider, as honours unjustly ravished from himself, all those which are bestowed upon his brethren. What shall I say?—With a prodigal, his profusions are no longer, in our mouths, but a display of generosity and magnificence. With a miser, his sordid callousness of heart, in which every feeling is lost, is no longer but a prudent moderation, and a laudable domestic economy. With a person of high rank, his prejudices and his errors always find in us ready apologies; we respect his passions equally as his authority, and his prejudices always become our own. Lastly, we catch the infection, and imbibe the errors of all with whom we live; we transform ourselves, as I may say, into other selves; our grand study is to find out their weaknesses, that we may appropriate and apply them to our own purposes: we have, in fact, no language of our own; we always speak the language of others; our discourses are merely a repetition of their prejudices; and this infamous debasement of truth we call knowledge of the world, a prudence which knows its own interest, the grand art of pleasing and of succeeding in the world. O ye sons of men! how “long will ye love vanity, and seek after leasing?”

Yes, my brethren, by that we perpetuate error among men; we authorize every deceit; we justify every false maxim; we give an air of innocence to every vice; we maintain the reign of the world, and of its doctrine, against that of Jesus Christ; we corrupt society, of which truth ought to be the first tie; we pervert those duties and mutual offices of civil life, established to animate us to virtue, into snares, and inevitable occasions of a departure from righteousness; we change friendship, which ought to be a grand resource to us against our errors and irregularities, into a commerce of dissimulation and mutual deception; by that, in a word, we render truth hateful and ridiculous by rendering it

rare among men; and, when I say we, I mean more especially the souls who belong to God, and who are intrusted with the interests of truth upon the earth. Yes, my brethren, I would that faithful souls had a language peculiar to them amid the world; that other maxims, other sentiments were found in them than in the rest of men; and while all others speak the language of the passions, that they alone speak the language of truth. I would that, while the world hath its Balaams, who, by their discourses and counsels, authorize irregularity and licentiousness, piety had its Phineases, who durst boldly adopt the interests of the law of God, and of the sanctity of its maxims; that, while the world hath its impious philosophers and false sages, who think that it does them honour, openly to proclaim that we ought to live only for the present, and that the end of man is, in no respect, different from that of the beast, piety had its Solomons, who, undeceived by their own experience, durst publicly avow, that, excepting the fear of the Lord and the observance of his commandments, all else is vanity and vexation of spirit: that while the world hath its charms and enchantments, which seduce kings and the people by their delusions and flatteries, piety had its Moseses and Aarons, who had the courage to confound, by the sole force of truth, their imposition and artifice; in a word, that, while the world hath its priests and its scribes, who, like those of the gospel, weaken the truth, piety had its magi, who dread not to announce it in the presence even of those to whom it cannot but be displeasing.

Not that I condemn the modifications of a sage prudence, which apparently gives up something to the prejudices of men, only that it may more surely recall them to rule and duty. I know that truth loves neither rash nor indiscreet defenders; that the passions of men require a certain deference and management; that they are in the situation of sick persons, to whom it is often necessary to disguise and render palatable their medicines, and to cure them without their privy. I know that all deferences paid to the passions, when their tendency is to establish the truth, are not weakeners, but auxiliaries of it; and that the grand rule of the zeal of truth, is prudence and charity. But such is not the intention when they weaken it by flattering and servile adulations: they seek to please, and not to edify; they substitute themselves in the place of truth; and their sole wish is to attract those suffrages which are due to it alone. And let it not be said that it is more through sourness and ostentation, than through charity, that the just claim a merit in disdaining to betray truth. The world, which is always involved in deceit, of which the commerce and mutual ties revolve only upon dissimulation and artifice, which considers these even as an honourable science, and which is totally unacquainted with this noble rectitude of heart, cannot suppose it in others; it is its profound corruption which is the cause of its suspecting the sincerity and

the courage of the upright: it is a mode of acting which appears ridiculous, because it is new to it; and, as it finds in it so marked a singularity, it loves better to suppose that it is rather the consequence of pride, or folly, than of virtue.

From thence it is that the truth is not only disguised, but is likewise openly betrayed. Last dissimulation of the priests of our gospel,—a dissimulation of falsehood. They are not satisfied with quoting the prophecies in obscure and mollified terms: but, seeing that the magi did not return to Jerusalem, as they had intended, they add, no doubt in order to calm Herod, that, ashamed of not having been able to find that new King of whom they came in search, they have not had the courage to return: that they are strangers little versed in the knowledge of the law and of the prophets; and that the light of Heaven, which they pretended to follow, was nothing but a vulgar illusion, and a superstitious prejudice of a rude and credulous nation. And such must indeed have been their language to Herod, since they themselves act according to it, and do not run to Bethlehem to seek the new-born King, in order, it appears, to complete the persuasion of Herod, that there was more credulity than truth in the superstitious research of these magi.

And behold to what we at last come: in consequence of a servile compliance with the passions of men, and of continually wishing to please them at the expense of truth, we at last openly abandon it; we cowardly and downrightly sacrifice it to our interest, our fortune, and our reputation; we betray our conscience, our duty, and our understanding; and, consequently, from the moment that truth becomes irksome to us, or renders us displeasing, we disavow it, and deliver it up to oppression and iniquity; like Peter, we deny that we have ever been seen as its disciple. In this manner we change our heart into a cowardly and groveling one, to which any profitable falsehood costs nothing; into an artificial and pliable heart, which assumes every form, and never possesses any determinate one; into a weak and flattering heart, which has not the courage to refuse its suffrage to any thing but the unprofitable and the unfortunate virtue; into a corrupted and interested heart, which makes subservient to its purposes, religion, truth, justice, and all that is most sacred among men; in a word, a heart capable of every thing except that of being true, noble, and sincere. And think not that sinners of this description are so very rare in the world. We shun only the notoriety and shame of these faults; secret and secure basenesses find few scrupulous hearts; we often love only the reputation and glory of truth.

It is only proper to take care that, in pretending to defend the truth, we are not defending the mere illusions of our own mind. Pride, ignorance, and self-conceit, every day furnish

defenders to error, equally intrepid and obstinate as any of whom faith can boast. The only truth worthy of our love, of our zeal, and of our courage, is that held out to us by the church; for it alone we ought to endure every thing; beyond that, we are no longer but the martyrs of our own obstinacy and vanity.

O my God! pour then through my soul that humble and generous love of the truth, with which thy chosen are filled in heaven, and which is the only characteristic mark of the just upon the earth. Let my life be only such as to render glory to thine eternal truths; let me honour them through the sanctity of my manners; let me defend them through zeal for thy interests alone, and enable me continually to oppose them to error and vanity: annihilate in my heart those human fears, that prudence of the flesh which dreads to lay open to persons their errors and their vices. Suffer not that I be a feeble reed which bends to every blast, nor that I ever blush to bear the truth imprinted on my forehead, as the most illustrious title with which thy creature can glorify himself, and as the most glorious mark of thy mercies upon my soul. In effect, it is not sufficient to be the witness and depository of it, it is also necessary to be its defender: character contrasted with that of Herod, who is, in our gospel at present, its enemy and persecutor. Last instruction with which our gospel furnishes us,—the truth persecuted.

PART III.—If it is a crime to withstand the truth when it shines upon us, iniquitously to withhold it when we owe it to others; it is the fulness of iniquity, and the most distinguished character of reprobation, to persecute and combat it. Nevertheless, nothing is more common in the world than this persecution of truth; and the impious Herod, who, on the present occasion, sets himself up against it, has more imitators than is supposed.

For, in the first place, he persecutes it through that repugnancy which he visibly shows to the truth, and which induces all Jerusalem to follow his example; and this is what I call a persecution of scandal. Secondly, he persecutes it by endeavouring to corrupt the priests, and even by laying snares for the piety of the magi; and this is what I call a persecution of seduction. Lastly, he persecutes it by shedding innocent blood; and this is a persecution of power and violence. Now, my brethren, if the brevity of a Discourse permitted me to examine these three descriptions of persecution of the truth, there is not perhaps one of them of which you would not find yourselves culpable.

For, first, who can flatter himself with not being among the number of the persecutors of truth, under the description of scandals? I even speak not of those disorderly souls who have

erected the standard of guilt and licentiousness, and who pay little, if indeed any, attention to the public opinion: the most notorious scandals are not always those which are most to be dreaded; and avowed debauchery, when carried to a certain degree, occasions, in general, more censures upon our conduct than imitations of our excesses. I speak of those souls delivered up to the pleasures, to the vanities, and to all the abuses of the age, and whose conduct, in other respects regular, is not only irreproachable in the sight of the world, but attracts even the praises and the esteem of men; and I say that they persecute the truth through their sole examples; that they undo, as much as in them lies, the maxims of the gospel in every heart; that they cry out to all men, that shunning of pleasure is a needless precaution; that love of the world and the love of virtue are not at all incompatible; that a taste for theatres, for dress, and for all public amusements, is entirely innocent; and that it is easy to lead a good life even while living like the rest of the world. This worldly regularity is therefore a continual persecution of the truth; and so much the more dangerous, as it is an authorized persecution which has nothing odious in it, and against which no precaution is taken; which attacks the truth without violence, without effusion of blood, under the smiling image of peace and society: and which, through these means, occasions more deserters from the truth than ever all tyrants and tortures formerly did.

I speak even of those good characters who only imperfectly fulfil the duties of piety, who still retain, too, public remains of the passions of the world and of its maxims: and I say, that they persecute the truth through these unfortunate remains of infidelity and weakness; that they are the occasion of its being blasphemed by the impious and other sinners; that they authorize the senseless discourses of the world against the piety of the servants of God; that they are the cause of souls being disgusted with virtue, who might otherwise feel themselves disposed to it; that they confirm, in the path of error, those who seek pretexts to remain in it: in a word, that they render virtue either suspicious or ridiculous. Thus, still every day, as the Lord formerly complained, through his prophet Jeremiah, the backsliding Israel, that is to say, the world, justifies herself more than treacherous Judah, that is to say, the weaknesses of the good: I mean to say, that the world thinks itself secure when it sees that those souls, who profess piety, join in its pleasures and frivolities; are warm, like the rest of men, upon fortune, upon favour, upon preferences, and upon injuries; pursue their own ends, have still a desire of pleasing, eagerly seek after distinctions and favours, and sometimes make even piety subservient toward more surely attaining them. Ah! it is then that the world triumphs, and that it feels itself comforted in the comparison; it is then that, finding such a resemblance between the virtue of the good and its own vices, it feels tranquil upon its situation,

and thinks that it is needless to change, since, in changing the name, the same things are still retained.

And it is here that I cannot prevent myself from saying, with the apostle Peter, to you whom God hath recalled from the ways of the world and of the passions, to those of truth and righteousness; let us act in such a manner among the worldly, that, in place of decrying virtue as they have hitherto done, and of despising or censuring those who practise it; the good works which they shall behold in us, our pure and holy manners, our patience under scorn, our wisdom and our circumspection in discourse, our modesty and humility in exaltation, our equality of mind and submission under disgrace, our gentleness toward our inferiors, our regard for our equals, our fidelity toward our masters, our universal charity toward our brethré, force them to render glory to God, make them to respect and even to envy the destiny of virtue, and dispose their hearts to receive the grace of light and of truth when it shall deign to visit them, and to enlighten them upon their erroneous ways. Let us shut up the mouth of all the enemies of virtue by the sight of an irreprehensible life: let us honour piety, that it may honour us: let us render it respectable, if we wish to gain partisans to it: let us furnish to the world examples which condemn it, and not censures which justify it: let us accustom it to think, that godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise not only of the life to come, but also peace, satisfaction, and content, which are the only good, and the only real pleasures of the present life.

To this persecution of scandal, Herod adds a persecution of seduction: he tempts the sanctity and the fidelity of the ministers of the law: he wishes to make the zeal and the holy boldness of the magi instrumental to his impious designs: in a word, he neglects nothing to undo the truth before he openly attacks it.

And behold a fresh manner in which we continually persecute the truth. In the first place, we weaken the piety of the just by accusing their fervour of excess, and by struggling to persuade them that they do too much; we exhort them, like the grand tempter, to change their stones into bread; that is to say, to abate from their austerity, and to change that retired, gloomy, and laborious life, into a more ordinary and comfortable one: we give them room to dread that the sequel will not correspond with these beginnings: in a word, we endeavour to draw them nearer to us, being unwilling to raise ourselves to a level with them. Secondly, we perhaps tempt even their fidelity and their innocence, by giving the most animated descriptions of those pleasures from which they fly: like the wife of Job, we blame their simplicity and weakness: we exaggerate to them the inconveniencies of virtue and the difficulties of perseverance: we shake them by the example of unfaithful souls, who, after

putting their hand to the plough, have cast a look behind, and abandoned their labour:—what shall I say? We perhaps attack even the immoveable groundwork of faith, and we insinuate the inutility of the self-denials it proposes, from the uncertainty of its promises. Thirdly, we harass, by our authority, the zeal and the piety of those persons who are dependent upon us: we exact duties of them, either incompatible with their innocence, or dangerous to their virtue: we place them in situations either painful or trying to their faith: we interdict them from practices and observances, either necessary for their support in piety, or profitable toward their progress in it: in a word, we become domestic tempters with respect to them, being neither capable of tasting good ourselves, nor of suffering it in others, and performing toward these souls, the office of the demon, who only watches in order to destroy. Lastly, we render ourselves culpable of this persecution of seduction, by making our talents instrumental to the destruction of the reign of Jesus Christ: the talents of the body in inspiring iniquitous passions; in placing ourselves in hearts where God alone ought to be; in corrupting the souls for whom Jesus Christ gave his blood: the talents of the mind in inducing to vice; in embellishing it with all the charms most calculated to hide its infamy and horror; in presenting the poison under the most alluring and seductive form; and in rendering it immortal by lascivious works, through the means of which, a miserable author shall, to the end of ages, preach up vice, corrupt hearts, and inspire his brethren with every deplorable passion which had enslaved himself during life; shall see his punishment and his torments increased in proportion as the impious fire he has lighted up shall spread upon the earth; shall have the shocking consolation of declaring himself, even after death, against his God, of gaining souls from him whom he had redeemed, of still insulting his holiness and majesty, of perpetuating his own rebellion and disorders even beyond the tomb, and of making, even to the fulfilment of time, the crimes of all men his own crimes. Woe, saith the Lord, to all those who rise up against my name and glory, and who lay snares for my people! I will take vengeance of them on the day of my judgment: I will demand of them the blood of their brethren whom they have seduced, and whom they have caused to perish: and I will multiply upon them, and make them for ever to feel, the most dreadful evils, in return for that glory which they have ravished from me.

But a last description of persecution, still more fatal to truth, is that which I call a persecution of power and violence. Herod, having gained nothing by his artifices, at last throws off the mask, openly declares himself the persecutor of Jesus Christ, and wishes to extinguish in its birth, that light which comes to illuminate the whole world.

The sole mention of the cruelty of that impious prince strikes us with horror; and it does not appear that so barbarous an

example can ever find imitators among us: nevertheless, the world is full of these kinds of public and avowed persecutors of the truth: and, if the church be no longer afflicted with the barbarity of tyrants, and with the effusion of her children's blood, she is still every day persecuted by the public derisions which the worldly make of virtue, and by the ruin of those faithful souls, whom she, with grief, so often beholds sinking under the dread of their derisions and censures.

Yes, my brethren, those discourses which you so readily allow yourselves against the piety of the servants of God, of those souls who, by their fervent homages, recompense his glory for your crimes and insults; those derisions of their zeal and of their holy intoxication for their God; those biting sarcasms which rebound from their person upon virtue itself, and are the most dangerous temptation of their penitence; that severity, on their account, which forgives them nothing, and changes even their virtues into vices; that language of blasphemy and of mockery, which throws an air of ridicule over the seriousness of their compunction; which gives appellations of irony and contempt to the most respectable practices of their piety; which shakes their faith, checks their holy resolutions, disheartens their weakness, makes them, as it were, ashamed of virtue, and often is the cause of their returning to vice:—behold what, with the saints, I call an open and declared persecution of the truth. You persecute in your brother, says St. Augustine, that which the tyrants themselves have never persecuted: they have deprived him only of life; your scheme is to deprive him of innocence and virtue: their persecution extended only to the body; you carry yours even to the destruction of his soul.

What, my brethren! is it not enough that you do not yourselves serve the God for whom you are created? (This is what the first defenders of faith, the Tertullians and the Cyprians, formerly said to the Pagan persecutors of the faithful; and must it be that we, alas! have the same complaints to make against Christians?) Is it not enough? Must you also persecute those who serve him? You are then determined neither to adore him yourselves, nor to suffer that others do it? You every day forgive so many extravagancies to the followers of the world, so many unreasonable passions; you excuse them;—what do I say? you applaud them in the inordinate desires of their heart; in their most shameful passions you find constancy, fidelity, and dignity: you give honourable names to their most infamous vices; and it is a just and faithful soul alone, a servant of the true God, who has no indulgence to expect from you, and is certain of drawing upon himself your contempt and censures? But, my brethren, theatrical and other amusements are publicly licensed, and nothing is said against them: the madness of gambling has its declared partisans, and they are quietly put

up with: ambition has its worshippers and slaves, and they are even commended: voluptuousness has its altars and victims, and no one contests them: avarice has its idolaters, and not a word is said against them; all the passions, like so many sacrilegious divinities, have their established worship, without the smallest exception being taken; and the sole Lord of the universe, and the Sovereign of all men, and the only God upon the earth, either shall not be served at all, or shall not be it with impunity, and without every obstacle being placed in the way of his service?

Great God! avenge then thine own glory; render again to thy servants that honour and that lustre which the impious unceasingly ravish from them: do not, as formerly, send ferocious beasts from the depths of their forests to devour the contemners of virtue and of the holy simplicity of thy prophets; but deliver them up to their inordinate desires, still more cruel and insatiable than the lion or the bear, in order that, worn out, racked by their internal convulsions and the frenzies of their own passions, they may know all the value and all the excellence of that virtue which they contemn, and aspire to the felicity and to the destiny of those souls who serve thee.

For, my brethren, you whom this discourse regards, allow me, and with grief, to say it here,—must you be the instruments which the demon employs to tempt the chosen of God, and, if it were possible, to lead them astray? Must it be that you appear upon the earth merely in order to justify the prophecies of the holy books with regard to the persecutions, which, even to the end, are inevitable to all those who shall wish to live in godliness which is in Jesus Christ? Must you alone be the means of sustaining the perpetuity of that frightful succession of persecutors of faith and of virtue, which is to endure as long as the church? Must you, in default now of tyrants and of tortures, continue to be the rock and the scandal of the gospel? Renounce, then, yourselves the hope which is in Jesus Christ; join yourselves with those barbarous nations, or with those impious characters who blaspheme his glory and his divinity, if to you it appears so worthy of derision and laughter to live under his laws, and according to his maxims. An infidel or a savage might suppose that we, who serve and who worship him, are under delusion; he might pity our credulity and weakness, when he sees us sacrificing the present to a futurity, and a hope which, in his eyes, might appear fabulous and chimerical: but he would be forced, at least, to confess, that, if we do not deceive ourselves, and if our faith be justly grounded, we are the wisest and the most estimable of all men. But for you, who would not dare to start a doubt of the certitude of faith, and of the hope which is in Jesus Christ, with what eyes, with what astonishment would that infidel regard the censures which you so plentifully bestow upon his servants! You prostrate yourselves before his cross, he would say to you, as before the pledge of your salvation; and

you laugh at those who bear it in their heart, and who ground their whole hope and expectation in it! You worship him as your Judge; and you contemn and load with ridicule those who dread him, and who anxiously labour to render him favourable to their interests! You believe him to be sincere and faithful in his word; and you look upon, as weak minds, those who place their trust in him, and who sacrifice every thing to the grandeur and to the certainty of his promises! O man, so astonishing, so full of contradictions, so little in unison with thyself, would the infidel exclaim, how great and how holy must the God of the Christians therefore be, seeing that, among all those who know him, he hath no enemies but such as are of thy description!

Let us, therefore, respect virtue, my brethren; let us honour, in his servants, the gifts of God, and the wonders of his grace. Let us merit, by our deference and our esteem for piety, the blessing of piety itself. Let us regard the worthy and pious as the souls who alone continue to draw down the favours of Heaven upon the earth, as resources established to reconcile us one day with God, as blessed signs, which prove to us that the Lord still looketh upon men with pity, and continueth his mercies upon his church. Let us encourage by our praises, if we cannot strengthen by our example, the souls who return to him: let us applaud their change, if we think it impossible, as yet, to change ourselves; let us glory in defending them, if our passions will not, as yet, permit us to imitate them. Let us reverence and esteem virtue. Let us have no friends but the friends of God. Let us count upon the fidelity of men only in proportion as they are faithful to their Master and Creator. Let us confide our sorrows and our sufferings only to those who can present them to him, who alone can console them: let us believe to be in our real interests only those who are in the interests of our salvation. Let us smooth the way to our conversion: let us, by our respect for the just, prepare the world to behold us one day, without surprise, just ourselves. Let us not, by our derisions and censures, raise up an invincible stumbling-block of human respect, which shall for ever prevent us from declaring ourselves disciples of that piety which we have so loudly and so publicly decried. Let us render glory to the truth; and, in order that it may deliver us, let us religiously receive it, like the magi, from the moment that it is manifested to us: let us not dissemble it, like the priests, when we owe it to our brethren: let us not declare against it, like Herod, when we can no longer dissemble it to ourselves, in order that, after having walked in the ways of truth upon the earth, we may all together one day be sanctified in truth, and perfected in charity.

SERMON XXVIII.

THE DIVINITY OF JESUS CHRIST.

“ His name was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel.”—LUKE ii. 21.

A GOD lowering himself so far as even to become man, astonishes and confounds reason; and into what an abyss of errors is it not plunged, if the light of faith come not speedily to its aid, to discover the depth of the divine wisdom concealed under the apparent absurdity of the mystery of a Man-God! Thus, in all times, this fundamental point of our holy religion, I mean the divinity of Jesus Christ, hath been the object most exposed to the foolish oppositions of the human mind. Men, full of pride, whose mouths ought to be filled with only thanksgivings for the ineffable gift, made to them by the Father of mercies, of his only Son, have continually insulted him, by vomiting forth the most impious blasphemies against that adorable Son;—full of blindness, who have not seen that the sole name of Jesus, which is given to him on this day, that name which he at first receives in heaven, and which an angel conveys to the earth, to Mary and Joseph, is the incontestable proof of his divinity. That sacred name establishes him the Saviour of mankind; Saviour, in that, through the effusion of blood, which becomes our ransom, he delivers us from sin, and from the consequences inseparable from it, namely, the tyranny of the demon and of hell: Saviour, in that, attracting upon his own head the chastisement due to our transgressions, he reconciles us with God, and opens to us afresh the entry of the eternal sanctuary, which sin had shut against us. But, my brethren, if the Son of Mary be but a mere man, of what value, in the eyes of God, will be the oblation of his blood? If Jesus Christ be not God, how will his mediation be accepted, while he would himself have occasion for a mediator to reconcile him with God?

This proof, which I only touch upon here, and so many others with which religion furnishes me, would quickly stop the mouth of the ungodly, and confound his impiety, if I undertook to show them in all their light, and to give an extension in proportion to their importance. But, God forbid that I should come here, into the holy temple, where the altars of our divine Saviour are raised up, where his worshippers assemble, to enter into contestation, as if I spake in the presence of his enemies, or to make the apology of

the mystery of the Man-God, before a believing people, and a sovereign whose most illustrious and most cherished title is that of Christian. It is not, therefore, to combat these ungodly, that, on this day, I consecrate my discourse to the divinity and to the eternal glory of Jesus, Son of the living God; I come for the sole purpose of consoling our faith, while recounting the wonders of him who is its Author and Perfecter; and to reanimate our piety in exposing to you the glory and the divinity of our Mediator, who is its object and its sweetest hope.

It is even proper to renew, from time to time, these grand truths in the minds of the great and of the princes of the people, in order to strengthen them against those discourses of infidelity which they, in general, are only too much in the way of hearing; and it is expedient sometimes to raise up the veil which covers the sanctuary, that they may have a view of those hidden beauties which religion only holds out to their respect and their homages.

Now, the divinity of the Mediator can only be proved by his ministry; his titles can appear only in his functions; and, in order to know whether he be descended from heaven, and equal with the Most High, it requires only to relate the purposes for which he came upon the earth. He came, my brethren, to form a holy and a believing people; a believing people, who subject their reason to the sacred yoke of faith; a holy people, whose conversation is in heaven, and who are no longer responsible to the flesh, to live according to the flesh: such is the grand design of his temporal mission.

The lustre of his ministry is the firmest foundation of our faith: the spirit of his ministry, the sole rule of our morals. Now, if he was only a man commissioned of God, the lustre of his ministry would be the inevitable occasion of our superstition and idolatry; the spirit of his ministry would be the fatal snare to entrap our innocence. Thus, whether we consider the lustre or the spirit of his ministry, the glory of his divinity remains equally and invincibly established.

O Jesus, sole Lord of all, accept this public homage of our confession and of our faith! While impiety blasphemes in secret, and under the shades of darkness, against thy glory, allow us the consolation of publishing it with the voice of all ages in the face of these altars; and form, in our heart, not only that faith which confesses and worships thee, but also that which follows and which imitates thee.

PART I.—God can manifest himself to men, only in order to teach them what he is, and what men owe to him; and religion is, properly speaking, but a divine light, which discovers God to man, and which regulates the duties of man toward God. Whether the Most High show himself to the earth, or whether he fill extraordinary men with his spirit, the end of all

his proceedings can be only the knowledge and the sanctification of his name in the universe, and the establishment of a worship in which they render to him what is due to him alone.

Now, if the Lord Jesus, come in the fulness of time, was nothing more than an upright and innocent man, only chosen to be the messenger of God upon the earth, the principal end of his ministry would have been that of rendering the world idolatrous, and of ravishing from the Divinity that glory which is his due, in order to appropriate it to himself.

In effect, my brethren, whether we consider the lustre of his ministry in that pompous train of oracles and of figurative allusions which have preceded him, in the wonderful circumstances which have accompanied him, and, lastly, in the works which he hath operated; the lustre of it is such, that, if Jesus Christ was only a man, similar to us, God, who hath sent him upon the earth, arrayed in such glory and power, would himself have deceived us, and would be culpable of the idolatry of those who worship him.

The first signal character of the ministry of Jesus Christ is, that, from the beginning of the world, it was foretold and promised to men. Scarcely had the fall of Adam taken place, when the Restorer, whom his guilt had rendered necessary to the earth, is shown to him from afar. In the following ages, God, it would appear, is only occupied in preparing mankind for his coming: if he manifest himself to the patriarchs, it is in order to confirm their faith in that expectation; if he inspire prophets, it is in order to announce him; if he choose to himself a people, it is for the purpose of making it the depositary of that grand promise; if he prescribe sacrifices and religious ceremonies to men, it is in order to trace out in them, as from afar, the history of him who was to come. Whatever took place upon the earth seems to lead to that grand event: empires and kingdoms fall or rise only in order to prepare the way for it: the heavens are only opened to promise it: and, as St. Paul says, the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain to bring forth the Righteous, who is to come for the redemption of our body from the bondage of corruption and sin.

Now, my brethren, to inspire, from the beginning of all ages, the earth with the expectation of a man, and to announce him to it from heaven, is already, in fact, to prepare men to receive him with a kind of religion and worship; and even granting that Jesus Christ were to have only the eclat of that particular circumstance which distinguishes him from all other men, the superstition of the people, with regard to him, were he only a simple creature, had been to dread. But even the circumstance of Jesus Christ being foretold is not so wonderful as those in which he hath been it, which are more surprising than even the prophecies themselves. In effect, if Cyrus and John the Baptist had been fore-

told, long before their birth, in the prophecies of Isaiah and of Malachi, these are only individual prophecies, without consequence or train, and which are found in a single prophet; predictions which announce only particular events, and by which the religion of the people could never be caught or surprised: Cyrus to be the re-establisher of the walls of Jerusalem; John the Baptist to prepare the way for him who was to come: both in order to confirm, by the accomplishment of their particular prophecies, the truth and the divinity of all the prophecies which announce Jesus Christ.

But here, my brethren, it is a Messenger of Heaven, foretold by a whole people, announced, during four thousand years, by a long train of prophecies, desired of all nations, figured by all the ceremonies, expected by all the just, and shown from afar in all ages. The patriarchs expire in wishing to see him: the just live in that expectation: fathers instruct their children to wish for him: and this desire is like a domestic religion which is perpetuated from age to age. The prophets themselves of the Gentiles, see the Star of Jacob shining from afar; and this great event is announced even in the oracles of idols. Here, it is not for a particular event; it is to be the resource of the condemned world, the legislator of all people, the light of all nations, the salvation of Israel; it is in order to blot out iniquity from the earth, to bring an eternal righteousness, to fill the universe with the spirit of God, and to be the blessed bearer of an immortal peace to all men. What a pompous train! What a snare for the religion of all ages, if such magnificent preparations announce only a simple creature; and, more especially, in times when the credulity of the people so easily placed extraordinary men in the rank of gods!

Besides, when John the Baptist appears on the borders of the Jordan, afraid, it would seem, that the single oracle which had foretold him might become an occasion of idolatry to the people whom the fame of his sanctity attracted round him, he performs no miracles; he never ceases to say, "I am not he whom you expect; but one mightier than me cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose;" he is only watchful, it would appear, to prevent superstitious honours. Jesus Christ, on the contrary, whom four thousand years of expectation, of allusions, of prophecies, of promises, had with so much magnificence announced to the earth; Jesus Christ, far from preventing the superstition of the people with regard to himself, comes in full authority and might; he does miracles and deeds which no one had ever done before him; and, not only does he raise himself above John the Baptist, but he gives out that he is equal with God himself. Had the error been to dread, and, if to render to him divine honours had been idolatry, where would be his zeal for the glory of him who sends him, or where would be his love for men?

And yet more, my brethren: all the extraordinary men of

which the preceding ages could boast, all the just of the law and of the age of the patriarchs, had been only the imperfect types of the Christ; and again, each of them represented only some individual trait of his life and ministry: Melchizedek, his priesthood; Abraham, his quality of Head and Father of believers; Isaac, his sacrifice; Job, his persecutions and sufferings; Moses, his office of Mediator; Joshua, his triumphant entry into the land of the living with a chosen people. All these men, however, so venerable and so miraculous, were only rude sketches of the Messiah to come; and how great must have been that Messiah himself, seeing his figures were so illustrious and so shining! But, deprive Jesus Christ of his divinity and of his eternal origin, and the reality has nothing superior to the figure. I know, as we shall afterward say, that, when we narrowly examine the lustre of his wonders, we shall see them marked with divine characters which are only to be found in the life of those great men. But, to judge of them by the eyes of the senses alone, the parallel would not be favourable to Jesus Christ. Is he greater than Abraham; that man so great, that the Lord himself, among his most pompous names, had taken that of the God of Abraham, as if in order to proclaim to the world that the homages of a man, so righteous and so extraordinary, were more glorious to his sovereignty than the title of God of empires and of nations: so great, that the Jews believed themselves superior to all other nations of the earth, only because they were the posterity of that famous chief so cherished of Heaven; and that fathers, in recounting to their children the wonders of their nation, and the history of their ancestors, animated them to virtue, only by putting them in remembrance that they were the children of Abraham and the members of a holy race? Is he more wonderful than Moses; that man, mighty in words and in deeds, mediator of a holy covenant, who broke the yoke of Egypt, and delivered his people from bondage; that man, who was established the god of Pharaoh, who seemed the master of nature, who covered the earth with plagues, who divided seas, who made a new nourishment to be showered from heaven; that man, who saw the Lord face to face upon the holy mountain, and who appeared before Israel all resplendent in light? What is there more astonishing or more magnificent in the life of Jesus Christ? Nevertheless, these were only rude sketches of his glory and might: he was to be the last finishing and perfection of them. Now, if Jesus Christ were not the image of the substance of his Father, and the eternal splendour of his glory, he, at the utmost, could only be equalled with these first men; and the incredulity of the Jews might, without blasphemy, demand of him, "Art thou greater than our father Abraham, or than the prophets which are dead? Whom makest thou thyself?" I have then justly said, that if, in the first place, you will estimate his ministry from that pompous train of oracles and

of figures which have announced him, the splendour is such, that, if Jesus Christ be but a man similar to us, the wisdom itself of God would be culpable of the mistake of those who worship him.

But, my brethren, the Christ hath been foretold with his members; we are comprised in the prophecies which have announced him to the earth; we have been promised as a holy race, a spiritual people, who were to bear the law engraven on their heart, who were to sigh only after eternal riches, and who were to adore in spirit and in truth: like Jesus Christ, we have composed the expectation of the just of ancient times, and the desire of nations: we are that new Jerusalem, pure and undefiled, so often announced in the prophets, where God alone was to be known and worshipped; where faith was to be the sole light to illuminate us, charity the only bond of union, and the land of promise the only hope to animate us. Now, do we answer an expectation so illustrious and so holy? Are we worthy of having been the earnest desire of all those distant ages which have preceded us? Do we merit to have been looked forward to like celestial men, who were to fill the earth with sanctity and righteousness? Have not those ages been deceived in their expectation of the Christian people? Were the just of those distant times to return upon the earth, could we present ourselves to them, and say, Behold those celestial, spiritual, temperate, believing, and charitable men, whom you expected? Alas! my brethren, the just of former times were Christians before the birth of faith; and we are still Jews, under all the advantages of the gospel: we live solely for the earth: we know no true riches but the present good: our whole religion is grounded in the senses: we have received more assistances, but we are not more believing.

To the lustre of the prophecies which have announced Jesus Christ, we must add that of his works and of his miracles:—second resplendent character of his ministry. Yes, my brethren, even admitting that Heaven had not promised him to the earth with such magnificence; that the manner in which he was to appear to the earth had not constituted, during all these first ages, the sole occupation and expectation of the universe; did ever man appear more wonderful, more divine in his actions, and in all the circumstances of his life?

I say, first, in his actions and in his miracles. I know, and we come from saying it, that, in the ages which preceded him, extraordinary men had appeared upon the earth, to whom the Lord seemed to have delegated his omnipotence and virtue: in Egypt and in the desert Moses appeared the master of heaven and earth; in the following ages Elijah came to present the same sight to men. But, when we narrowly examine their power itself, we find that all these miraculous men always bore with them the marks of weakness and dependence.

Moses only operated his miracles with his mysterious rod; without it he was no longer but a weak and powerless man; and it would seem that the Lord had attached the virtue of miracles to that morsel of parched wood for the purpose of making the Israelites sensible that, in his hands, Moses himself was but a weak and fragile instrument, whom he was pleased to employ in the operation of grand effects: Jesus Christ operates the grandest miracles, even without speaking; and the sole touch of his garment cures inveterate infirmities. Moses communicates not to his disciples the power of operating miracles; for it was an extraneous gift which he had received from Heaven, and which he had not the power of delegating: Jesus Christ leaves to his disciples a still greater efficacy than had appeared even in himself. Moses always acts in the name of the Lord: Jesus Christ operates all in his own name; and the works of his Father are his. Nevertheless, this Moses, who had not been prophesied of like Jesus Christ, who remitted not sins as he did, who never gave himself out as equal to God, but only as his faithful servant,—this Moses, dreading that, after his death, his miracles should make him pass for a god, takes precautions lest, in the revolution of ages, the credulity of his people render to him divine honours: he goes up alone to the mountain, to expire far from the sight of his brethren, in the fear of their coming to offer up victims upon his tomb, and for ever removes his body from the superstition of the tribes: he does not show himself to his disciples after his death; he contents himself with leaving to them the law of God, and employs every mean to obliterate himself from their remembrance. And Jesus Christ, after all the miracles which he operates in Judea, after all the prophecies which had announced him, after having appeared as a God upon the earth, his tomb is known to all the universe, exposed to the veneration of all people and ages; even after his death he shows himself to his disciples. Was superstition, then, less to be dreaded here? Or is Jesus Christ less zealous than Moses, for the glory of the Supreme Being and for the salvation of men?

Elijah, it is true, raises up the dead; but he is obliged to stretch himself out upon the body of the child whom he recalls to life; and it is easily seen that he invokes a foreign power; that he withdraws from the empire of death a soul which is not subjugated to him; and that he is not himself the master of life and death. Jesus Christ raises up the dead as easily as he performs the most common actions; he speaks as master of those who repose in an eternal sleep; and it is thoroughly felt that he is the God of the dead as of the living, never more tranquil and calm than when he is operating the grandest things.

Lastly. The poets represented to us their sybils and their priestesses as mad women, while foretelling the future: it would seem that they were unable to sustain the presence of the false

spirit which dwelt within them. Even our own prophets, when announcing future things, without losing the use of their reason, or departing from the solemnity and the decency of their ministry, partook of a divine enthusiasm: the soft sounds of the lyre were often necessary to arouse in them the prophetic spirit; it was easily to be seen that they were animated by a foreign impulse, and that it was not from their own funds they drew the knowledge of the future, and those hidden mysteries which they announced to men. Jesus Christ prophesies as he speaks; the knowledge of the future has nothing either to move, disquiet, or surprise him, because all times are contained in his mind; the future mysteries which he announces are not sudden and infused lights to his soul; they are familiar objects to him, always present to his view, and the images of which he finds within himself; and all ages to come, under the immensity of his regards, are as the present day which illuminates us. Thus, neither the resurrection of the dead, nor the foretelling of the future, ever injures his natural tranquillity; he sports himself, if I may venture to say so, in operating miracles in the universe; and if he, at times, appear to tremble and to be troubled, it is solely when viewing the sin and the perversity of his people; because the more exalted one is in sanctity, the more does sin offer new horrors; and that the only thing which a Man-God can view with trembling, is the spectacle of a conscience stained with crimes.

Such is the omnipotency of Jesus Christ: his miracles bear no mark of dependence: and, not satisfied with thereby showing to us that he is equal to God, he also advertises us, that, whatever wonder is operated by his Father upon the earth, he likewise operates; and that his Father's works are his. Hath any prophet, down to the period of Jesus Christ, spoken in this manner; and who, far from rendering glory to God as the author of every excellent gift, hath attributed to himself all the grand things which it had pleased the Lord to operate through his ministry?

But, my brethren, if we have also been prophesied with Jesus Christ, we are moreover participators of his sovereignty over all creatures. Through faith the Christian is master of nature: all is subjected to him, because he himself is inferior only to God; all his actions ought to be miraculous, because they ought all to proceed from a sublime and a divine principle, and far above the powers of human weakness. We ought to be, as I may say, miraculous men, masters of the world, in contemning it; exalted above the laws of nature, by overcoming them; sovereign disposers of events, by a thorough and tranquil submission to them; more powerful than death itself, by wishing for it. Such is the sublimity of the Christian: and how great must Jesus Christ have been to have exalted human weakness to such a pinnacle of grandeur and might!

Finally. The last splendid character of his ministry is the

marvellous, and, till then, unheard-of circumstances which compose the whole course of his mortal life. I know that he came in nakedness and humiliation; but, through these obscure and contemptible externals, what lustre are not even the enemies of his divinity forced to acknowledge there!

In the first place, although they consider him as a man similar to us, they, nevertheless, believe him to have been formed, through the invisible operation of the Most High, in the womb of a virgin of Judah, in opposition to the common law of the children of Adam. What glory already for a simple creature!

Secondly. Scarcely is he born, when celestial legions sing the praises of the Lord, and give us to understand, that this birth renders his glory to the Most High, and brings an eternal peace upon the earth. What then is this creature who can render glory to the Most High, whose glory is in himself alone? Immediately after this a new star calls the wise men from the heart of the East; and, guided by that miraculous light, those righteous men come from the extremities of the earth to worship the new King of the Jews.

Trace all the circumstances of his life. If Mary bring him to the temple, a righteous man and a holy woman proclaim his future greatness; and, transported with a holy joy, they die with pleasure, after having seen him whom they call the salvation of the world, the light of nations, and the glory of Israel. The doctors, assembled in the temple, behold, with terror, his infancy to be wiser and more enlightened than all the wisdom of old men. In proportion as he grows up, his glory unfolds itself: John the Baptist, that man, the greatest of the children of men, humbles himself before him, and says that he is not worthy of performing the meanest offices to him. A voice from Heaven declares that he is the well-beloved Son. The affrighted demons fly from before him, are unable to support the sole presence of his sanctity, and confess that he is the holy of God. Collect together testimonies so different and so new, circumstances so unheard-of and so extraordinary; what is this man who appears upon the earth with so much eclat? And are not the people who have worshipped him at least excusable?

But these are only weak preludes of his glory. If he privately withdraw himself upon the Tabor, accompanied with three disciples, his glory, impatient, if I dare to say it, at having hitherto been held captive under the veil of humanity, openly bursts forth: he appears all resplendent in light: the heavenly Father, who then, it would appear, lest the glory of Jesus Christ should become an occasion of error and idolatry to the astonished disciples, spectators of this sight, ought to have warned them that this Jesus, whom they beheld so glorious, was nevertheless only his servant and messenger, declares to them, on the contrary, that this is his well-beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased, and affixes no

bounds to the homages which, according to his pleasure, they are to render to him. When Moses appeared surrounded with glory, and, as it were, transfigured on Mount Sinai, afraid lest the Israelites, always superstitious, should consider him as a god descended upon the earth, the Lord, amid a flame of fire, declared at the same time from on high, "I am that I am, and thou shalt worship only me." Moses himself appears before the people with only the tables of the law in his hands, as if to let them know that, notwithstanding the glory with which they had seen him arrayed, he nevertheless was only the minister, and not the author of the holy law; that he could offer it to them only engraven on stone, and that it belonged solely to God to engrave it on hearts. But, on the Tabor, Jesus Christ appears as the legislator himself: the new law is not given to him by his Father to bear it to men; he only commandeth them to listen to him, and from his own mouth he proposeth him as their legislator, or rather as their living and eternal law.

What more shall I say, my brethren? If from the Tabor we pass to Mount Calvary, that place, in which all the ignominy of the Son of Man was to be consummated, is not less, however, the theatre of his glory and divinity. All nature, disorganized, confesses its Author in him; the stars which are hidden; the dead who arise; the stones of the tombs, which open of their own accord, and break in pieces; the veil of the temple, which is rent from top to bottom; even incredulity itself, which confesses him through the mouth of the centurion; all feel that it is not an ordinary man who dies, and that things take place upon that mount totally new and extraordinary.

Many righteous before him had died for the truth, by the hands of the impious. The head of the forerunner had lately been seen in the palace of Herod, as the price of voluptuousness. Isaiah, by a grievous death, had rendered glory to God; and, notwithstanding his royal blood, his august birth was ineffectual in sheltering him from those persecutions which are always the recompense of truth and zeal. Many others had died for the sake of righteousness; but nature seemed not wholly interested in their sufferings; the dead forsook not their tombs, to come, and, as it were, reproach to the living their sacrilege; nothing, in any degree similar, had, as yet, appeared upon the earth.

Survey the rest of his mysteries; every where you will find traits which distinguish him from all other men. If he rise up from among the dead, besides that it is through his own efficiency, (which no eye had ever yet beheld,) it is not, like so many others, who had been raised up through the ministry of the prophets, to return once more into the empire of death: he arises, never more to die; and, even here below, he receives an immortal life, which is what had never yet been accorded to any creature.

If he is carried up into heaven, it is not in a flaming chariot

that he vanishes in the twinkling of an eye ; he ascends with majesty, and allows all leisure to his affectionate disciples to worship him, and to accompany their divine Master with their eyes and their homages. The angels, as if to receive him into his empire, come to greet this King of Glory and comfort the affliction of the disciples, by promising him once more to the earth, surrounded with glory and immortality. All here announces the God of heaven, who returns to the place from whence he came, and who goes to resume the possession of his own glory ; at least, every thing inclines men to believe so.

And, in truth, my brethren, when Elijah is taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot, a single disciple is the only spectator of that miraculous ascension ; it takes place in a retired spot, removed from the view of the other children of the prophets, who, perhaps more credulous and less enlightened than Eliseus, might have been inclined to render divine honours to that miraculous man. But Jesus Christ, surrounded with glory, mounts up to heaven before the eyes of five hundred disciples : the weakest, and those who are least confirmed in the faith of his resurrection, are the first who are invited to the holy mountain : nothing is dreaded from their credulity : on the contrary, their adorations are equally permitted as their regrets and tears ; and a life full of prodigies, till then so unheard-of on the earth, is at last terminated by a circumstance still more wonderful, and sufficient of itself to make him to be regarded as a God, and to immortalize error and idolatry among men.

In effect, if the pagan ages, in order to justify the ridiculous and impious homages which they paid to their legislators, to the founders of empires, and to other celebrated men, gave it out, in their historians and poets, that these heroes were not dead, but had only disappeared from the earth ; and that, being of the same nature with the gods, they had ascended to heaven, in order to assume their station among the other stars, which, according to them, were so many divinities who enlighten us, and for the purpose of there enjoying that immortality to which their divine birth entitled them : if so very vulgar a fiction had of itself been able to render men so long idolatrous, what impression must the reality of that fable not have made upon the people ! And if the universe had worshipped impostors, who were falsely said to have mounted up to heaven, would it not have been excusable to worship a miraculous man, whom men, with their own eyes, had seen exalted above the stars ?

But observe, my brethren, that the occasion of error finishes not with Jesus Christ ; it is announced to us that, at the end of ages, he will again appear in the heavens, surrounded with power and majesty, and accompanied with all the heavenly host ; all assembled nations shall, with trembling, await at his feet the decision of their eternal destiny : he will sovereignly pronounce their decisive sentence. The Abrahams, the Moseses, the Davids,

the Elijahs, the John the Baptists, and all that ages have produced of great and most wonderful, shall be submitted to his judgment and to his empire; he will himself be exalted above all power, all dominion, and all which is termed great in heaven and in the earth: he will erect his throne above the clouds, and sit on the right hand of the Most High: he will appear Master, not only of life and death, but the immortal King of ages, the Prince of eternity, the Chief of a holy people, the supreme Arbiter of all the created. What then is this man to whom the Lord hath delegated such power? And the dead themselves, who shall appear in judgment before him, shall they be condemned for having worshipped him, when they shall see him clothed with such glory, majesty, and power?

And one reflection, which I beg you to make in finishing this part of my Discourse, is, that, if only one extraordinary and divine trait were to be found here in the course of a long life, we might be inclined to believe that it sometimes pleaseth the Lord to allow his glory and his power to shine forth in his servants. Thus Enoch was carried up, Moses appeared transfigured on the holy mountain, Elijah was raised up to heaven in a fiery chariot, John the Baptist was foretold. But, besides that these were individual circumstances, and that the language of those miraculous men and of their disciples, with respect to the Divinity and to themselves, left no room for superstition and mistake; here, it is an assemblage of wonders, which all, or even taken separately, would have been sufficient to deceive the credulity of men; here, all the different traits, dispersed among all these extraordinary men, who had been considered almost as gods upon the earth, are collected together in Jesus Christ, but in a manner a thousand times more glorious and more divine. He prophesies, but more loftily, and with more striking characters, than John the Baptist: he appears transfigured in the holy mount, but surrounded with more glory than Moses: he ascends to heaven, but with more marks of power and majesty than Elijah: he penetrates into the future, but with more accuracy and clearness than all the prophets: he is produced, not only from a barren womb, like Samuel, but likewise by a pure and innocent virgin. What shall I say? And not only he does not undeceive men by certain precise expressions upon his origin as purely human; but his sole language, with respect to his equality to the Most High, nay, the sole doctrine of his disciples, who tell us that he was in the bosom of God from all eternity, and that all hath been made through him, who call him their Lord and their God, who inform us that he is all and in all things, would justify the errors of those who worship him, had even his life been, in other respects, an ordinary one, and similar to that of other men.

O you! who refuse to him his glory and his divinity, yet, nevertheless, consider him as a messenger sent by God to in-

struct men, complete the blasphemy, and confound him with those impostors who have come to seduce the world, since, far from tending to establish the glory of God and the knowledge of his name, the splendour of his ministry has answered the sole purpose of erecting himself into a divinity, of placing him at the side of the Most High, and of plunging the whole universe into the most dangerous, the most durable, the most inevitable, and the most universal of all idolatries.

For our part, my brethren, we who believe in him, and to whom the mystery of the Christ hath been revealed, let us never lose sight of that divine model which the Father shows to us from on high on the holy mount. Let us enter into the spirit of the divers mysteries of which his whole mortal life is composed; they are merely the different states of the life of the Christian on this earth; let us confess the new empire which Jesus Christ came to form in our hearts. The world, which we have hitherto served, hath never been able to deliver us from our grievances and wretchedness. We vainly sought in it, freedom, peace, and comfort of life; and we have found only slavery, disquiet, bitterness, and the curse of life. Behold a new Redeemer, who comes to bring peace to the earth; but it is not as the world promises it that he gives it to us. The world had wished to conduct us to peace and happiness through the pleasures of the senses, indolence, and a vain philosophy: it hath not been successful; by favouring our passions it hath only augmented our punishments. Jesus Christ comes to propose a new way for the attainment of that peace and happiness which we search after: detachment from, and contempt of the world, mortification of the senses, self-denial; behold the new riches which he comes to display to men. Let us be undeceived; we have no happiness to expect, even in this life, but by repressing our passions, and by refusing ourselves the gratification of every pleasure which disquiets and corrupts the heart: there is no philosophy, but that of the gospel, which can bestow happiness, or make real sages, because it alone regulates the mind, fixes the heart, and, by restoring man to God, restores him to himself. All those who have pursued other ways, have found only vanity and vexation of spirit; and Jesus Christ alone, in bringing the sword and separation, is come to bring peace among men.

O my God! I know only too well that the world and its pleasures make none happy! Come, then, and resume thy influence over a heart which in vain endeavours to fly from thee, and which its own disgusts recall to thee in spite of itself: come to be its Redeemer, its peace, and its light, and pay more regard to its wretchedness than to its crimes.

Behold how the lustre of the ministry of Jesus Christ would operate as an inevitable occasion of idolatry in men, were he

only a simple creature. Let us now see how the spirit of his ministry would become the snare of our innocence.

PART II.—The lustre of the ministry of Jesus Christ is not the most august and most magnificent side of it. However dignified he hath appeared, in consequence of all the oracles which have announced him, the works which he hath operated, and the shining circumstances of his mysteries, these are merely the outward appearances, as I may say, of his glory and of his grandeur; and, in order to know all that he is, we must enter into the principle and spirit of his ministry. Now, in the spirit of his ministry are comprised his doctrine, his favours, and his promises. Let us display these in their proper extent, and prove, either that we must deny to Jesus Christ his quality of a righteous man, and of a messenger of the Almighty God, which the enemies of his divinity grant him to have been, or we must admit that he is himself a God manifested in the flesh, and come down upon the earth in order to save mankind.

Yes, my brethren, this is an inevitable alternative: if Jesus Christ be holy, he is God; and if his ministry be not a ministry of deceit and imposition, it is the ministry of Eternal Truth itself, which hath been manifested for our instruction. Now, the enemies of his divine birth, are forced to admit, that he hath been a man righteous, innocent, and a friend of God: and if the world hath beheld dark and impious minds, who have likewise dared to blaspheme against his innocence, and to confound him with seducers, these have been only some individual monsters who were held in abhorrence by the human race, and whose names, too odious to all nature, are for ever buried in the same darkness from which the horror of their impiety originally came.

In effect, what man, till then, had appeared upon the earth with more incontestable marks of innocence and sanctity than Jesus, Son of the living God? In what philosopher had ever been observed such a love of virtue, so sincere a contempt of the world, so much charity toward men, such indifference for human glory, such zeal for the glory of the Supreme Being, such elevation above whatever is admired or sought after by men? How great is his zeal for the salvation of men! It is to that object that he directs all his discourses, all his cares, all his desires, and all his anxieties. The philosophers criticised only the men, and solely endeavoured to expose their weakness or their absurdities: Jesus Christ never speaks of their vices but in order to point out their remedies. The former were the censurers of human weaknesses; Jesus Christ is their physician: the former gloried in being able to point out vices in others, from which they themselves were not exempted; he never speaks, but with the bitterest sorrow, of faults, from which his own innocence protects him, and even sheds tears over the

disorders of an unbelieving city: it is easily seen that the former had no intention to reclaim men, but merely to attract esteem to themselves, by pretending to condemn them; and that the only wish of the latter is to save them, and that he is little affected with their applauses or esteem.

Pursue the whole detail of his manners and of his conduct, and see if any righteous character hath ever appeared on the earth more generally exempted from all the most inseparable weaknesses of humanity. The more narrowly he is examined, the more is his sanctity displayed. His disciples, who have it best in their power to know him, are the most affected with the innocence of his life; and familiarity, so dangerous to the most heroic virtue, serves only in his to discover fresh matter of wonder. He speaks only the language of heaven: he never replies but when his answers may be useful toward the salvation of those who interrogate him. We see not in him those intervals, as I may say, in which the man re-appears; on every occasion he is the messenger of the Most High. The commonest actions are extraordinary in him, through the novelty and the sublimity of the dispositions with which he accompanies them; and, when he eats with the pharisee, he does not appear a man less divine than when he raises up Lazarus. Surely, my brethren, nature alone could never lead human weakness so far; this is not a philosopher who enjoins to others what he doth not himself, it is a righteous character, who, in his own examples, adopts the rules and precepts of his doctrine; and holy must he indeed be, seeing the very disciple who betrayed him, so interested to justify his own perfidy by an exposure of his faults, renders public testimony, however, to his innocence and sanctity; and that the whole challenged malice of his enemies hath never been able to convict him of sin.

Now, I say, that, if Jesus Christ be holy, he is God; and that, whether you should consider the doctrine which he hath taught us with respect to his Father or with respect to men, it is no longer but a mass of equivocations, or qualified blasphemies, if he be only an ordinary man, merely deputed by God for the instruction of men.

I say, whether you should consider it with respect to his Father. In effect, if Jesus Christ be but a simple messenger of the Most High, he comes, then, for the sole purpose of manifesting to idolatrous nations the unity of the Divine essence. But, besides, that his mission principally regards the Jews, who, for a long time past, had not returned to idolatry, and, consequently, needed not that God should raise up a prophet to reclaim them from an error of which they were not guilty, and a prophet whom they were taught from the beginning of the world to expect as the light of Israel and the Redeemer of his people; and, besides, in what manner doth Jesus Christ fulfil his ministry, and what is his language with regard

to the Supreme Being? Moses and the prophets, charged with the same mission, never cease to proclaim that the Lord was one and the same; that it was impious to compare him to the similitude of the creature; and that they themselves were only his servants and messengers, vile instruments in the hands of a God, who, through them, operated great things. No dubious expression escapes from their mouth on so essential a point of their mission; no comparison of themselves to the Supreme Being, always dangerous, in consequence of the natural tendency of man to prostitute his homages to men, and to raise up for himself palpable and visible gods; no equivocal term which might have blended themselves with the Lord, in whose name they spake, and have given birth to a superstition and an idolatry, to combat which they only came.

But if Jesus Christ be only a messenger such as they were, with how much less fidelity doth he fulfil his ministry! He continually says, that he is equal to his Father; he acquaints us, that he hath come down from heaven, and that he hath quitted the bosom of God; that he was before Abraham; that he was before all things; that the Father and he are one; that eternal life consists in the knowledge of the Son, as well as in the knowledge of the Father; that whatever is done by the Father, the Son also doth. Had any prophet, down to Jesus Christ, spoken in a language so new, so strange, so disrespectful toward the Supreme God; and who, far from rendering the glory to God as the author of every good gift, hath attributed to his own efficiency the great things which the Lord hath deigned to operate through his ministry? Every where he compares himself to the sovereign God; on one occasion, indeed, he says that the Father is greater than he; but what language is that, if he be not himself a God manifested in flesh? And would we not consider as a fool any man who should seriously tell us that the Supreme Being is greater than he? Even to dare to compare himself with the Divinity, is it not equalling himself to him? Is there any proportion either of greater or less between God and man, between the whole and nothing? But what do I say? Jesus Christ is not content with saying that he is equal to God; he even justifies the novelty of these expressions against the murmurings of the Jews who are offended at them; far from clearly undeceiving them, he confirms them in the offence; on every occasion he affects a language, which, unless cleared up and justified by his equality to his Father, becomes either foolish or impious. If he be not God, what came he to do upon the earth? He comes to offend the Jews, by giving them room to believe that he compares himself to the Most High: he comes to seduce nations, by procuring to himself the adoration of the whole earth after his death: he comes to spread fresh obscurity over the universe, and not, as he hath vaunted, to

spread understanding, light, and the knowledge of God. What! my brethren, Paul and Barnabas rend their garments when they are taken for gods; they loudly proclaim to the people who wished to offer up victims to them—Worship the Lord alone, whose servants and ministers we are. The angel in the Revelation, when St. John prostrates himself to worship him, rejects the homage with horror, and says to him, “Worship God alone; I am only thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus.” And Jesus Christ tranquilly suffers that they render divine honours to him! And Jesus Christ praises the faith of the disciples who worship him, and who, with Thomas, call him their Lord and their God! And Jesus Christ even confutes his enemies who contest his divinity and divine origin! Is he, then, less zealous than his disciples for the glory of him who sends him? Or is it a matter of less importance to him, pointedly to undeceive the people on a mistake so injurious to the Supreme Being, and which, in fact, destroys the whole fruit of his ministry?

Yes, my brethren, what a blessing hath the coming of Jesus Christ brought to the world, if those who worship him be idolatrous and profane! All who have believed in him have worshipped him as the eternal Son of the Father, the image of his substance, and the splendour of his glory. There is but a small number of men in Christianity, who, though they acknowledge him as a messenger of God, yet refuse to him divine honours: even this sect, universally banished, and execrable even in those places where every error finds an asylum, is reduced to a few obscure and concealed followers, every where punished as an impiety from the instant that it dares to avow itself, and forced to hide itself in obscurity, and in the extremities of the most distant provinces and kingdoms. Is it, then, that numerous people of every tongue, of every tribe, and of every nation, which Jesus Christ came to form upon the earth? Is it a Jerusalem, formerly barren, and become fruitful, which was to contain tribes and nations in its bosom, and where the most distant isles, princes, and kings, were to come to worship? Are these the grand advantages which the world was to reap from the ministry of Jesus Christ? Is this, then, that abundance of grace, that plenitude of the Spirit of God shed over all men, that universal regeneration, that spiritual and lasting reign which the prophets had foretold with such majesty, and which was to attend the coming of the Redeemer? What, my brethren, an expectation so magnificent is then reduced to the miserable sight of the world plunged into a new idolatry? That event, so blessed for the earth, promised for so many ages, announced with so much pomp, so earnestly longed for by all the righteous, and held out from afar to the whole universe as its only resource, was then to corrupt and to pervert it for ever? That church, so fruitful, of which kings and Cæsars, at the head of their people,

were to be the children, was then to contain, in its bosom, only a small number of men, equally odious to heaven and to the earth, the disgrace of nature and of religion, and obliged to seek, in obscurity, a shelter for the horror of their blasphemy? And all the future magnificence of the gospel was then to be limited to the formation of the detestable sect of an impious Socinus?

O God! how wise and reasonable doth the faith of thy church appear, when opposed to the absurd contradictions of unbelief! And how consoling for those who believe in Jesus Christ, and who place their hope in him, to behold the abysses which pride digs for itself when it pretends to open new ways, and to sap the only foundation of the hope of Christians.

Behold, my brethren, how the doctrine of Jesus Christ, with relation to his Father, establishes the glory of his eternal origin. Thus, when the prophets speak of the God of heaven and of the earth, their expressions are too weak for the magnificence and the grandeur of their ideas. Full of the immensity, the omnipotence, and the majesty of the Supreme Being, they exhaust the weakness of the human language, in order, if possible, to correspond with the sublimity of these images. That God is he who measures the waters of the ocean in the hollow of his hand, who weighs the mountains in his balance, in whose hands are the thunders and the tempests, who speaks, and all is done; who faints not, neither is weary, in upholding the universe. It was natural for simple men to speak in this manner of the glory of the Most High: the infinite disproportion between the immensity of the Supreme Being and the weaknesses of the human mind must strike, dazzle, and confound it; and the most pompous expressions are too feeble to convey its astonishment and admiration.

But when Jesus Christ speaks of the glory of the Lord, it is no longer in the pompous style of the prophets; he calls him a holy Father, a righteous Father, a merciful Father, a Shepherd who pursues a strayed sheep, who kindly bears it home himself; a Friend who yields to the importunities of his friend; a Father feelingly affected with the return and the amendment of his son: it is clearly seen that this is a Child who speaks a domestic language; that the familiarity and the simplicity of his expressions suppose in him a sublimity of knowledge which renders the idea of the Supreme Being familiar to him, and prevents him from being struck and dazzled, as we are, with his majesty and glory; and, lastly, that he only speaks of what is laid open to his view, and which he possesses himself. A person is much less struck with the eclat of titles which he has borne, as I may say, from his birth: the children of kings speak, without emotion, of sceptres and crowns; and it is likewise the eternal Son alone of the living God who can speak so familiarly of the glory of God himself.

Behold, my brethren, seeing we participate with Jesus Christ in all his blessings, the right which he hath acquired for us, of considering God as our Father, of daring to call ourselves his children, and of loving rather than of fearing him. Nevertheless, we serve him like slaves and hirelings: we dread his chastisement, but we are little affected by his love and his promises: his law, so righteous, so holy, has nothing pleasing for us; it is a yoke which oppresses us, which excites our murmurs, and which we would soon free ourselves from, were our transgressions against it to go unpunished: nothing is heard but complaints against the severity of its precepts, but contensions in order to support the propriety of those sufferings which the world always mingles with their practice: in a word, were he not an avenging God, we would never confess him; and it is to his justice and to his chastisements alone that he is indebted for our respect and homages.

But the doctrine of Jesus Christ, with relation to men whom he came to instruct, doth not less establish the truth of his divine birth; for I speak not here of the wisdom, the sanctity, and the sublimity of that doctrine: in it every thing is worthy of reason, and of the soundest philosophy: every thing is proportioned to the wretchedness and to the excellency of man, to his wants and to his exalted lot; every thing there inspires contempt for perishable things, and the love of eternal riches: every thing there maintains good order, and the peace and tranquillity of states: every thing there is grand, because every thing is true: the glory of the deeds is more real and more shining in the heart than the deeds themselves. The wise man of the gospel seeks, from his virtue here below, only the satisfaction of obeying God, who will one day amply recompense him for it; and he prefers the testimony of his own conscience to all the applauses of men: he is greater than the entire world, through his exalted faith; and he is below the least of men, through the modesty of his sentiments. His virtue seeks not, in pride, the indemnity of its sufferings: that is the first enemy which it attacks; and, in that divine philosophy, the most heroic actions are nothing, from the moment that we count them as any thing ourselves: it considers glory as an error, prosperity as a misfortune, elevation as a precipice, afflictions as favours, the earth as a place of exilement, all that happens as a dream. What is this new language? What man prior to Jesus Christ hath ever spoken in this manner? And if his disciples, merely in consequence of having announced this divine doctrine, were taken by a whole people for gods descended upon the earth, what worship shall they have it in their power to refuse to him who is the Author of it, and in whose name they announce it?

But let us leave these general reflections, and come to the more precise duties of that love and dependence which his doctrine exacts of men with regard to himself. He commands us to love him as he

commands us to love his Father : he insists that we dwell in him, that is to say, that we establish ourselves in him, that we seek our happiness in him, as in his Father ; that we direct all our actions, all our thoughts, all our desires, that we direct ourselves to his glory, as to the glory of his Father. Sins themselves are not remitted but to those who sincerely love him ; and all the righteousness of the just, and the reconciliation of the sinner, are the effects of the love which we have for him. What is this man who comes to usurp the place of God in our hearts ? Is a creature worthy of being loved for itself, and every noble and estimable quality which it may possess, is it not the sole gift of him who alone is worthy of all love ?

What prophet prior to Jesus Christ had ever spoken thus to men, You shall love me : whatever you do, you shall do it for my glory ? You shall love the Lord your God, said Moses to the children of Israel. Nothing is amiable in itself but what can bestow happiness upon us : now, no creature can be our happiness or our perfection : no creature, consequently, is worthy of being loved for itself ; it would be an idolatry. Any man, who comes to propose himself to men as the object of their love, is impious and an impostor, who seeks to usurp the most essential right of the Supreme Being : he is a monster of pride and folly, who wants to erect altars to himself, even in hearts, the only sanctuary which the Divinity had never yielded up to profane idols. The doctrine of Jesus Christ, that doctrine so divine, and so much admired even by the pagans, would no longer, in that case, be but a monstrous mixture of impiety, of presumption, and of folly, if, not being himself the God blessed in all ages, he had made that love which he exacted of his disciples the most essential precept of his morality ; and it would be a ridiculous mark of ostentation in him to have held himself out to men as a model of humility and modesty, while, in fact, he was carrying presumption and unlimited compliance to a degree far beyond all the proudest philosophers, who had never aspired to more than the esteem and the applauses of men.

Nor is this all : not only Jesus Christ insists that we love him, but he also exacts of men marks of the most disinterested and most heroic love : he insists that we love him more than our relations, than our friends, than our fortune, than our life, than the whole world, than ourselves ; that we suffer all for his sake, that we renounce all for him, that we shed, even to the last drop, our blood for him : whoever renders not to him these grand homages, is unworthy of him : whoever puts him in competition with any creature, or with himself, insults and dishonours him, and forfeits every pretension to his promises.

What ! my brethren, he is not satisfied, as the idols, and even the true God himself had appeared to be, with the sacrifices of goats and bulls !—he carries his pretensions still farther, and requires of man the sacrifice of himself ; that he fly to gibbets ;

that he offered himself to death and to martyrdom for the glory of his name! But if he be not the Master of our life, by what right doth he exact it of us? If our soul be not originally come from him, is it to him that we ought to return it? Is that regaining it, to have lost it for his sake? If he be not the Author of our being, do we not become sacrilegious and murderers, when we sacrifice ourselves for his glory, and when we transfer to a creature, and to a simple messenger of God, the grand sacrifice of our being, solely destined to confess the sovereignty and the power of the eternal Maker, who hath drawn us from nothing? That Jesus Christ die for himself, well and good, for the glory of God, and even that he exhort us to follow his example: many prophets before him had died for the Lord's sake, and had exhorted their disciples to walk in their steps; but that Jesus Christ, if he be not God himself, should order us to die for himself, should exact of men that last proof of love,—that he should command us to offer up a life for him which we hold not of him, is it possible that men should have ever existed upon the earth so vulgar and so stupid as to allow themselves to be led away by the extravagance of such a doctrine? Is it possible that maxims so ridiculous and so impious should have been able to triumph over the whole universe, to overthrow all sects, to recall all minds, and to prevail over every thing which had hitherto appeared exalted, either in learning, in doctrine, or in the wisdom of the earth? And, if we consider as barbarians those savage nations who make a sacrifice of themselves upon the tombs and ashes of their relations and friends, why should we view in a more respectable light those disciples of Jesus Christ who have sacrificed themselves for his sake?—and shall not his religion be equally a religion of barbarity and of blood?

Yes, my brethren, the Agnesses, the Lucias, the Agathas, those first martyrs of faith and of modesty, would then have sacrificed themselves to a mortal man. And, in preferring to shed their blood rather than to bend the knee before vain idols, they would have shunned one idolatry only in order to fall into another more condemnable, in dying for Jesus Christ. The generous avowers of faith would then have been only a set of desperate and fanatical men, who, like madmen, had run to death. The tradition of the martyrs would then be no longer but the list of an impious and bloody scene. The tyrants and persecutors would then have been the defenders of righteousness, and of the glory of the Divinity,—Christianity itself a sacrilegious and profane sect. The human race would then have totally erred. And the blood of the martyrs, far from having been the seed of believers, would have answered the sole purpose of inundating the whole universe with superstition and idolatry.—O God! can the ear of man listen to such blasphemies without horror? and what more is necessary to overthrow unbelief than to show it to itself?

Such are our first duties toward Jesus Christ; to sacrifice to him our inclinations, our friends, our relations, our fortune, our life itself, and, in a word, whatever may stand in the way of our salvation; it is to confess his divinity; it is to acknowledge that he alone can supply the place of all that we forsake for him, and render to us even more than we quit, by giving us himself. It is he alone, says the apostle John, who contemns the world and all its pleasures, who confesses that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, because he thereby pronounces that Jesus Christ is greater than the world, more capable of rendering us happy, and consequently more worthy of our love.

But it is not sufficient to have considered the spirit of the ministry of Jesus Christ in his doctrine; it is necessary to consider it, secondly, in the special favours and blessings which the universe has received from him. He came to deliver all men from eternal death; from enemies of God, as they were, he hath rendered them his children; he hath secured to them the possession of the kingdom of God, and of immutable riches; he hath brought to them the knowledge of salvation and the doctrine of truth. These gifts, so magnificent, have not ended even with him: seated on the right hand of his Father, he still sheds them over our hearts; all our miseries still find their remedy in him; he nourishes us with his body; he washes us from our stains by continually applying to us the price of his blood; he forms pastors to conduct us; he inspires prophets to instruct us; he sanctifies righteous characters to animate us by their example; he is continually present in our hearts to comfort all their wants: man hath no passion which his grace doth not cure, no affliction which it doth not render pleasing, no power but what springs from him; in a word, he assures us himself that he is our way, our truth, our life, our righteousness, our redemption, our light. What new doctrine is this? Can an individual man be the source of so many benefits to other men? Can the sovereign God, so jealous of his glory, attach us to a creature, by duties and ties so intimate and sacred, that we depend almost more upon that creature than upon himself? Would there be no danger that a man, become so beneficial and so necessary to other men, should at last become their idol? That a man, author and dispenser of so many blessings, and who discharges, with regard to us, the office and all the functions of a god, should likewise, in a little time, occupy his place in our hearts?

For observe, my brethren, that it is gratitude alone which hath formerly made so many gods. Men, neglecting the Author of their being and of the universe, worshipped, at first, the air which enabled them to live, the earth which nourished them, the sun which gave them light, and the moon which presided

over the night: such were their Cybeles, their Apollos, their Dianas. They worshipped those conquerors who had delivered them from their enemies, those benevolent and upright princes who had rendered their subjects happy, and the memory of their reign immortal; and Jupiter and Hercules were placed in the rank of gods, the one for the number of his victories, and the other in consequence of the happiness and tranquillity of his reign. In the ages of superstition and credulity, men knew no other gods than those who were serviceable to them; and such is the character of man, his worship is but his love and his gratitude.

Now, what man hath ever benefitted mankind so much as Jesus Christ? Recollect all that the pagan ages have told us of the history of their gods, and see if they believed themselves indebted to them what unbelief itself acknowledges, with the holy books, the world to be indebted to Jesus Christ. To some they thought themselves indebted for favourable winds and a fortunate navigation; to others for the fertility of seasons; to their Mars for success in battle; to their Janus for the peace and tranquillity of the people; to Esculapius for their health: but what are these weak benefits, if you compare them with those which Jesus Christ hath showered upon the earth? He hath brought to it an eternal peace, a lasting happiness, righteousness and truth; he hath made of it a new world and a new earth; he hath not loaded a single people with his benefits, he hath loaded all nations, the whole universe; and what is more, he hath become our benefactor only by suffering as our victim. What could he do more exalted or more noble for the earth? If gratitude hath made gods, could Jesus Christ fail to find worshippers among men? And, were it possible that any excess could take place in our love and in our gratitude to him, was it at all proper that we should be so deeply indebted to him?

Again, if Jesus Christ, in dying, had informed his disciples that to the Lord alone they were indebted for so many benefits, that he himself had been merely the instrument, and not the author and source of all these special favours, and that they ought, consequently, to forget him, and to render to God that glory which was due to him alone; but very differently than with such instructions doth Jesus Christ terminate his wonders and his ministry. He not only requires that his disciples forget him not, and that they do not cease, even after his death, to hope in him; but, on the point of quitting them, he assures them that, even to the consummation of time, he will be present with them; he promises still more than he hath already bestowed upon them, and attaches them for ever to himself by indissoluble and immortal ties.

In effect, the promises which, in that last moment, he makes to them, are still more astonishing than all the favours he had

granted to them during his life. In the first place, he promises to them the consoling Spirit, which he calls the Spirit of his Father; that Spirit of truth, which the world cannot receive; that Spirit of energy, which was to form the martyrs; that Spirit of intelligence, which was to enlighten the prophets; that Spirit of wisdom, which was to conduct the pastors; that Spirit of peace and charity, which of all believers was to make only one heart and one soul. What right hath Jesus Christ over the Spirit of God, to dispose of it at his pleasure, and to promise it to men, if it be not his own Spirit? Elijah, ascending to heaven, looks upon it as a thing hardly possible to promise to Eliseus, individually, his two-fold spirit of zeal and prophecy: how far was he from promising to him the eternal Spirit of the heavenly Father, that Spirit of liberty which agitates where he thinks fit! Nevertheless, the promises of Jesus Christ are accomplished; scarcely hath he ascended to heaven when the Spirit of God descends upon the disciples; the illiterate become at once more learned than all the sages and philosophers, the weak more powerful than the tyrants, the foolish, according to the world, more prudent than all the wisdom of the age. New men, animated with a new Spirit, appear upon the earth: they attract all to walk in their steps; they change the face of the universe, and, even to the end of ages, shall that Spirit animate his church, form righteous souls, overthrow the unbelieving, console his disciples, sustain them amid persecutions and disgraces, and shall bear witness in the bottom of their heart that they are the children of God, and that they are entitled, through that august title, to more real and more solid riches than all those of which the world can ever despoil them.

Secondly. Jesus Christ promises to his disciples the keys of heaven and of hell, and the power of remitting sins. What! my brethren, the Jews are deeply offended when he pretends to remit them himself, and when he seems to attribute to himself a power reserved to God alone; but how will all nations of the earth be scandalized when they shall read in his gospel that he hath even delegated his power to his disciples! And, if he be not God, hath the mind of man ever imagined such an instance of temerity and folly. What right, in effect, hath he over consciences, to bind or unbind them at his pleasure, and to transfer to weak men a power which he himself could not exercise without blasphemy!

Thirdly. But this is not all: he promises to his disciples the gift likewise of miracles; that, in his name, they should raise up the dead; that they should restore sight to the blind, health to the sick, and speech to the dumb; that they should be masters of all nature. Moses promises not to his disciples the gifts with which the Lord had favoured him: he is sensible that the power is not his own, and that the Lord alone can bestow it on

whomsoever he may think fit. Thus, after his death, when Joshua arrests the sun in the middle of his course, in order to complete the victory over the enemies of the people of God, it is not in the name of Moses that he commands that planet to stand still; it is not of him that he holds the power of making even the stars obedient to him; when he wishes to exercise it, it is not to him that he addresses himself: but the disciples of Jesus Christ can operate nothing but in the name of their Master; it is in his name that they raise up the dead and make the lame to walk; and, without the assistance of that divine name, they are equally weak as the rest of men. The ministry and the power of Moses terminate with his life; the ministry and the power of Jesus Christ only begin, as I may say, after his death, and we are assured that his reign is to be eternal.

What more shall I say? He promises to his disciples the conversion of the universe, the triumph of the cross, the compliance of all the nations of the earth, of philosophers, of Cæsars, of tyrants; and that his gospel shall be received by the whole world: but, doth he hold the hearts of all men in his hands thus to answer for a change of which the world had hitherto no example? You will, no doubt, tell us, that God layeth open the future to his servant. But you are mistaken: if he be not God, he is not even a prophet; his predictions are dreams and chimeras: it is a false spirit which seduces him, and which is concerned in his knowledge of the future, and the sequel hath belied the truth of his promises: he prophesies that all nations, seated under the shadow of death, shall open their eyes to the light; and he sees not that they are on the point of falling into a more criminal blindness in worshipping him: he prophesies that his Father shall be glorified, and that his gospel shall every where form to him worshippers in spirit and in truth; and he sees not that men are going for ever to dishonour him, in placing upon an equality, with him, even to the end of ages, that Jesus who ought to have been considered only as his servant and prophet: he prophesies that idols shall be overthrown; and he sees not that he himself shall occupy their place: he prophesies that he will form to himself a holy people of every tongue and of every tribe; and he sees not that he comes only to form a new people of idolaters of every nation, who shall place him in the temple as the living God; whose actions, worship, and homages shall all be directed to him; who shall do all for his glory; who shall depend solely upon him, live only for and through him, and have neither force nor energy but what they receive from him: in a word, who shall worship him, who shall love him a thousand times more spiritually, more intimately, and more universally, than ever the pagans had worshipped their idols. This, then, is not even a prophet; and his relations according to the flesh, are guilty of no blasphemy when they say "he is beside himself," and that he bestows, on the dreams of a heated

imagination, all the weight and reality of revelations and mysteries.

Behold to what unbelief conducts. Overturn the foundation, which is the Lord Jesus, eternal Son of the living God, and the whole edifice tumbles in pieces: take away the grand mystery of piety, and all the religion is but a dream: deny the divinity of Jesus Christ, and you cut off, from the doctrine of Christians, all the merit of faith, all the consolation of hope, all the motives of charity. Thus, with what zeal did not the first disciples of the gospel oppose those impious men who, from that time, ventured to attack the glory of their Master's divinity? They well knew that it was striking at the heart of their religion; that it was ravishing from them the only alleviation of their persecutions and sufferings, all confidence in the promises to come, and all the dignity and grandeur of their pretensions; and that, that principle once overthrown, the whole religion dissipated in smoke, and was no longer but a human doctrine and the sect of a mortal man, who, like all the other chiefs, had left nothing but his name to his disciples.

Thus the pagans themselves then reproached the Christians with rendering divine honours to their Christ. Pliny, a Roman proconsul, celebrated for his works, giving an account to the emperor Trajan of their morals and doctrine; after being forced to confess that the Christians were pious, innocent, and upright men, and that they assembled before the rising of the sun, not to concert the commission of crimes, or to disturb the peace of the empire, but to live in piety and righteousness, to detest frauds, adulteries, and even the coveting of the wealth of others; he only reproaches them with chaunting hymns in honour of their Christ, and of rendering to him the same homages as to a god. Now, if these first believers had not rendered divine honours to Jesus Christ, they would have justified themselves against that calumny: they would have rejected that scandal from their religion, almost the only one which shocked the zeal of the Jews and the wisdom of the Gentiles; they would openly have said,—We do not worship Jesus Christ, for we know better than to transfer to a creature that honour and worship which are due to God alone. Nevertheless, they make no reply to this accusation. Their apologists refute all the other calumnies with which the pagans endeavoured to blacken their doctrine; they clear up and overthrow the slightest accusations; and their apologies, addressed to the senate, attract to them even the admiration of Rome, and impose silence on their enemies. And, upon the accusation of idolatry toward Jesus Christ, which should be the most crying and the most horrible; upon the reproach of worshipping a crucified person, which was the most likely to discredit them, and which ought indeed to have been the most grievous to men so holy, so declared against idolatry, and so jealous of the glory of God, they are totally silent; and,

far from defending themselves, they even justify the accusation by their silence? What do I say! By their silence? They authorize it by their language, in professing to suffer for his name, in dying for him, in confessing him before the tyrants, in joyfully expiring upon gibbets, in the sweet expectation of going to enjoy him, and of receiving, in his bosom, a more immortal life than that which they had lost for his glory. They suffered martyrdom rather than bend to the statue of the Cæsars, rather than allow their pagan friends, through a human compassion, and to save them from torture, to falsely attest, before the magistrates, that they had offered incense to the idols, and they would have submitted to the accusation of paying divine honours to Jesus Christ, without any attempt to destroy the imputation? Ah! they would have proclaimed the contrary from the house-tops; they would have exposed themselves even to death, rather than to have given room to so hateful and so execrable a suspicion. What can unbelief oppose to this? And, if it be an error to equal Jesus Christ to God, it is an error which has been born with the church, and upon which the whole structure hath been reared; which has formed so many martyrs, and converted the whole universe.

But what fruit, my brethren, are we to draw from this Discourse? That Jesus Christ is the grand object of Christian piety. Nevertheless, scarcely do we know Jesus Christ: we never consider that all the other practices of piety are, as I may say, arbitrary; but that this is the ground-work of faith and of salvation; that this is pure and sincere piety; that, continually to meditate upon Jesus Christ, to have recourse to him, to nourish ourselves with his doctrine, to enter into the spirit of his mysteries, to study his actions, to count solely upon the merit of his blood and of his sacrifice, is the only true knowledge and the most essential duty of the believer. Remember, then, my brethren, that piety toward Jesus Christ is the cordial spirit of the Christian religion; that nothing is solid but what you shall build upon that foundation; and that the principal homage which he expects of you is, that you become like him, and that his life be the model of your own, in order that, through your resemblance to him, you may be included in the number of those who shall be partakers of his glory.

SERMON XXIX.

ON THE RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS.

“Come and see.”—JOHN xi. 34.

THE most hardened sinner could never submit to the horror of his situation, were he able to see and to know himself such as he is. A soul grown old in guilt, is only bearable to itself, because that the same passion, from which all his miseries spring, conceals them from him, and that his disorder is, at the same time, both the weapon which inflicts the wound and the fatal bandage which hides it from the eyes of the patient.

Behold wherefore the church, in order to lay the sinner open to himself during this time of penitence, almost continually displays to us, under various images, the deplorable state of a soul who has grown old in his iniquity: one while under the figure of a paralytic young man; that is, to mark to us the insensibility and fatal ease which always follow habitual guilt: another, under the symbol of a prodigal reduced to feed with the vilest animals; and, under these traits, it wishes to make us feel his abasement and his infamy: again, under the image of a person born blind, and that is in order to paint to us the depth and the horror of his blindness: and, lastly, under the parable of a deaf and dumb person possessed with a devil; and that is, more animatedly to figure to us the subjection under which habitual guilt holds all the powers of an unfortunate soul.

To-day, in order, as it were, to assemble all these traits under a single image, still more terrible and striking, the church proposes to us Lazarus in the tomb, dead for four days, emitting stench and infection, bound hand and foot, his face covered with a napkin, and exciting only horror even in those whom affection and blood had most closely united to him in life.

Come then and see, you, my dear hearer, who live, for so many years past, under the shameful yoke of dissipation, and who are insensible to the misery of your situation. Approach this tomb which the voice of Jesus Christ is now to open before your eyes; and, in that spectacle of infection and putrefaction, behold the true picture of your soul. You fly to profane spectacles, in order to see your passions represented under pleasing and deceitful colours: approach, and see them expressed here such as they are: come, and, in that infectious and loathsome

carcass, behold what you are in the sight of God, and how much your situation is worthy of your tears.

But in exposing here only the horrible situation of a soul who lives in disorder, lest I trouble and discourage, without holding out to him a hand in order to assist him in quitting that abyss,—that I may omit nothing of our gospel, I shall divide it into three reflections: in the first, you will see how shocking and deplorable is the situation of a soul who lives in habitual irregularity; in the second, I shall show to you the means by which he may quit it; and, in the third, what the motives are which determine Jesus Christ to operate the miracle of his resurrection and deliverance. O my God! let thine all-powerful voice be now heard by those unfortunate souls who sleep in the darkness and shadow of death; command these withered bones once more to be animated, and to recover that light and that life of grace which they have lost.

REFLECTION I.—I remark, at first, three principal circumstances in the deplorable spectacle which Lazarus, dead and buried, offers to our eyes. First, already become a mass of worms and corruption, he spreads infection and stench; and behold the profound corruption of a soul in habitual sin. Secondly, a gloomy napkin covers his eyes and his face; and behold the fatal blindness of a soul in habitual sin. Lastly, he appears in the tomb, bound hand and foot; and behold the melancholy subjection of a soul in habitual sin. Now, it is that profound corruption, that fatal blindness, and that melancholy servitude, typified in the spectacle of Lazarus, dead and buried, which precisely form all the horror and all the wretchedness of a soul long dead in the eyes of God.

In the first place, there is not a more natural image of a soul grown old in iniquity, than that of a carcass already a prey to worms and putrefaction. Thus the holy books every where represent the state of sin under the idea of a shocking death; and it seems as if the Spirit of God had found that melancholy image the most calculated to give us, at least, a glimpse of all the deformity of a soul in which sin dwells.

Now, two effects are produced on the body by death; it deprives it of life, it afterward alters all its features and corrupts all its members. It deprives it of life: in the same manner it is that sin begins to disfigure the beauty of the soul; for, God is the life of our souls, the light of our minds, and the spring, as I may say, of our hearts: our righteousness, our wisdom, our truth, are only the union of a righteous, wise, and true God with our soul: all our virtues are only the different influences of his Spirit which dwells within us; it is he who exciteth our good desires, who formeth our holy thoughts, who produceth our pure lights, who operateth our righteous propensities; insomuch that all the spiritual and supernatural life of our soul is only, as the apostle speaks, the life of God within us.

Now, by a single sin, that life ceases, that light is extinguished, that Spirit withdrawn, all these springs are suspended. Thus the soul, without God, is a soul without life, without motion, light, truth, righteousness, or charity: it is no longer but a chaos, a dead body: its life is no longer but an imaginary and chimerical life; and, like those inanimate substances set in motion by a foreign influence, it seems to live and to act; but "it is dead while living."

Behold the first degree of death, which every sin which separates a soul from God introduces into it; but habitual sin, like inveterate death, goes farther. Thus, Lazarus not only is without life in the tomb, but, having been there for four days, the corruption of his body begins to spread infection: for, although the first sin, which causes the loss of grace, leave us, in the eyes of God, without life and without motion, yet we may say, that certain impressions of the Holy Spirit, certain seeds of spiritual life, certain means of recovering the grace lost, still remain to us. Faith is not yet extinguished; the feelings of virtue not yet effaced; a sense of the truths of salvation not yet lost: it is a dead body in truth; but life being only just withdrawn, it still preserves, I know not what, of marks of warmth, which seem to spring from some remain of life. But, in proportion as the soul remains in death, and perseveres in guilt, grace withdraws; all extinguishes, all changes, all corrupts, and its corruption becomes universal.

I say universal; yes, my brethren, all changes, all corrupts, in the soul, through a continuance of disorder: the gifts of nature, gentleness, rectitude, humanity, modesty, even the mental talents; the blessings of grace, the feelings of religion, the remorse of conscience, the terrors of faith, and faith itself; the corruption penetrates all, and changes into putrefaction and a spectacle of horror both the gifts of heaven and the blessings of the earth: nothing remains in its original situation: the loveliest features are those which become the most hideous and the most undistinguishable; the charms of wit become the seasoning of debauchery and the passions; feelings of religion are changed into freethinking; superiority of knowledge into pride and a vain and shocking philosophy; nobility of mind is no longer but a boundless ambition; generosity and tenderness of heart but a yielding to the sway of impure and profane connexions; the principles of glory and honour, handed down to us with the blood of our ancestors, but a vain ostentation, and the source of all our hatreds and animosities; our rank, our elevation, the cause of our envies and mean jealousies: lastly, our riches and our prosperity, the fatal instruments of all our crimes.

But the corruption is not confined to the sinner alone: a dead body cannot be long concealed without a smell of death being spread around: it is impossible to live long in debauchery without

the smell of a bad life making itself felt. In vain is every precaution employed to conceal the ignominy of a disorderly life; in vain is the sepulchre, full of putrefaction and infection, externally whitened and embellished, the stench spreads; guilt, sooner or later, betrays itself; a black and infectious air always proceeds from that profane fire which, with so much care, was concealed. A disorderly life betrays itself in a thousand ways; the public, at last undeceived, opens its eyes, and the more their character becomes blown, the more they discover themselves; they become accustomed to their shame; they become weary of constraint and decency; that guilt which is only to be purchased with attention and arrangements, appears too dear; they unmask themselves; they throw off that remainder of restraint and modesty which make us still cautious of the eyes of men; they wish to riot in disorder without precaution or care; and then, servants, friends, connexions, the city, and country, all feel the infection of their irregularities and example. Our rank, our elevation, no longer serve but to render more striking and more durable the scandal of our debaucheries; in a thousand places our excesses serve as a model: the view of our manners perhaps strengthens, in secret, consciences whom guilt still rendered uneasy: perhaps they even cite us, and make use of our example, in seducing innocence, and in conquering a still timorous modesty; and, even after our death, the fame of our debaucheries shall stain the history of men, shall perhaps embellish lascivious tales, and, long after our day, in ages yet to come, the remembrance of our crimes shall still be an occasion and a source of guilt.

Lastly, (but I would not dare to enlarge here,) the corruption which habitual guilt sheds through the whole interior of the sinner is so universal that even his body is infected; debauchery leaves the shameful marks of his irregularities on his flesh: the infection of his soul often extends even to a body which he has made subservient to ignominy. He says, in advance, to corruption, like Job, "Thou art my father; and to the worm, thou art my mother and my sister!" The corruption of his body is a shocking picture of that of his soul.

Great God! can I then flatter myself that thou wilt yet cast upon me some looks of compassion! Wilt thou not groan at the sight of that mass of crimes and putrefaction which my soul presents to thine eyes, as thou now groanest in the spirit over the tomb of Lazarus? Ah! avert thine holy eyes from the spectacle of my profound wretchedness; but let me no more turn away from it myself, and let me be enabled to view myself with all that horror which my situation deserves: tear asunder the veil which hides me from myself; my evils shall in part be done away from the moment that I shall be able to see and to know them.

And behold the second circumstance of the deplorable situation of Lazarus ; a mournful cloth covers his face : that is the profound blindness which forms the second character of habitual sin.

I confess that every sin is an error which makes us mistake evil for good ; it is a false judgment which makes us seek in the creature that ease, grandeur, and independence which we can find in God alone ; it is a mist which hides order, truth, and righteousness from our eyes, and, in their place, substitutes vain phantoms. Nevertheless, a first falling off from God does not altogether extinguish our lights ; nor is it always productive of total darkness. It is true that the Spirit of God, source of all light, retires, and no longer dwells within us ; but some traces of light are still left in the soul : thus, though the sun be already withdrawn from our hemisphere, yet certain rays of his light still tinge the sky, and form, as it were, an imperfect day ; it is only in proportion as he sinks that the gloom gains, and the darkness of night at last prevails. In the same manner, in proportion as sin degenerates into habit, the light of God retires, darkness gains, and the profound night of total blindness at last arrives.

And then all becomes occasion of error to the criminal soul ; all changes its aspect to his eyes ; the most shameful passions no longer appear but as weaknesses ; the most criminal attachments but sympathies brought with us into the world and inherent to our hearts ; the excesses of the table but innocent pleasures of society ; revenge but a just sense of injury ; licentious and impious conversations but lively and agreeable sallies ; the blackest defamation but a customary language, of which none but weak and timid minds can make a scruple ; the laws of the church but old-fashioned customs ; the severity of God's judgments but absurd declamations, which equally disgrace his goodness and mercy ; death in sin, the inevitable consequence of a criminal life, mere predictions in which there is more of zeal than of truth, and refuted by the confidence which a return to God, previous to that last moment, promises to us : lastly, heaven, the earth, hell, all creatures, religion, crimes, virtues, good and evil, things present and to come, all change their aspect to the eyes of a soul who lives in habitual guilt ; all show themselves under false appearances ; his whole life is no longer but a delusion and a continued error. Alas ! could you tear away the fatal veil which covers your eyes, like those of Lazarus, and behold yourself, like him, buried in darkness, all covered with putrefaction, and spreading around infection and a smell of death ! But now, says our Saviour, all these things are hid from thine eyes ; you see in yourself only the embellishments and the pompous externals of the fatal tomb in which you drag on in sin ; your rank, your birth, your talents, your dignities, your titles, that is to say, the trophies and the ornaments which the vanity of men has there

raised up; but, remove the stone which covers that place of horror; look within, judge not of yourself from these pompous outsides, which serve only to embellish your carcass; see what, in the eyes of God, you are; and if the corruption and the profound blindness of your soul touch you not, let its slavery at least rouse and recall you to yourself.

Last circumstance of the situation of Lazarus dead and buried; he was bound hand and foot: and behold the image of the wretched slavery of a soul long under the dominion of sin.

Yes, my brethren, in vain does the world decry a Christian life as a life of subjection and slavery. The reign of righteousness is a reign of liberty; the soul, faithful and submissive to God, becomes master over all creatures; the just man is above all, because he is unconnected with all; he is master of the world, because he despises the world; he is dependent neither on his masters, because he only serves them for God, nor on his friends, because he only loves them according to the order of charity and of righteousness; nor on his inferiors, because he exacts from them no iniquitous compliance; nor on his fortune, because he rather dreads it; nor on the judgments of men, because he dreads those of God alone; nor on events, because he considers them all as in the order of Providence; nor even on his passions, because the charity which is within him is their rule and measure. The just man alone, then, enjoys a perfect liberty: superior to the world, to himself, to all creatures, to all events, he begins, even in this life, to reign with Jesus Christ; all is below him, while he is himself inferior to God alone.

But the sinner, who seems to live without either rule or restraint, is, however, a vile slave; he is dependent on all,—on his body, on his propensities, on his caprices, on his passions, on his fortune, on his masters, on his friends, on his enemies, on his rivals, on all surrounding creatures; so many gods to which love or fear subject him; so many idols which multiply his slavery, while he thinks himself more free by casting off that obedience which he owes to God alone; he multiplies his masters, by refusing submission to him alone who renders free those who serve him, and who gives to his servants dominion over the world, and over every thing which the world contains.

You often complain, my dear hearer, of the hardships of virtue; you dread a Christian life, as a life of subjection and sorrow: but what in it could you find so gloomy as you experience in debauchery? Ah! if you durst complain of the bitterness and of the tyranny of the passions; if you durst confess the troubles, the disgusts, the frenzies, the anxieties of your soul; if you were candid on the gloomy transactions of your heart, there is no lot but what would appear preferable to your own; but you disguise the inquietudes of guilt which you feel; and you exaggerate the hardships of virtue which you have never known. But, in order to hold out to you an

assisting hand, let us continue the history of our gospel, and let us see, in the resurrection of Lazarus, what are the means offered to you, by the goodness of God, of quitting so deplorable a situation.

REFLECTION II.—The power of God, says the apostle, is not less conspicuous in the conversion of sinners than in raising up the dead ; and the same supernatural power which wrought upon Jesus Christ to deliver him from the tomb, ought to operate upon the soul long dead in sin, in order to recall it to the life of grace. I find there only this difference, that the almighty voice of God meets no resistance from the body which he revives and recalls to life. On the contrary, the soul, dead and corrupted, as I may say, through the long duration of guilt, seems to retain a remainder of strength and motion only to oppose that powerful voice which is heard even in the abyss in which it is plunged, and which resounds for the purpose of restoring it to light and life. Nevertheless, however difficult may be the conversion of a soul of this description, and however rare such examples may be, the Spirit of God, in order to teach us never to despair of divine mercy, when we sincerely wish to quit the ways of iniquity, points out to us at present, in the resurrection of Lazarus, the means of accomplishing it.

The first is, confidence in Jesus Christ. Lord, says Mary, the sister of Lazarus, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died ; but I know that, even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee. I am the resurrection and the life, said Jesus unto her ; believest thou this ? Yes, Lord, said she, I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world. It is through this that the miracle of raising up Lazarus begins, namely, the perfect confidence that Jesus Christ is able to deliver him from death and corruption.

For, my brethren, the delusion continually employed by the demon, in order to render our desires of conversion unavailing, and to counteract their progress, is that of despondency and mistrust : he warmly retraces to our imagination the horrors of an entire life of guilt ; he says to us, in secret, that which the sisters of Lazarus say to Jesus Christ, though in a different sense,—that we ought, at a much earlier period, to have checked our career ; that it is now impossible, when so far advanced, to return ; that the time for attempting a change is now passed ; and that the virulency and age of our wounds no longer admit a resource. Upon this they abandon themselves to languor and indolence ; and, after having incensed the righteousness of God through our debaucheries, we insult his mercy through the excess of our mistrust.

I confess that a soul long dead in sin must suffer much in returning to God ; that it is difficult, after so many years of dissipation, to form to one's self a new heart and new inclinations ; and that it is even fit that the obstacles, the sufferings, and the difficulties, which always attend the conversion of souls of that

description, should make great sinners feel how dreadful it is to have been almost a whole life-time removed from God.

But I say, that, from the moment a truly contrite soul wishes to return to him, his wounds, however virulent or old, ought no longer to alarm his confidence: I say, that his wretchedness ought to increase his compunction, but not his despondency: I say, that the first step of his penitence ought to be that of adoring Jesus Christ as the resurrection and the life; a secret confidence that our wants are always less than his mercies; a firm persuasion that the blood of Jesus Christ is more powerful in washing out our stains than our corruption can be in contracting them: I say, that the fewer resources of strength a criminal soul may find in himself, the more ought he to expect from him who taketh delight in rearing up the work of grace upon the nothingness of nature; and that the more he is inwardly opposed to grace, the more does he, in one sense, become an object worthy of divine power and mercy, for God wisheth that all good shall evidently appear as coming from above, and that man shall attribute nothing to himself.

And, in effect, my dear hearer, whatever may the horror of your past crimes be, the Lord will not long refuse you grace, from the moment that he hath inspired you with the desire and the resolution of asking it. It is written in Judges, that the father of Samson, terrified by the apparition of the angel of the Lord, who, after announcing to him the birth of a son, commanded him to offer up a sacrifice, and then, like a devouring fire consumed the victim and the pile, and vanished from his sight; that, terrified, I say, at the spectacle, he was convinced that both himself and his wife were to be struck with death because they had seen the Lord. But his wife, holy and enlightened, condemned his mistrust. If the Lord, said she to him, wished to destroy us, he would not have made fire from heaven to descend on our sacrifice; he would not have accepted it from our hands; he would not have discovered to us his secrets and his wonders, and what we had hitherto been ignorant of.

And behold what I now answer to you. You believe your death and your destruction to be inevitable; the state of your conscience discourages you; in vain do sparks of grace and of light fall upon your heart; in vain do they touch you, solicit you, and almost gain the point of consuming the sacrifice of your passions; you persuade yourself that you are lost beyond resource. But, if the Lord wished to abandon and to destroy you, he would not make fire from heaven to descend upon your heart; he would not light up within you holy desires and sentiments of penitence: if he wished to let you die in the blindness of your passions, he would not manifest to you the truths of salvation; he would not open your eyes on those miseries to come which you prepare for yourself. Besides, how do you know if Jesus Christ has not permitted

your falling into such a deplorable state, for the purpose of making a prodigy of your conversion an incitement to the conversion of your brethren? How do you know if his mercy has not rendered your passions so notorious, in order that thousands of sinners, witnesses of your errors, despair not of conversion, and be inflamed at the sight of your penitence? How do you know if your crimes, and even your scandals, have not entered into the designs of God's goodness with regard to your brethren; and if your situation, which seems hopeless, like that of Lazarus, is not rather an occasion of manifesting God's glory than a pre-
sage of death to you?

When grace recalls a common sinner, the fruit of his conversion is limited to himself; but when it singles out a grand sinner, a Lazarus, long dead and corrupted, ah! the designs of its mercy are then much more extensive; in one change it prepares a thousand to come; it raises up a thousand out of one; and the crimes of a sinner become the seed of a thousand just. You give way to despondency in feeling the extremity of your wretchedness; but it is perhaps that very extremity which draws you nearer to the happy moment of your conversion, and which the goodness of God has reserved for you, that you might be a public monument of the excess of his mercies toward the greatest sinners. Only believe, as Jesus Christ said to the sisters of Lazarus, and you shall see the glory of God; you shall see your relations, your friends, your inferiors, and even the accomplices of your debaucheries, become imitators of your penitence; you shall see the most hopeless souls sighing after the happiness of your new life; and the world itself forced to render glory to God, and, in recalling your past errors, to admire the prodigy of your present lot. Take, even from your wretchedness itself, new motives of confidence: bless, in advance, the merciful wisdom of that Being, who, even from your passions, shall know how to extract advantages to his glory; every thing co-operates toward the salvation of his chosen, and he permitteth great excesses only in order to operate great mercies. God ever wisheth the salvation of his creature; and, from the moment that we form a wish of returning to him, our only dread ought to be, not that his justice reject us, but lest our intention be not sincere.

And the surest proof of our sincerity is the absenting ourselves from every occasion which may place an obstacle to our resurrection and our deliverance; obstacle, figured by the stone which shut up the mouth of Lazarus's tomb, and which Jesus Christ orders to be removed before he begins to operate the miracle of his resurrection.—Remove the stone: second mean, marked in our gospel.

In effect, every day shows sinners, who, tired of disorder,

wish to return to God, but who cannot prevail upon themselves to quit those objects, those places, those situations, and those rocks, which have been the cause of their removal from him: they vainly persuade themselves that they shall be able to extinguish their passions, to terminate a disorderly life; in a word, to rise from the dead, without removing the stone. They even make some efforts: they address themselves to men and God; they adopt measures for a change; but it is of those measures which, not removing the dangers, do not, in the smallest degree, forward their safety; and thus their whole life sorrowfully passes away in detesting their chains, and in the utter inability of breaking them asunder.

Whence comes this, my brethren? It is that the passions begin to weaken only after the removal of such objects as have lighted them up; it is absurd to suppose that the heart can change while every thing around us continues, with regard to us, the same: you would become chaste, yet you live in the midst of the dangers, the connexions, the familiarities, the pleasures, which have a thousand times corrupted your heart; you would wish to reflect seriously on your eternity, and to place some interval between life and death, yet you are unwilling to place any between death and those debaucheries which prevent you from reflecting on your salvation; and, in the midst of agitations, pleasures, trifles, and worldly expectations, from which, on no account, will you abate, you expect that the inclination and relish for a Christian life will come to you unsought-for: you would that your heart form new propensities, surrounded by every thing which nourishes and fortifies the old; and that the lamp of faith and grace blaze up in the midst of winds and tempests,—that light which, even in the sanctuary, is so often extinguished through want of oil and nourishment, and, to lukewarm and retired souls, converts into a danger even the safety of their retreat.

You come, after that, to tell us that good will is not wanting; that the moment is not yet come. How, indeed, should it come in the midst of every thing that repels it? But what is that good will, shut up within you, which has never any consequence, which never leads to any thing real, and never seriously adopts a single measure toward a change? That is to say, that you would wish to change, could it be done for nothing; you would wish to work out your salvation by the same conduct which occasions your destruction; you would wish that the same manners which have separated your heart from God should approach you to him; and that what has hitherto been the cause of your ruin should itself become the way and the mean of your salvation. Begin by removing the occasions which so often have been, and still continue to be, the rock of your innocence; remove the stone which shuts up the entry of grace to your soul; after that, you shall be entitled to demand of God the completion of his work in you. Then,

separated from those objects which nourished iniquitous passions within you, you shall have it in your power to say to him, It is thy part now, O my God! to change my heart; to thee I have sacrificed every attachment which might still fetter it; I have removed all the rocks upon which my weakness might still have split; as much as in me lay, I have changed the outward man; thou alone, O Lord, canst change the heart; it depends upon thee now to complete what yet remains to be done, to break the invisible chains, to overcome all internal obstacles, and totally to triumph over my corruption: I have removed the fatal stone which prevented me from hearing thy voice; let it now resound, even through the abyss in which I am still buried; command me to depart from that fatal tomb, that place of infection and putrescence, but command me with that almighty word which makes itself to be heard even by the dead, and is to them a word of resurrection and life; give me in charge to thy disciples, to be unloosed from those chains which hold captive all the powers of my soul; and let the ministry of thy church put the last seal to my resurrection and my deliverance.

And behold, my brethren, the last man held out in our gospel. Immediately, on the removal of the stone, our Saviour cries, with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth! Lazarus comes forth, still bound hand and foot, and Jesus Christ remits him to his disciples to be unloosed.

Observe here, that Jesus Christ doth not order his disciples to unloose Lazarus till after he had entirely quitted the tomb. We must manifest ourselves to the church, says a holy father, before we can, through its ministry, receive the blessing of our deliverance. Lazarus, come forth! that is to say, continues that father, how long wilt thou remain concealed and buried inwardly in thy conscience? How long wilt thou conceal thine iniquity within thy breast?

You undoubtedly are not ignorant, my brethren, that remission of our sins is only granted through the ministry of the church, and that it is necessary to lay open and to present our bonds to the piety of the ministers, who alone have authority to bind and to unbind on the earth; this is not upon what you require instruction. But, I say, that, in order that the conversion be solid and durable, we must, like Lazarus, show ourselves quite out of the tomb. An ordinary confession is not the matter in question; a hardened sinner ought to go back even to his infancy, even to the birth of his passions, even to the youngest periods of his life, which have been the commencement of his crimes. Neither doubts nor obscurities must longer be left in the conscience, nor mists over the youthful manners, under pretence that they have already been revealed; a general manifestation is required, and whatever may hitherto have been done must be reckoned as nothing; every duty of religion, performed during a disorderly and worldly life, is even to be

ranked among our crimes; the conscience must be considered as a chaos, into which no light has, as yet, penetrated, and over which all our fictitious and past penitence has spread only additional darkness.

For, alas! my brethren, a contrite soul, after returning from the errors of the world and the passions, ought to presume that, having to that period lived in criminal habits and propensities, every time the sacrament has been received in that state was only a profanation and a crime.

In the first place, because, having never felt real contrition for his errors, nor, consequently, any sincere desire to purge himself of them, the remedies of the church, far from having purified, have only completed his foulness, and rendered his disease more incurable.

Secondly, because he has never been known to himself; and, consequently, could never make himself known to the tribunal of his conscience. For, alas! the world, in the midst of which this soul has always lived, and in which he has ever thought and judged like it; the world, I say, finding reasonable and wise only its own maxims and manner of thinking, does it sufficiently know the holiness of the gospel, the obligations of faith, and the extent of duties, to be qualified to enter into the detail of those transgressions which faith condemns?

Thirdly, and lastly, because that, even admitting he should have known all his wretchedness, never having had any real sorrow for it, he has never been qualified to make it known; for nothing but heartfelt sorrow can explain itself as it ought, or truly represent those evils which it feels and abhors; it must be a feeling heart that can make itself to be understood on the wounds and the sufferings of a heart itself. A sinner full of a profane passion expresses it much more eloquently, and with more animation: nothing is left unsaid of the foolish and deplorable sufferings he endures; he enters into all the windings of his heart, his jealousies, his fears, and his hopes. As the mind of man, says the apostle, alone knows what passes in man, so likewise it is only the heart which can know what passes in the heart. Contrition gives eyes to see, and words to express every thing; it has a language which nothing can counterfeit: thus, in vain may a worldly soul, still chained by the heart to all his disorders, come to accuse himself; he cannot be understood. Without any absolute intention of concealing his wounds, he never exposes all their horror, because he neither feels nor is struck with them himself; his words always relish of the insensibility of his heart; and it is impossible that he should expose, in all their ugliness, deformities which he knows not, and which he still loves. He ought, therefore, to consider the whole period of his past life as a period of darkness and blindness, during which he has never viewed himself but with the eyes of

flesh and blood; never judged but through the opinions of passion and self-love; never accused but in the language of error and impenitence; never exhibited himself but in a false and imperfect light. It is not enough to have removed the stone from the tomb; the criminal soul must come forth from it himself, that he may exhibit himself, as I may say, in open day; that he may manifest his whole life; and that, from his earliest years even to the blessed hour of his deliverance, nothing be concealed from the eyes of the ministers ready to unbind him.

But this step, you say, has difficulties which may be the occasion of casting trouble, embarrassment, and discouragement through the conscience, and of suspending the resolution of a change of life. What! my brethren, you involve yourselves in discussions so arduous and so endless, for the purpose of clearing up your temporal concerns; and, in order to establish regularity and serenity in your conscience, and to leave nothing doubtful in the affair of your eternity, you would cry out from the moment that a few cares and investigations are required? How often do you proclaim, when a decisive step is in agitation which may determine the ruin or preservation of your fortune, that nothing must be neglected, nothing must be left to chance; that one's own eyes must look into every thing; that every thing must be cleared up, every thing fathomed even to the bottom, that you may have nothing afterward wherewith to reproach yourselves; and this maxim, so reasonable when connected with fleeting and frivolous interests, should be less so when applied to the grand and only real interest, that of salvation!

Ah! my brethren, how poor are we in faith! And what have we, in this life, of more importance than the care of arranging that awful account which we have to render to the eternal Judge, and to the Searcher of hearts and of thoughts? That is to say, the care of regulating our conscience, of dispelling its darkness, of purifying its stains, of clearing up its eternal interests, of confirming its hopes, of strengthening ourselves as much as the present condition permits, and making ourselves acquainted, as far as in our power, with its situation and its dispositions; and not to make our appearance before God like fools, unknown to ourselves, uncertain of what we are, and of what we must for ever be. Such are the means of conversion marked out to us in the miracle of raising up Lazarus: let us conclude the history of our gospel, and see what the motives are which determine Jesus Christ to operate it.

REFLECTION III.—To enter at once into our subject, without losing sight of the consequence of the gospel, the first motive which our Saviour seems to have, in the resurrection of Lazarus, is that of drying up the tears, and rewarding the prayers and the piety, of his sisters. Lord, said they to him, he whom thou

lovest is sick: and behold the first motive which often determines Jesus Christ to operate the conversion of a great sinner,—the tears and the prayers of those just souls who entreat it.

Yes, my brethren, whether it be that the Lord thereby wish to render virtue more respectable to sinners, by according favours to them only through the mediation of just souls; whether it be that he intend more closely to knit together his members, and to perfect them in unity and in charity, by rendering the ministry of the one useful and requisite to the other; it is certain that it is through the prayers of the good, and in their intercession, that the source of the conversion of the greatest sinners springs up. As all is done for the just in the church, says the apostle, so it may be said that every thing is done through them; and, as sinners are only endured in it to exercise their virtue, or to animate their vigilance, they are also recalled from their errors only to console their faith, and to reward their groanings and prayers.

To love just souls is a beginning, then, of righteousness to the greatest sinners: it is a presage of virtue to respect it in those who practise it; it is a prospect of conversion to seek the society of the good, to esteem their acquaintance, and to interest them in our salvation; and, even admitting that our heart still groan under iniquitous bonds, and that attachment to the world and to pleasures still separate us from God, yet, from the moment that we begin to love his servants, we accomplish, as it were, the first step in his service. It seems as if our heart already becomes tired of its passions, from the moment that we take pleasure in the society of those who condemn them; and that a relish for virtue is on the eve of springing up in us, from the moment that we take delight in those whom virtue alone renders amiable.

Besides, the just, instructed by ourselves with regard to our weaknesses, keep them continually present before the Lord: they lament, before him, over those chains which still bind us to the world and to its amusements; they offer up to him some weak desires of virtue, which we have intrusted to their charge, in order to induce his goodness to grant more fervent and more efficacious ones; they carry, even to the foot of the throne, some feeble essays toward good which they have noted in us, in order to obtain for us the perfection and plenitude of his mercy. More affected with our evils than for their own wants, they piously forget themselves, in order to snatch from destruction their brethren who are on the point of perishing before their eyes: they alone love us for ourselves, because they alone love in us but our salvation: the world may furnish sycophants, flatterers, social companions in dissipation, but virtue alone gives us friends.

And it is here that you who now listen to me, who, perhaps like Mary, were formerly slaves of the world and the passions,

and who, latterly, touched with grace, like her, quit no more the feet of the Lord; it is here that you ought to remember that, in future, one of the most important duties of your new life is, that of continually demanding, like the sister of Lazarus, from Jesus Christ, the resurrection of your brethren, the conversion of those unfortunate souls who have been accomplices in your criminal pleasures, and who still, under the dominion of death and sin, sorrowfully drag on their chains in the ways of the world and of error. You ought continually, in the bitterness of your heart, to be saying to Jesus Christ, like the sister of Lazarus, Lord, he whom thou lovest is sick; those souls to whom I have been a stumbling-block, and who have less offended thee than I, are still, however, in the shadow of death and in the corruption of sin; and I enjoy a deliverance of which I was more unworthy than they! Ah! Lord, the delight I feel in appertaining to thee shall never be perfect while I behold my brethren thus miserably perishing before mine eyes: I shall but imperfectly enjoy the fruit of thy mercies, while thou refuseth them to souls to whom I have myself been the fatal cause of their departure from righteousness: and I shall never think that my crimes are fully forgiven, while I see them existing in those sinners who have been removed from thee only through my example and my passions.

Not, my brethren, that you ought to place your whole dependence on the prayers of the good, or to expect from them alone a change of heart and the gift of penitence. For this is a very general illusion, and more especially among those who are high in the world: they suppose that, by respecting virtue, by showing favour to the good, and by interesting them to solicit our conversion from God, our chains shall drop off of themselves without any effort on our part; they comfort themselves upon that remainder of faith and religion which renders virtue in others still dear and respectable to us; they give themselves credit for not having, as yet, reached that point of freethinking and impiety, so common in the world, which makes virtue the public butt of its censures and derision. But, alas! my brethren, it availed nothing to king Jehu that he had publicly rendered honour to the holy man Jehonadab; his vices still subsisted with all that respect he had for the man of God. It availed nothing to Herod that he had honoured the piety of John the Baptist, and that he had even loved the holy freedom of his discourses: the deference which he had for the precursor left him still all the excess of his criminal passion. The honours which we pay to virtue attract aids to our weakness; but they do not justify our errors: the prayers of the good induce the Lord to pay more attention to our wants; but they do not render him more indulgent to our crimes: they obtain for us victory over the passions which we begin to detest; but not over those which we still love and which we still continue to cherish:

in a word, they assist our good desires; but they do not authorize our impenitence.

The miracle of raising up Lazarus teaches just souls, then, to solicit the conversion of their brethren; but the conversion and deliverance of their brethren likewise serve to animate their lukewarmness and slothfulness.—Second motive which Jesus Christ proposes: he wishes, by the novelty of that prodigy, to arouse the faith of his disciples, still dormant and languishing.

And such is the fruit which Jesus Christ continually expects from the miracles of his grace: he operates before your eyes, you who have long walked in his ways, sudden and surprising conversions, in order, by the fervour and the zeal of these newly risen from the dead, to confound your lukewarmness and indolence. Yes, my brethren, nothing is more calculated to cover us with confusion, and to make us tremble over the infidelities which we still mingle with a cold and languishing piety, than the sight of a soul buried, but an instant ago, in the corruption of death and sin, and whose errors had perhaps inflated the vanity of our zeal, and served as a butt to the malignity of our censures; than the sight, I say, of such a soul, vivified, a moment after, by grace, freed from his chains, and boldly walking in the ways of God, more eager after mortification than formerly after pleasure; more removed from the world and its amusements than apparently he was once attached; scrupling to himself the most innocent recreations; allowing almost no bounds to the vivacity and transports of his penitence; and every day making rapid advances in piety: while we, after many years of piety, alas! still languish on the beginning of that holy career; while we, after so many signal favours received, after so many truths known, after so many sacraments and other duties of religion attended, alas! we still hold to the world and to ourselves by a thousand ties; we are yet but in the first rudiments of faith and of a Christian life, and still more distant than at first from that zeal and that fervour which constitute the whole value and the whole security of a faithful piety.

My brethren, the dreadful prophecy of Jesus Christ is every day fulfilled before our eyes. Publicans and sinners, persons of a scandalous conduct according even to the world, and as distant from the kingdom of God as the east is from the west, are converted, repent, surprise the world with the sight of a retired and mortified life, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob; and, perhaps, we, who are looked upon as children of the kingdom,—we, whose manners present nothing to the eyes of the world but what is orderly and laudable; we, who are held out as models of propriety and piety; we, whom the world canonizes, and which we glorified with the reputation and the appearances of piety; alas! we shall perhaps be rejected and confounded with unbelievers, for having always laboured at our salvation with negli-

gence, and having preserved a heart still altogether worldly, in the midst even of our pious works.

Thus, my brethren, you whom this discourse regards, do not judge of yourselves from the comparison which you inwardly make with those souls whom the world and the passions hurry away. We may be more righteous than the world, and yet not enough so for Jesus Christ: for the world is so corrupted, the gospel is so little known in it, faith is so weakened, the law and truth so little observed, that what is virtue, with regard to it, may still be a great iniquity in the sight of God.

Rather compare yourselves with those holy penitents who formerly edified the church by the prodigy of their austerities, and whose life, even at this day, appears to us so incredible; with those noble martyrs who gave up their body for the truth, and who, amidst the most cruel torments, were transported with joy in contemplating the holy promises; with those primitive believers who suffered death every day for Jesus Christ, and who, under persecution, loss of property, and of their children, thought themselves still possessed of all, as they had neither lost faith nor the hope of a better life: behold the models by whom you ought to measure your piety, to find it still deficient, and all worldly. Unless you resemble them, in vain do you not resemble the world; you shall perish like it; it is not enough that you do not imitate the crimes of the worldly, you must also have the virtues of the just.

Lastly. Not only the goodness of Jesus Christ wishes, in this miracle, to furnish to his disciples and to the Jewish believers a fresh motive for believing in him, but in it his justice likewise supplies a fresh occasion of obstinacy and incredulity to the unbelieving Israelites: last circumstance of our gospel. They take measures to destroy him; they wish to put Lazarus himself to death, that so striking a testimony of the power of Jesus Christ may no longer continue among them. They had wept his death; scarcely is he recalled to life when he appears worthy only of their fury and vengeance. And behold the sole fruit which the generality of you commonly reap from the miracles of grace; that is to say, from the conversion and the spiritual resurrection of great sinners. Before that the mercy of Jesus Christ had cast looks of grace and salvation upon a criminal soul, and while delivered up to the dominion of the passions, he was not only dead in sin, but spread every where around the infection and the stench of his disorders and scandals, you seemed touched for his errors and shame; you deplored the misery of his lot; you mingled your tears and regrets with the tears and regrets of his friends and relatives; and the public irregularity of his conduct experienced from you every sorrow and compassion of humanity; but, scarcely hath the grace of Jesus Christ, recalled him to life, scarcely, come forth from the

tomb and that abyss of corruption in which he was buried, does he render glory to his deliverer by the holy ardours of a tender and sincere piety, than you become the censurers even of his piety: you had appeared touched for the excess of his vices, and you publicly deride the excess of his pretended piety: you had blamed his warm pursuits after pleasure, and you condemn the fervour of his love for God. Be consistent, therefore, with yourselves, and decide in favour either of the just or of the sinner.

Yes, my brethren, if the happiness of a soul, who, before your eyes, returns from his errors, excite not your envy; if the contrition of a sinner, who was formerly the companion perhaps of your pleasures and excesses, leave you all your indifference with regard to salvation, ah! insult not at least his good fortune; despise not in him the gift of God; take not, even from the miracles of grace, so proper to open your eyes, a fresh motive of blindness and unbelief; and do not thus change the blessings of God to your brethren, into a dreadful judgment of justice against you.

In reading the history of our gospel, you are sometimes astonished that the obstinacy and blindness of the Jews should be able to resist the most striking miracles of Jesus Christ; you do not comprehend how the raising up of the dead, the curing of persons born blind, and so many other wonders wrought before their eyes, did not force them to acknowledge the truth of his ministry and the sanctity of his doctrine: you say that much less would convince you; that any one of all these miracles would suffice, and that you would immediately yield to the truth.

But, my brethren, you condemn yourselves out of your own mouth; for, (without refuting here that absurd manner of speaking, by those grand and sublime proofs which religion furnishes against impiety, and which we have elsewhere employed,) candidly, is it not a more arduous and more astonishing miracle, that a soul, delivered up to sin, and to the most shameful passions,—born with every propensity to voluptuousness, pride, revenge, and ambition, and more distant than any one, by the nature of his heart, from the kingdom of God, and from all the maxims of Christian piety; that, all at once, that soul should renounce all his gratifications, break asunder all his warmest attachments, repress his liveliest passions, change his most rooted inclinations, forget injuries, attention to the body and to fortune; no longer have a relish but for prayer, retirement, the practice of the most gloomy and repulsive duties, and hold out to the eyes of the public, in a change, in a resurrection so palpable, the spectacle of a life so different from the former, that the world, that freethinking itself, shall be forced to render glory to the truth of his change, and that they shall no longer know him to be the same;—is it not, I say, a more arduous and more astonishing miracle?

Now, doth not the mercy of Jesus Christ operate such miracles almost every day before your eyes? Doth not his holy word,

though in a weak and languishing mouth, still raise up, every day, new Lazaruses from the dead? You behold them; you know and you appear astonished at them; yet, nevertheless, do they touch you? Do these wonders which, with so much majesty, the finger of God maketh to shine forth, recall you to truth and to the light? Do these changes, a thousand times more miraculous than the raising up of the dead, convince you? Do they bring you nearer to Jesus Christ, or restore to you that faith which you have lost?

Alas! your whole care, like the Jews, is to stand out against, or to weaken their truth. You deny that grace hath any part in the glory of these wonders: you seek to trace their motives in causes altogether worldly; you consider them as delusions and impositions; you attribute to the artifices of man the most shining operations of the Holy Spirit; you insist that such a new life is only a fresh snare to entrap the public credulity, and a new path more securely to attain some worldly purpose. Thus, the works of the almighty power of Jesus Christ harden you; thus, even the wonders of his grace complete your blindness; thus, you make every thing conducive toward your destruction. Jesus Christ becomes to you a stumbling-block, when he ought to have been a source of life and salvation. The examples of sinners stain and corrupt you: their penitence revolts and hardens you.

Great God! suffer, then, in order that a life altogether criminal at last be terminated, that I now raise my voice to thee out of the depths in which I have, for so many years, languished. The impure chains with which I am bound, attach me, by so many folds, to the bottom of the gulf in which I drag on my gloomy days, that, in spite of all my good desires, I still remain fettered, and almost incapable of any effort toward disengaging myself and returning to thee, O my God, whom I have forsaken. But, Lord, out of the depths even in which thou seest me, like another Lazarus, fettered and buried, I have, at least, the voice of the heart free to send up, even to the foot of the throne, my sorrows, my lamentations, and my tears.

The voice of a repentant sinner is always agreeable, O Lord, to thine ear; it is that voice of Jacob which awakens all thy tenderness, even when it offers to thy sight but hands of Esau, and still covered with blood and crimes.

Ah! thine holy ears, O Lord, have now sufficiently been turned away from my licentious and blasphemous words; let them now be attentive to the voice of my supplications; and let the singularity of the words which I now address to thee, O my God! attract a more favourable attention to my prayer.

I come not here, great God! to excuse my disorders in thysight, by alleging to thee the occasions which have seduced me, the examples which have led me astray, the misfortune of my engagements, and the nature of my heart and of my weakness; cover thine eyes, O Lord, upon the horrors of my past life; the only pos-

sibility of excusing them is, not to behold or to know them. Alas! if I am unable myself to support even their view; if my crimes dread and fly from mine own eyes, and if my terrors and my weakness render it absolutely necessary to turn my sight from them, how, O Lord, should they be able to sustain the sanctity of thy looks, if thou search into them with that eye of severity which finds stains in the purest and most laudable life?

But thou, O Lord, art not a God like unto man, to whom it is always so difficult to pardon and to forget the injuries of an enemy: goodness and mercy dwell in thine eternal bosom; clemency is the first attribute of thy supreme being; and thou hast no enemies but those who refuse to place their trust in the abundant riches of thy mercy.

Yes, Lord! be the hour what it may when a criminal soul casts himself upon thy mercy; whether in the morning of life or in the decline of age; whether after the errors of youthful manners, or after an entire life of dissipation and licentiousness, thou wouldst, O my God! that their hope in thee be not extinguished; and thou assurest us that the highest point of our crimes is but the lowest degree of thy mercy.

But, likewise, great God! if thou listen to my desires; if, once more, thou restore to me that life and that light which I have lost; if thou break asunder my chains of death which still fetter me; if thou stretch out thine hand to withdraw me from the gulf in which I am plunged, ah! never, O Lord, shall I cease to proclaim thine eternal mercies. I will forget the whole world, that I may be occupied only with the wonders of thy grace toward my soul. I will every moment of my life render glory to the God who shall have delivered me: my mouth, for ever shut against vain things, shall with difficulty be able to express all the transports of my love and of my gratitude; and thy creature, who still groans under the dominion of the world and of sin, then restored to his true Lord, shall, henceforth and for evermore, bless his deliverer.

SERMON XXX.

ON THE DAY OF JUDGMENT.

“Then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud, with power and great glory.”—LUKE xxi. 27.

SUCH will be that last spectacle which shall terminate the eternal revolutions which the aspect of this world is continually offering to our eyes, and which either amuse us through their novelty, or seduce us by their charms. Such will be the coming of the Son of Man, the day of his revelation, the accomplishment of his kingdom, and the complete redemption of his mystical body. Such the day of the manifestation of consciences, that day of misery and despair to one portion of men, and of peace, consolation, and ineffable delight to the other: the sweet expectation of the just, the dread of the wicked; the day which is to determine the destiny of all men.

It was the image, ever present to their minds, of that terrible day, which rendered the first believers patient under persecution, delighted under sufferance, and illustrious under injury and reproach. It is that which has since supported the faith of martyrs, animated the constancy of virgins, and smoothed to the anchorite all the horrors of a desert: it is that which still, at this day, peoples those religious solitudes erected, by the piety of our ancestors, as asylums against the contagion of the age.

Even you, my brethren, when the awful solemnity of that grand event hath sometimes intruded on your thoughts, have been unable to check feelings of compunction and dread. But these have been only transitory fears; more smiling and more agreeable ideas have speedily effaced them, and recalled to you your former calm. Alas! in the happy days of the church, it would have been considered as renouncing faith not to have longed for the day of the Lord. The only consolation of those first disciples of faith was in looking forward to it, and the apostles were obliged even to moderate, on that point, the holy eagerness of believers; and, at present, the church finds itself under the necessity of employing the whole terror of our ministry, in order to recall its remembrance to Christians, and the whole fruit of our discourses is confined to making it dreaded.

I mean not, however, to display to you here the whole history of that awful event. I wish to confine myself to one of its circumstances, which has always appeared to me as the most proper to make an impression on the heart: it is the manifestation of consciences.

Now, behold my whole design. On this earth the sinner never knows himself such as he is, and is only half-known to men; he lives, in general, unknown to himself, through his blindness, and to others through his dissimulation and cunning. In that grand day he will know himself, and will be known. The sinner laid open to himself, the sinner laid open to all creatures! Behold the subject upon which I have resolved to make some simple, and, I trust, edifying reflections.

PART I.—“All things are reserved for a future day,” says the sage Ecclesiastes, “and no man knoweth them here below, for all things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good, and to the clean and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner.”

What idea, indeed, should we have of Providence in the government of the universe, were we to judge of its wisdom and justice only from the diverse lots which it provides on this earth for men? What! the good and the evil should be dispensed on the earth, without choice, respect, or discrimination? The just man should almost always groan under affliction and want, whilst the wicked should live surrounded with glory, pleasures, and affluence, and, after fortunes so different, and manners so dissimilar, both should alike sink into an eternal oblivion; and that just and avenging God, whom they should afterward meet, would not deign either to weigh their deeds, or to distinguish their merits? Thou, O Lord, art just, and wilt render to each according to his works.

This grand point of Christian faith, so consistent even with natural equity, supposed,—I say, that, in that terrible day, when, in the face of the universe, the sinner shall appear before that awful tribunal accompanied by his works, the manifestation of consciences will be the most horrible punishment of the unfaithful soul. A rigorous examination shall, in the first place, make him known to himself; and behold all the circumstances of that awful discussion.

I ought, in the first place, to make you observe all the titles with which he will be invested who shall examine you, and which announce all the rigour with which he shall weigh in the balance your deeds and your thoughts. It will be a rigid legislator, jealous of the sanctity of his law, and who will judge you only by it; all the softenings, all the vain interpretations, which custom or a false knowledge had invented, shall vanish; the lustre of the law will dissipate them; the resources with which they had flattered the sinner, will sink into nothing; and the incensed legislator will examine almost more rigorously the false interpretations which had changed its purity, than the manifest transgressions which had violated it. It will be a judge charged with the interest of his Father's glory against the sinner, established to decide between God

and man; and that day will be the day of his zeal for the honour of the Divinity, against those who shall not have rendered to him that honour which is his due: a Saviour, who will show you his wounds to reproach your ingratitude; all that he hath done for you will rise up against you: his blood, the price of your salvation, will loudly demand your destruction; and his despised kindnesses will be numbered among your heaviest crimes: the Searcher of hearts, to whose eyes the most hidden counsels and the most secret thoughts will all be laid open: lastly, a God of terrible majesty, before whom the heavens shall dissolve, the elements be confounded, and all nature overturned, and whose scrutiny, with all the terror of his presence, the sinner shall singly be forced to support.

Now, behold the circumstances of that awful examination. First, it will be the same for all men; and, as St. Matthew says, before him shall be gathered all nations. The difference of ages, countries, conditions, birth, and temperament, shall no longer be regarded; and as the gospel, on which you will be judged, is the law of all times and conditions, and holds out the same rules to the prince and to the subject, to the great and to the lowly, to the anchorite and to the man immersed in the affairs of the world, to the believer who lived in the fervour of the primitive times, and to him who hath the misfortune to live in the relaxation of the present age, no distinction will be made in the manner of proceeding on the examination of the guilty; vain excuses on rank and birth, on the dangers of his station, on the manners of his age, on the weakness of temperament, will then be no longer listened to from you; and, with respect to modesty, chastity, ambition, forgiveness of injuries, renouncement of one's self, mortification of the senses, the just Judge will demand an exact account, equally from the Greek as from the Barbarian, from the poor as from the powerful, from the man of the world as from the solitary, from the prince as from the humblest subject; lastly, from the Christian of these latter times as from the first disciples of the gospel.

Vain judgments of the earth, how shall you then be confounded! and how little shall we then estimate nobility of blood, the glory of ancestry, the blaze of reputation, the distinction of talents, and all the pompous titles with which men endeavour, on this earth, to puff out their meanness, and to found so many vain distinctions and privileges, when we shall see, amidst that crowd of guilty, the sovereign confounded with the slave, the great with the meanest of the people, the learned promiscuously blended with the ignorant and mean,—the gods of war, these invincible and far-famed characters who had filled the universe with their name, at the side of the husbandman and labourer! Thou alone, O my God! hast glory, power, and immortality; and, all the titles of vanity being destroyed and annihilated with the world which had invented them, each will appear before thee accompanied solely by his works!

Secondly. That examination will be universal, that is to say, it will comprehend all the different ages and circumstances of your life : the weaknesses of childhood, which have escaped your remembrance ; the transports of youth, of which almost every moment has been a crime ; the ambition and the anxieties of a riper age ; the obstinacy and the chagrins of an old age, still perhaps voluptuous. What astonishment, when repassing over the diverse parts which you have acted on the earth, you shall find yourself every where profane, dissolute, voluptuous, without virtue, without penitence, without good works ; having passed through a diversity of situations merely in order to amass a more abundant treasure of wrath ; and having lived in these diverse states as if to a certainty all were to die with you !

The variety of events which succeed each other here below, and divide our life, fix our attention only on the present, and do not permit us to recollect it in the whole, or fully to see what we really are. We never regard ourselves but in that point of view in which our present situation holds us out ; the last situation is always the one which leads us to judge of ourselves ; a sentiment of salvation, with which God sometimes indulges us, calms us on an insensibility of many years ; a day passed in exercises of piety, makes us forget a life of crimes ; the declaration of our faults at the tribunal of penitence, effaces them from our remembrance, and they become to us as though they had never been : in a word, of all the different states of our conscience we never see but the present. But, in the presence of the terrible Judge, the whole will be visible at once ; the history will be entirely laid open. From the very first feeling formed by your heart, even to its last sigh, all shall be collected before your eyes ; all the iniquities, dispersed through the different stages of your life, will then confront you ; not an action, not a desire, not a word, not a thought, will there be omitted ; for, if our hairs be numbered, judge of our deeds. We shall see spring up the whole course of our years, which, though as if annihilated to us, yet lived in the eyes of God ; and there we shall find, not those perishable histories in which our vain actions were to be transmitted to posterity, not those flattering recitals of our military exploits, of those brilliant events which had filled so many volumes, and exhausted so much praise,—not those public records in which are set down the nobility of our birth, the antiquity of our origin, the fame of our ancestors, the dignities which have rendered them illustrious, the lustre which we have added to their name, and all the history, as I may say, of human illusion and weakness ; that immortality so vaunted, which it promised to us, shall be buried in the ruins and in the wrecks of the universe ; but there we shall see the most shocking and exact history of our heart, of our mind, of our imagination ; that is to say, that internal and invisible part of our life, equally unknown to ourselves as to the rest of men.

Yes, my brethren, besides the exterior history of our manners, which will be all recalled, what will most astonish us is, the secret history of our heart, which will then be wholly laid open to our eyes; of that heart which we have never sounded, never known; of that heart which continually eluded our search, and, under specious names, disguised from us the shame of its passions; of that heart whose elevation, probity, magnanimity, disinterestedness, and natural goodness we have so much vaunted, which the public error and adulation had beheld as such, and which had occasioned our being exalted above other men. So many shameful desires, which were scarcely formed before we endeavoured to conceal them from ourselves; so many absurd projects of fortune and elevation, sweet delusions, up to which our seduced heart continually gave itself; so many secret and mean jealousies which were the invisible principle of all our conduct, yet, nevertheless, which we dissembled through pride; so many criminal dispositions which had a thousand times induced us ardently to wish that either the pleasures of the senses were eternal, or that, at least, they should remain unpunished; so many hatreds and animosities, which, unknown to ourselves, had corrupted our heart; so many defiled and vicious intentions, with regard to which we were so ingenious in flattering ourselves; so many projects of iniquity to which opportunity had alone been wanting, and which we reckoned as nothing because they had never departed from our heart: in a word, that vicissitude of passions which in succession had possession of our heart: behold what shall all be displayed before our eyes. We shall see, says a holy father, come out, as from an ambuscade, numberless crimes of which we could never believe ourselves capable. We shall be shown to ourselves; we shall be made to enter into our own heart, where we had never resided: a sudden light shall clear up that abyss: that mystery of iniquity shall be revealed; and we shall see that which of all we knew least, that was ourselves.

To the examination of the evils we have committed will succeed that of the good which we have failed to do. The endless omissions of which our life has been full, and for which we had never felt even remorse, will be recalled; so many circumstances where our character engaged us to render glory to the truth, and where we have betrayed it through vile motives of interest, or mean compliances; so many opportunities of doing good, provided for us by the goodness of God, and which we have almost always neglected; so much culpable and voluntary ignorance, in consequence of having dreaded the light, and even fled from those who could have instructed us; so many events so calculated to open our eyes, and which have served only to increase our blindness; so much good, which, through our talents or our example, we might have done, and which we have prevented by our vices; so many souls whose innocence might have been

preserved by our bounty, and whom we have left to perish by refusing to abate from our profusions; so many crimes which might have been prevented in our inferiors or equals by prudent remonstrances and useful advice, and which indolence, meanness, and perhaps more culpable views, have made us suppress; so many days and moments which might have been placed to advantage for Heaven, and which we have spent in inutility and an unworthy effeminacy. And what in this is more dreadful, is that, in our own eyes, that was the most innocent part of our life, offering nothing to our remembrance, as we think, but a great void.

What endless regret, then, to the unfaithful soul, to see such a list of days sacrificed to inutility, to that world which is no more; while a single moment, consecrated to a God faithful to his promises, might have merited the felicity of the holy!—to see so many meannesses, so many subjections for the sake of riches, and a miserable fortune which could last only for a moment; while a single self-denial, suffered for the sake of Jesus Christ, would have secured to him an immortal crown! What regret, when he now finds that not half the cares and anxieties were required for his salvation which he has undergone to accomplish his destruction; and that a single day of that long life, wholly devoted to the world, had sufficed for eternity!

To that examination will succeed, in the fourth place, that of mercies which you have abused; so many holy inspirations either rejected or only half prosecuted; so many watchful attentions of Providence to your soul rendered unavailing; so many truths, declared through our ministry, which, in many believers, have operated penitence and salvation, but have always been sterile in your heart; so many afflictions and disappointments, which the Lord had provided for you, in order to recall you to him, and of which you have always made so unworthy a use; even so many natural gifts which once were blossoms of virtue, and which you have turned into agents of vice: ah! if the unprofitable servant be cast into outer darkness for having only hidden his talent, with what indulgence can you flatter yourself, you who have received so many, and who have always employed them against the glory of that Master who had intrusted them to you?

Here, indeed, it is that the reckoning will be terrible. Jesus Christ will demand from you the price of his blood. You sometimes complain that God doth not enough for you; that he hath brought you into the world weak, and of a temperament of which you are not the master; and that he bestoweth not the necessary grace to enable you to resist the many opportunities which drag you away. Ah! you will then see that your whole life has been a continued abuse of his mercies; you will see that, among so many infidel nations which know him not, you have been privileged, enlightened, called to faith, nourished in the doctrine of

truth and the virtue of the sacrament, incessantly supported by his inspirations and his grace; you will be shocked to see all that God hath done for you, and the little that you have done for him; and your complaints will quickly be changed into an utter confusion, destitute of every resource but in the horrors of your own despair.

Hitherto the just Judge hath examined you only on those crimes which are especially your own; but what will it be when he shall enter into a reckoning with you on the sins of others, of which you have been either the occasion or the cause, and which will, consequently, be charged to your account! What a new sink! All the souls to whom you have been a subject of scandal and ruin will be presented to you; all the souls whom your discourses, your counsels, your example, your solicitations, your impudencies, have precipitated, with yourself, into eternal destruction; all the souls whose weakness you have either seduced, or whose innocence you have corrupted, whose faith you have perverted, whose virtue you have shaken, whose freethinking you have authorized, or whose impiety you have strengthened by your persuasions, or by the example of your life. Jesus Christ, to whom they belonged, and who had purchased them with his blood, will demand them at your hands, as a dear heritage, as a precious conquest, which you have unjustly ravished from him; and if the Lord marked Cain with the sign of reprobation in demanding account from him of the blood of his brother, judge with what sign you shall be marked when you shall be brought to a reckoning for his soul.

But this is not all. Were you a public character, and high in authority, what abuses authorized! What iniquities glanced over! What duties sacrificed, either to your own interests or to the passions and interests of others! What respect of persons, in opposition to equity and conscience! What iniquitous undertakings counselled! What wars, perhaps, what confusions, what public evils, of which you have either been the author or the infamous agent! You will see that your ambition or your counsels have been as the fatal source of an infinity of miseries, of the calamities of your age, of those evils which are perpetuated, and pass from father to son; and you will be surprised to find that your iniquities have survived yourself, and that, even long after death, you were still culpable, before God, of an infinity of crimes and disorders which took place on the earth. And now it is, my brethren, that the danger of public stations shall be known, the precipices which surround the throne itself, the rocks of authority, and with what reason the gospel denominated happy those who live in the obscurity of a private station; with what it was that religion wished to inspire us with so much horror at ambition, so much indifference toward the grandeurs of the earth, so much contempt for all that is exalted only in the eyes of men, and so

frequently recommended to us to love only what we ought for ever to love.

But, exempted perhaps from all these vices which we have just been mentioning, and attached, for a long time past, to the duties of a Christian life, you presume that this terrible examination will either not regard you, or, at any rate, that you will appear there with more confidence than the criminal soul. Undoubtedly, my dear hearer, that will be the day of triumph and glory for the just; the day which will justify these pretended excesses of retreat, mortification, modesty, and delicacy of conscience, which had furnished to the world so many subjects of censure and profane derision. The just shall, no doubt, appear before that awful tribunal with more confidence than the sinner; but he will also appear there, and even his righteousness shall be judged: your virtues, your holy works, will be submitted to that rigorous examination. The world, which often refuses the praises due to the truest virtue, too often likewise grants them to the sole appearances of virtue: there are even so many just who deceive themselves; and who are indebted, for that name and that reputation, merely to the public error. Thus, it is not only Tyre and Sidon that I shall visit in the day of my wrath, saith the Lord; that is to say, those sinners whom their crimes seemed to confound with the unbelievers and the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon: I shall carry the light of my judgments even to Jerusalem; that is to say, I will examine, I will search into, I will fathom the motives of those holy works which seem to equal you with the most faithful of the holy Jerusalem.

I will trace, even to the source, the motive of that conversion which made so much noise in the world; and it shall be seen whether I find not its origin in some secret disgust, in the declension of youth and fortune, in private views of favour and preferment, rather than in the detestation of sin and love of righteousness.

I will balance those liberalities poured out on the bosom of the poor, those compassionate visits, that zeal for pious undertakings, that protection granted to my servants with complaisance, a desire of esteem, ostentation, and worldly views which have infected them: and, in my sight, they shall perhaps appear to be rather the fruits of pride than the consequences of grace and the work of my Spirit.

I will recall that train of prayer and other holy practices of which you had made a kind of habit, which no longer roused within you any feeling of faith and compunction; and you shall know whether lukewarmness, negligence, the little fruit which attended them, and the little disposition within you previous to them, have not, before me, constituted so many infidelities, for which you shall be judged without mercy.

I will search into that removal from the world and from pleasures, that singularity of conduct, that affectation of modesty and

regularity; and perhaps I shall find them more the consequence of humour, temperament, and indolence, than of faith; and that, in a life more regular and more retired, in the opinion of men, you shall still have preserved all your self-love, your attachment to the flesh, all the niceties of sensuality; and, in a word, all the sins of the most worldly souls.

I will search, even to the bottom, that pretended zeal for my glory which made you so deeply lament over the scandals of which you were a spectator, which led you to condemn them with such confidence and pride, and to blaze out, with such warmth, against the irregularities and weaknesses of your brethren; and, perhaps, shall that zeal be no longer in my sight but a natural severity of temper, a malignity of disposition, an inclination toward censure and upbraiding, an indiscreet warmth, a vain, ostentatious zeal; far from finding you full of zeal for my glory, and for the salvation of your brethren, you shall no longer appear before me, but unjust, obstinate, malicious, and rash.

I will demand an account from you of those splendid talents which, it would appear, you employed only for my glory and for the instruction of believers; and which had drawn upon you the blessings of the just and the acclamations even of the worldly; and, perhaps, that continual attention to, and gratification of your own pride, the desire of surpassing others, and your sensibility of human applause, will prove the prominent features of your works to be only the works of man and the fruits of pride; and that I shall curse those labours which had sprung from so impure a source.

Great God! what works, upon which I had so firmly depended, shall then be found dead in thine eyes! How terrible shall be that discrimination! And, of all the actions which we have performed even for heaven, how few wilt thou acknowledge as thine, and which thou wilt deem worthy of reward!

Do not from thence conclude, my brethren, that it is then needless to labour for salvation, seeing the just Judge shall seek only the condemnation of men. Only their condemnation! My brethren, he is come solely to save them, and his mercies will far surpass even his justice. But behold the conclusion which you ought rather to draw. Those righteous souls whom you so frequently accuse of excess, of scrupulosity in the practice of the duties of a Christian life, as though they carried things too far; these souls, exposed to the light of God, shall appear lukewarm, sensual, imperfect, and perhaps criminal: and you, who live in the dangers and pleasures of the world; you, who devote to religion and your salvation only the most idle moments of your life; you, who scarcely mingle a single work of piety with an entire year of dissipation and inutility, in what situation shall you then be, my dear hearer? If those who shall have only laudable works to present shall yet be in danger of rejec-

tion, what shall be your destiny,—you, who have only a life entirely worldly to offer? If the tree full of blossoms be treated with such rigour, what shall become of the withered and barren tree? And, if the just be even with difficulty saved,—I speak not of the sinner, for he is already judged,—but the worldly soul, who lives without either vice or virtue, how shall he dare to appear?

You, after all, say, my dear hearer, that your conscience does not reproach you with great crimes; that, if not good, neither are you bad, and that your only sin is indolence and sloth. Ah! you shall then know yourself before the tribunal of Jesus Christ. You shall see whether the testimony of your conscience, which reproached you not with crimes, and left you scarcely any thing culpable to confess, were not a terrible blindness, up to which the justice of God had always delivered you. From the dread in which you shall see the just, you shall find what ought to be your own fears, and whether the confidence in which you have always lived sprung from the peace of a good conscience, or from the false security of a worldly one.

O my God! cries St. Augustine, could I but see at this moment the state of my soul as thou shalt then lay it open to me! Could I despoil myself of those prejudices which blind me, mistrust those examples which confirm me, those customs which quiet me, those talents which dazzle me, those praises which seduce me, that rank and those titles which deceive me, and those complaisances of a sacred guide, which form all my security: could I but despoil myself of that self-love which is the source of all my errors, and behold myself alone at thy feet, in thy light; O my God! what horror would I not feel for myself! and what measures would I not take in humbling myself before thee, to prevent the public shame of that awful day, when the counsels of hearts and the secrecy of thoughts, shall be manifested! For, my brethren, not only shall the sinner be shown to himself, but he shall likewise be shown to all creatures.

PART II.—That mixture of good and wicked, inevitable on this earth, gives birth to two disorders: in the first place, through favour of that mixture, concealed vice escapes that public ignominy which is its due: virtue, not known, receives not the applause it merits. In the second place, the sinner, high in honours, frequently fills the most distinguished offices, while the good and pious man lives in humiliation, and crawls like a slave at his feet. Now, on that terrible day, a double manifestation shall be made, which will repair that twofold disorder: in the first place, the sinful will be marked out from the just by the public exposition of their conscience; in the second place, they will be discerned by a separation from them, and the difference of their stations before the throne of glory.

In order fully to comprehend all the shame and confusion with which the criminal soul shall then be covered, when shown to all creatures, and all his vices, the most secret, exposed to the light, it requires only to pay attention, first, to the number and character of the spectators who shall witness his shame; secondly, to the care he had taken to conceal his weaknesses and debaucheries from the eyes of men, while on the earth; thirdly, and lastly, to his personal qualities, which will render his confusion still more deep and overwhelming.

Here figure to yourselves, then, my brethren, the criminal soul before the tribunal of Christ, surrounded by angels and men; the just, the sinful, his relations, his subjects, his masters, his friends, his enemies, all their eyes fixed on him, present at the terrible scrutiny which the just Judge will make into his actions, his desires, and his thoughts; forced, in spite of themselves, to assist at his judgment, and to witness the justice of the sentence which the Son of Man shall pronounce against him. All the resources which, on this earth, might soften the most humiliating confusion, shall fail, on that day, to the unfaithful soul.

First resource. On this earth, when guilty of a fault which has sunk us into contempt, the whole has turned on a certain number of witnesses confined to our nation, or to the place of our birth; we may have removed ourselves from them, in the course of time, to avoid continually reading, in their eyes, the remembrance and reproach of our past shame; we may have changed our place of dwelling, to go elsewhere among strangers, to recover a reputation which we had already lost: but on that grand day, all men assembled shall be acquainted with the secret history of your manners and of your conscience: you shall no longer have it in your power to hide yourself far from the looks of the spectators, to seek new countries, and, like Cain, to fly into the desert. Each shall be fixed immovable in the place marked out for him, bearing on his forehead the sentence of his condemnation and the history of his whole life, obliged to sustain the eyes of the universe and the whole shame of his weaknesses. There shall no longer, then, be any hidden spot wherein to conceal himself from the public regard; the light of God, the sole glory of the Son of Man, will fill the heavens and the earth; and in all that immensity of space around you, you will, in every part, discover from afar only watchful eyes fixed on you.

Second resource. On the earth, when our shame is even public, and when degraded in the minds of men, in consequence of some striking fault, yet there are always some friends grounded in our favour, whose esteem and society recompense us, in some measure, for the public contempt, and whose kindnesses assist us in sustaining the inveteracy of the general censure; but, on this occasion, the presence of our friends will be the object by far the most insup-

portable to our shame. If sinners, like ourselves, they will cast up to us our common pleasures and our example, which, perhaps, have been the first rock upon which their innocence split: if just, as they had believed us to be children of light, ah! they will reproach to us their good opinion abused and their friendship seduced. You loved the just, shall they say to us, and you hated righteousness; you protected virtue, yet, in your heart, you placed vice on the throne: in us you sought that probity, that fidelity, and that security which you found not in your worldly friends, but you sought not the Lord who formed all these virtues in our heart: ah! did not the author of all our gifts deserve to be more loved, more sought after than we!

And behold the third resource, which shall fail, to the confusion of the criminal soul; for, should no friends be found on this earth to interest themselves in our misfortunes, there are always, at least, indifferent persons whom our faults do not wound or excite against us: but, on that terrible day, we shall have no indifferent spectators. The just, so feeling on this earth to the calamities of their brethren, so ingenious in excusing their faults, and so ready in covering them with the veil of charity, in order, at least, to soften, if they cannot find an apparent excuse for them in the eyes of men,—the just, then, despoiled, like the Son of Man, of that indulgence and pity which they had exercised toward their brethren on the earth, shall hiss at the sinner, says the prophet,—shall insult him, and shall demand his punishment from the Lord to avenge his glory; they shall enter into the zeal and interests of his justice; and, becoming judges themselves, they shall mock him, says the prophet, and say, “Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength; but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness. Behold, now, that foolish man, who believed himself the only sage on the earth, and who considered the life of the just as a folly; who made to himself in the favour of the great, in the vanity of titles and dignities, in the extent of his lands and possessions, in the good opinion and applause of men, supports of dirt, which were to perish with him. Where now are your gods, your rock in whom you trusted? Let them rise up and help you, and be your protection!”

Nor shall sinners be more indulgent to his misery; they will feel for him all that horror which they shall be forced to feel for themselves; the fellowship of misfortune, which ought to unite, will be only an eternal hatred which shall divide them; only a cruel inveteracy, which shall fill their hearts with nothing but sentiments of cruelty and fury against their brethren; and they will hate in others the same crimes from which all their miseries spring. In a word, the men most distant from us, the most savage nations, to whom the name of Jesus Christ hath never been announced, come then, but too late, to the knowledge of the

truth, shall rise up against you, and reproach to you, that, if the miracles which God had in vain operated amongst you had been wrought before their eyes,—that if they, like you, had been enlightened by the gospel, and sustained by the succours of faith, they would have done penance in sackcloth and ashes, and put to advantage, for their salvation, those favours which you have abused for your destruction.

Such shall be the confusion of the reprobate soul. Accursed before God, he will find himself at the same time the outcast of heaven and of earth, the shame and curse of all creatures: even the inanimate, which he had forced to be subservient to his passions, and which groaned, says St. Paul, in the expectation of deliverance from that shameful servitude, shall, in their way, rise up against him. The sun, of which he had abused the light, shall be darkened, as if it were not to shine on his crimes: the stars shall disappear, as if to tell him that they have too long witnessed his iniquitous passions: the earth shall crumble from under his feet, as if to eject from its bosom a monster which it could no longer bear: and the whole universe, says Solomon, shall arm against him to avenge the glory of the Lord whom he has insulted. Alas! we so dearly love to be lamented in our misfortunes: indifference alone irritates and wounds us: here not only shall all hearts be shut to our misfortunes, but all beholders shall insult our shame, and the only portion left to the sinner shall be his confusion, his despair, and his crimes. First circumstance of the confusion of the criminal soul, namely, the multitude of witnesses.

I take the second from the care and anxiety they had taken, whilst living on the earth, to disguise and conceal themselves from the eyes of men; for, my brethren, the world is a grand theatre, on which almost every one acts a borrowed part. As we are full of passions, and as all passions have always in them something mean and despicable, our whole attention is employed in concealing their meanness, and in endeavouring to give ourselves out for what we are not: iniquity is always treacherous and deceitful. Thus, your whole life, you, above all, who listen to me, and who considered the duplicity of your character as knowledge of the world and of the court, your whole life has been only one train of dissimulation and artifice; even your sincerest and most intimate friends have only in part known you; you were beyond the reach of the world, for you changed character, sentiment, and inclination, according to circumstances and the disposition of those to whom you wished to make yourselves agreeable. Through these means you had acquired the reputation of ability and wisdom; but there shall be seen, in its native colours, a mean and treacherous soul, destitute of probity and truth, and whose principal virtue had been the concealment of its baseness and meanness.

You, likewise, unfaithful soul, whom a sex more jealous of honour had rendered still more attentive to conceal your weaknesses from the eyes of men, you were so artful in saving yourself from a discovery; you took from so far, and so surely, your measures to deceive the eyes of the husband, the vigilance of a mother, and, perhaps, the probity of a confessor: you would not have survived the accident which had therein betrayed your precautions and artifices. Vain cares! you only covered your lewdnesses, says the prophet, with a spider's web, which on that great day the Son of Man shall dissipate with a single blast of his mouth. In the presence of all assembled nations, saith the Lord, I will gather around thee all thy lovers. They shall see that eternal train of artifices, disguises, and meannesses; that shameful traffic of protestations and oaths which you made instrumental to so many different passions, and, at the same time, to lull their credulity; they shall see them, and tracing, even to the source, those criminal favours which you had bestowed on them, they shall find them not in their pretended merit, as you had wished to make them believe, but in your own infamous character, in a heart naturally lewd; you, who pique yourselves on having a heart so noble, so sincere, and so incapable of being touched but by merit alone. And all this shall take place before the eyes of the universe; of those friends whom an appearance of regularity had preserved to you; of your relations who were ignorant of the disgrace with which you covered them; of that husband who had so much depended on your affection and fidelity.

O my God! is there an abyss sufficiently profound in the earth in which the unfaithful soul would not then wish to hide himself? For, in the world, men never see but the outside and the scandal of our vices; and, besides, our confusion is shared and countenanced by those who are continually culpable of the same faults. But, before the tribunal of Jesus Christ, your weaknesses shall be seen even in your heart; that is to say, their birth, their progress, their most private motives, and a thousand shameful and personal circumstances, which, even more than the crimes themselves, shall cover you with shame: it will be a confusion in which none shall bear a share, and, consequently, will be entirely your own.

Lastly, the final circumstance, which shall render the shame of the sinner overwhelming, is his personal qualities.

You passed in the world for a faithful, sincere, and generous friend: it will be seen that you were vile, perfidious, interested, without faith, honour, probity, conscience, or character. You gave yourself out for a towering mind, above all the vulgar prejudices; and you shall unfold the most humiliating meannesses and circumstances, at which the vilest soul would almost expire with shame. In the world you were regarded as a man of integrity, and of an approved probity in the administration of your charge; that reputation had perhaps attracted fresh honours, and acquired to you the

public confidence; you, nevertheless, abused the credulity of men; those pompous shows of equity concealed an unjust and servile soul, and a thousand times had your fidelity been in secret betrayed, and your conscience corrupted, by views of fortune and motives of interest; you were apparently adorned with sanctity and righteousness; you had always assumed the semblance of the just; you were believed to be the friend of God, and the faithful observer of his law; yet your heart was not upright before the Lord: under the cloak of religion you covered a defiled conscience and ignominious concealments; you walked in the way of holy things more securely to attain your purposes. Ah! on that day of revelation, you go to undeceive the whole universe; those who had seen you on the earth, astonished at your unexpected lot, shall search among the reprobate to discover the upright man; the hope of the hypocrite shall then be overthrown: you unjustly had enjoyed the esteem of men; you shall be known and God avenged. Lastly, yet shall I dare to say it, and here reveal the shame of my brethren? You were perhaps the dispenser of holy things, high in honour in the temple of God; the charge of faith, of doctrine, and of piety, was intrusted to you; you appeared every day in the sanctuary, clothed in the formidable tokens of your dignity, offering up pure gifts and sacrifices without stain; you were intrusted with the secrecies of consciences; you sustained the weak in faith; you spoke of wisdom among the instructed; and, under all that religion hath most august or most holy, you perhaps concealed whatever the earth has most execrable. You were an impostor, a man of sin, seated in the temple of God; you instructed others, and you taught not yourself; you inspired horror against idols, and your days were only numbered by your sacrileges. Ah! the mystery of iniquity shall then be revealed; and you shall at last be known for what you have always been,—the curse of heaven and the shame of the earth.

Behold, my brethren, all the confusion with which the criminal soul shall be overwhelmed. And it will not be a transitory confusion. In the world we have only the first shame of a fault to undergo: the noise of it gradually dies away; new adventures at last take place of ours; and the remembrance of our disgrace fades away, and disappears with the rumour which had published it. But, at the great day, shame shall eternally remain upon the criminal soul; there shall no longer be any fresh events to obliterate his crimes and his confusion; nothing shall more change: all shall be fixed and eternal: that which he shall have appeared before the tribunal of Jesus Christ, that will he for ever appear: even the nature of his torments shall incessantly publish the nature of his crimes; and his shame shall every day be renewed in his punishment. My brethren, reflections here are needless; and, if some remains of faith still exist within you, it is for you to sound your own con-

sciences, and, from this moment, to adopt such measures as may enable you to sustain the manifestation of that great day.

But, after having shown to you the public confusion with which the sinner shall be covered, why may I not expose to you here what shall be the glory and the consolation of the truly just man, when the secrecies of his conscience shall be laid open to the universe; when the whole mystery of his heart shall be unfolded; of that heart, of which all the loveliness concealed from the eyes of men was known only to God; of that heart in which he had always supposed stains and defilements, and of which his humility had concealed from himself all the holiness and innocency; of that heart in which God alone had always dwelt, and which he had taken pleasure in adorning and enriching with his gifts and grace! What new wonders shall that divine sanctuary, hitherto so impenetrable, then offer to the eyes of the beholders, when the veil shall be removed from it! What fervent desires! What secret victories! What heroic sacrifices! What pure prayers! What tender lamentations! What faith! What grandeur! What elevation above all those vain objects which form all the desires and hopes of men! Then it shall indeed be seen, that nothing was so great, or so worthy of admiration in the world, as a truly just man; as those souls who were considered as useless, because they were so to our passions; and whose obscure and retired life was so much despised. It shall be seen that the heart of the faithful soul possessed more lustre and grandeur than all those great events which take place on the earth, was alone worthy of being written down in the eternal books, and offered to the eyes of God a sight more worthy of angels and men than all the victories and conquests which here below fill the vanity of histories, to which pompous monuments are erected in order to eternize their remembrance, and which, then, shall no longer be considered but as puerile squabbles, or the fruit of pride and the human passions.—First disorder repaired on that great day: vice concealed here below from public shame, and virtue from the applauds it merits.

The second disorder which the mixture of the good and of the bad gives birth to in the world, is the inequality of conditions, and the unjust exchange of their lots. It is with the present age as with the image of which Daniel explained the mystery: the just, like the clay which we trample under our feet, or, like iron hardened in the fire of tribulation, in general occupy, here below, only the meanest and most contemptible stations; while, on the contrary, the sinful and the worldly, typified by the gold and silver, vain objects of their passions, almost always find themselves placed at the head of affairs, and in the most eminent places. Now, this is a disorder; and, although the good be thereby exercised, and the wicked hardened; although

this confusion of good and evil enter into the order of Providence, and that, by ways and means impenetrable to man, God makes use of them to lead the just and the sinner to his purposes; yet it is necessary that the Son of Man gather together all things, and that it shall at last be discerned between the righteous and the wicked; between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not. Now, behold the grand spectacle of that last day: order shall be re-established; the good separated from the wicked: the sheep set on his right hand, and the goats on the left.

Separation, first, altogether new. It will not be demanded from you, in order to determine what rank you ought to hold in this awful scene, what were your names, your birth, your titles, or your dignities; these were but a vapour, which had no reality but in the public illusion; you will be examined only to prove whether you be an unclean animal or an innocent sheep: the prince shall not be separated from the subject; the noble from the peasant; the poor from the powerful; the conqueror from the vanquished: but the chaff from the good grain; the vessels of honour from the vessels of shame; the goats from the sheep.

The Son of Man shall be seen from on high, casting his regards over all the mingled nations and people assembled at his feet; recalling, in that view, the history of the universe, that is to say, of the passions or of the virtues of men; he shall be seen gathering together his chosen from the four quarters; choosing them from among every tongue, every station, and every nation; reuniting the children of Israel dispersed through the universe; unfolding the secret history of a holy and new people; bringing forth to view heroes of faith till then unknown in the world: no more distinguishing ages by the victories of conquerors, by the establishment or the fall of empires, by the politeness or the barbarity of the times, by the great characters who have blazed in every age; but by the diverse triumphs of grace, by the hidden victories of the just over their passions, by the establishment of his reign in a heart, by the heroic fortitude of a persecuted believer. You shall see him change the face of all things, create a new heaven and a new earth, and reduce that infinite variety of people, titles, conditions, and dignities, to a people holy and a people reprobate, to the goats and the sheep.

Separation, secondly, cruel. The father shall be separated from his child; friend from friend; brother from brother: the one shall be taken, the other left. Death, which deprives us of the dearest friends, and whose loss occasions to us so many sighs and tears, leaves us, at least, a consolation in the hope of being one day reunited to them. Here, the separation is eternal; no hope of reunion shall more exist; we shall no more have relatives, father, child, friend; no other ties than everlasting flames, which shall for ever unite us to the reprobate.

Separation, thirdly, ignominious. We are so touchy on a preference, when neglected, or left blended with the crowd on any splendid occasion; we are so peevish and so irritated, when, in the distribution of favours, we see novices carrying off the palm and the principal offices; our services forgotten, and those whom we had always seen far below us, now exalted and placed over our heads. But, on that grand day, it is that preference shall be accompanied with circumstances the most humiliating and the most galling to the criminal soul. In that universal silence, in that dreadful expectation, in which each one shall be for the decision of his destiny, you shall see the Son of Man advancing in the heavens, with crowns in one hand and the rod of wrath in the other, to carry off, from your side, a just soul whose innocence you, perhaps, had blackened by rash discourses, or whose virtues you had insulted by impious pleasantries; a believer who was, perhaps, born your subject; a Lazarus, who in vain, perhaps, had importuned you with the recital of his wants and poverty; a rival whom you had always beheld with an eye of scorn, and upon whose ruins your intrigues and artifices had perhaps exalted you. You shall see the Son of Man place a crown of immortality on his head, seat him at his right hand, while you, like the proud Haman, rejected, humbled, and degraded, shall no longer have before your eyes but the preparation of your punishment.

Yes, my brethren, every galling and overwhelming circumstance shall attend that preference. A savage converted to faith shall be ranked among the sheep, while a Christian inheritor of the promises shall be left among the goats. The layman shall ascend, like the eagle over his prey, while the minister of Jesus Christ shall grovel on the earth, covered with shame and reproach. The man of the world shall pass to the right hand, while the recluse passes to the left. The wise, the learned, the critic of the age, shall be driven to the side of the unclean; and the idiot, who knew not how to answer even the common salutations, shall be placed on a throne of glory and light. Rabab, a sinful woman, shall mount up to the heavenly Sion along with the true Israelites; while the sister of Moses, and the spouse of Jesus Christ, shall be driven from the camp and the tents of Israel, and shall appear covered with a shameful leprosy. Thou art determined, O my God! that nothing shall be wanting toward the despair of the criminal soul. It is not sufficient that he shall be overwhelmed under the weight of his own misery; thou shalt create for him a new punishment in the felicity of the just, who, preferred to him, shall be seen conducted by angels into the bosom of immortality.

What change of scene, my brethren, in the universe! It is then that, all scandals being plucked out from the kingdom of Jesus Christ, and the just wholly separated from the sinful, they shall form a holy nation, a chosen race, and the church of first born,

whose names were written down in heaven. It is then that the commerce of the wicked, inevitable on this earth, shall no longer occasion their faith to lament, or their innocence to tremble. It is then that their lot, no longer connected with the unfaithful or the hypocrite, shall no more constrain them to be witnesses of their crimes, and sometimes even the involuntary agents of their passions. It is then that all the bonds of society, of authority, or dependence, which attached them on this earth to the impious and to the worldly, being broken asunder, they shall no longer say with the prophet, "Lord, why lengthenest thou out here our banishment and our sojourning? How long shall the land mourn, and the herbs of every field wither for the wickedness of them that dwell therein?" Lastly, then it is that their tears shall be changed into joy, and their sighs into thanksgivings; they shall pass to the right hand as the sheep, while the left shall be reserved for the goats and the impious.

The disposition of the universe thus laid out; all nations of the earth thus divided; each one fixed in the place allotted to him; surprise, terror, despair, and confusion marked in the countenance of one part; on that of the other, joy, serenity, and confidence: the eyes of the just raised on high toward the Son of Man, from whom they await their deliverance; those of the impious frightfully fixed on the earth, and almost piercing the abyss with their looks, as if already to mark out the place which is destined for them: the King of glory, says the gospel, placed in the middle of two nations, shall come forward; and, turning toward those who shall be at his right hand, with an aspect full of sweetness and majesty, and sufficient of itself to console them for all their past sufferings, he will say to them, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. The sinful had always considered you as the outcast, and the most useless portion of the earth; let them now learn that the world itself existed only for you, that all was created for you, and that all hath finished from the moment that your number was completed. Quit, then, an earth where you had always been travellers and strangers; follow me into the immortal ways of my glory and felicity, as you have followed me in those of my humiliation and sufferings. Your toils have endured but for an instant; the happiness you go to enjoy shall be without end."

Then, turning to the left hand, vengeance and fury in his eyes, here and there casting the most dreadful looks, like avenging thunderbolts, on that crowd of guilty; with a voice, says a prophet, which shall burst open the bowels of the abyss to swallow them up, he shall say, not as upon the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," but, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. You were the chosen of the earth, you are the accursed of

my Father; your pleasures have been fleeting and transitory, your anguish shall be eternal." The just, then, mounting with the Son of Man, shall begin to sing this heavenly song, Thou art rich in mercy, Lord, and thou hast crowned thy gifts in recompensing our good actions. Then shall the impious curse the Author of their being and the fatal day which brought them forth; or, rather, they shall enter into wrath against themselves, as the authors of their misery and destruction. The abyss shall open; the heavens shall bow down; the reprobate, says the gospel, shall go into everlasting punishment, and the just into life eternal. Behold a lot which shall change no more.

After a relation so awful, and so proper to make an impression on the most hardened hearts, I cannot conclude, without addressing to you the same words which Moses formerly addressed to the Israelites after having laid before them the dreadful threatenings, and the soothing promises, contained in the Book of the Law: "Children of Israel, behold I set before you this day a blessing and a curse: a blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you this day; and a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside, out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods which ye have not known."

Behold, my brethren, what I say to you in concluding a subject so terrible. It now belongs to you to choose and to declare yourselves: the right hand and the left are before you, the promises and the threatenings, the blessings and the curses. Your destiny turns on this awful alternative: you either shall be on the side of Satan and his angels, or you shall be chosen with Jesus Christ and his saints. Here there is no middle way; I have pointed out the path which leads us to life, and that which leads to perdition. In which of these two do you now walk? And on which side do you believe that you should find yourselves, were you, at this moment, to appear before the awful tribunal? We die as we have lived: tremble lest your destiny of this day be your everlasting destiny. Quit, and from this moment, the ways of the sinful; begin now to live like the just, if you wish, on that last day, to be placed at the right hand, and to mount, along with them, into the abode of a blessed immortality.

SERMON XXXI.

THE HAPPINESS OF THE JUST.

“Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”—MATTHEW v. 4.

SIRE,

IF the world were to speak to you in the place of Jesus Christ, it undoubtedly would not say, “Blessed are they who mourn.”

Happy, would it say, the prince who has never fought but to conquer, and whose mind has always been superior either to the danger or to the victory: who, during the course of a long and a prosperous reign, has enjoyed, and still continues to enjoy, at his ease, the fruits of his glory, the love of his people, the esteem of his enemies, the advantage of his conquests, the splendour of his actions, the wisdom of his laws, and the august prospect of a numerous posterity; and who has nothing left now to desire but the continuance of what he possesses.

In this manner would the world speak: but, Sire, Jesus Christ does not speak like the world.

Happy, says he to you, not him who is the admiration of his age; but he who makes his study of the age to come, and lives in the contempt of himself and of all the things of the earth; for to him is the kingdom of heaven. Not him whose reign and actions history will immortalize in the remembrance of men; but he whose tears shall have effaced the history of his sins from the remembrance even of God; for he shall be for ever consoled. Not him who, by new conquests, shall have extended the bounds of his empire; but he who has succeeded in confining his desires and his passions within the limits of the law of God; for he shall inherit a kingdom more durable than the empire of the universe. Not him who, exalted by the voice of nations above all preceding princes, tranquilly enjoys his greatness and his fame; but he who, finding nothing even on the throne worthy of his heart, seeks no perfect happiness on this earth but in virtue and in righteousness; for he shall be filled. Not him to whom men have given the pompous titles of great and invincible; but he to whom the wretched shall give, before the tribunal of Jesus Christ, the title of father and of merciful; for he shall be treated with mercy. Lastly, happy not him who, always disposer of the lot of his enemies, has more than once given peace to the earth; but he who has been able to give it to himself, and to banish from his heart all the vices and

disorderly inclinations which disturb its tranquillity; for he shall be called a child of God.

Such, Sire, are those whom Jesus Christ calls happy: and the gospel acknowledges no other happiness on the earth than virtue and innocence.

Great God! it is not, then, that long train of unexampled prosperities, with which thou hast favoured the glory of his reign, that can render him the happiest of kings. He is thereby great; but he is not thereby happy. His felicity has commenced with his piety. Whatever does not sanctify man, can never make the happiness of man. Whatever does not place thee, O my God! in a heart, places only vanities which leave it empty, or real evils which fill it with disquiet; and a pure conscience is the only resource of real enjoyments.

It is to this truth that the church, on the occasion of this solemnity, confines its whole fruit. As the common error, that the life of the saints has been gloomy and disagreeable, is one of the principal artifices employed by the world in order to prevent us from imitating them, the church, in renewing their memory on this day, gives us to remember, at the same time, that not only they now enjoy an immortal felicity in heaven, but also that they have been the only happy of the earth, and that he who carries iniquity in his bosom always carries terror and anxiety; and that the lot of the godly is a thousand times more tranquil and more satisfactory, even in this world, than that of sinners.

But in what does the happiness of the just in this life consist? It consists, first, in the manifestation of truth concealed from the sages of the world. Secondly, in the relish of charity denied to the lovers of the world. In the lights of faith which soften all the sufferings of the believing soul, and which render those of the sinner still more bitter: this is my first point. In the comforts of grace which calm all the passions, and which, denied to a corrupted heart, leave it a prey to itself, is the last. Let us examine these two truths, so calculated to render virtue amiable and the example of the saints beneficial.

PART I.—Our sorrows proceed, in general, from our errors; and we are unhappy only because we are inadequate judges of what is really good and evil. The just, who are children of light, are, therefore, much happier than sinners, because they are more enlightened. The same lights which correct their judgments alleviate their sufferings; and faith, which shows the world to them such as it is, changes, into sources of consolation for them, the very same events in which souls, delivered up to the passions, find the principle of all their disquiets.

And, in order to make you sensible of a truth so honourable to virtue, observe, I pray you, my brethren, that, whether a contrite soul recall the past, and those times of error which preceded his

penitence; whether he pay attention to what passes before his eyes in the world; or, lastly, whether he look forward to the future, every thing consoles, every thing strengthens him in the cause of virtue which he has adopted, every thing unites in rendering his condition infinitely more pleasing than that of a soul who lives in dissipation, and who finds, in these three situations, only bitterness and inward terrors.

For, in the first place, however the sinner may be delivered up to all fervency of his heart, he is not so violently hurried away, by present gratifications, but that he sometimes gives a look back to those years of iniquity which he amasses behind him. Those days of darkness, which he has consecrated to debauchery, have not so completely perished, but that, in certain moments, they obtrude themselves upon his remembrance. Gloomy and troublesome images force themselves upon his soul, and, from time to time, arouse him from his lethargy by holding out, as if collected into one point, that shocking mass of crimes which make less impression, during their commission, because he only sees them in succession. At one glance of his eye he sees favours always contemned, inspirations always rejected, a vile perversion of a disposition naturally good and originally formed, it appears, for virtue; weaknesses at which he now blushes, phantoms and horrors against which he would wish for ever to shut his eyes.

Such is what the sinner leaves behind him. He is miserable if he look back to the past. His whole happiness is, as it were, shut up in the present moment; and, to be happy, he must never think, but allow himself, like the dumb creation, to be led away by the attraction of the present objects; and, to preserve his tranquillity, he must either extinguish or brutify his reason. And thence those maxims so unworthy of humanity, and so circulated in the world, that too much reason is a sorry advantage; that reflection spoils all the pleasures of life; and that, to be happy, the less we think the better. O man! was it for thy misery, then, that Heaven had given thee that reason by which thou art enlightened, or to assist thee in search of the truth, which alone can render thee happy? Could that divine light which embellishes thy being, be a punishment rather than a gift of the Creator? And should it so gloriously distinguish thee from the beast, only that thy condition may be more wretched?

Yes, my brethren, such is the lot of an unbelieving soul. Intoxication, delirium of passion, and the extinction of all reason, alone can render him happy; and, as that situation is merely momentary, the instant the mind becomes calm and regains itself, the charm ceases, happiness takes wing, and man finds himself alone with his conscience and his crimes.

But how different, O my God, is the lot of a soul who walks in thy ways, and how much to be pitied is the world which knows thee not! In effect, the sweetest thoughts of a righteous

soul are those by which the past is recalled. If there encounters it is true, that portion of his life which had been engrossed by the world and the passions; and the remembrance, I confess, fills him with shame before the sanctity of his God, and forces from him tears of compunction and sorrow. But what consolation in his tears and in his grief!

For, my brethren, a contrite soul can never retrace the whole train of his past errors, without discovering all the proceedings of God's mercy upon him: the singular ways by which his wisdom hath gradually, and, as it were, step by step, conducted him to the blessed moment of his conversion: so many unexpected favourable circumstances, so many accidents of disgrace, of loss, of death, of treachery, and of affliction; all provided by a watchful Providence to facilitate the means of breaking asunder his chains: those special attentions of God, even when in the paths of iniquity: those disgusts, even in the midst of his pleasures, provided for him by his goodness: those inward calls which incessantly whispered to him, Return to virtue and to duty: that internal monitor, which, go where he would, never left him, and unceasingly repeated to him, as formerly to St. Augustine, Fool! how long wilt thou hunt after pleasures which can never make thee happy? When, by terminating thy crimes, wilt thou terminate thy troubles? What more is yet required to open thine eyes upon the world, than thine own experience itself, of thy weariness and unhappiness while serving it? Try if, in belonging to me, thou shalt not be more happy, and if I suffice not to fill the soul which possesses me.

Such is what the past offers to a contrite soul. It there sees the accomplices of its former pleasures still delivered up, by God's justice, to the errors of the world and of the passions, and it alone chosen, separated, and called to the knowledge of the truth.

With what peace and consolation does that reflection fill the believing soul! "How infinite, O my God," cries he, with the prophet, "are thy mercies! Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb: thou hast compassed my path, and my lying down, and all my ways have been known to thee. What have I done for thee more than so many other sinners whose eyes thou deignest not to open, and to manifest the severity of thy judgments and of thy justice? How marvellous, O God! are all thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well!"—First advantage of righteous souls; the remembrance even of their past infidelities consoles them.

But, secondly, if they find sources of solid consolation in reviewing the past, their piety is not less comforted while viewing the present occurrences of the world. And here, my brethren, you will presently see how essentially requisite is virtue to the happiness of life, and how that very world, which gives birth to all the passions, and, consequently, to all the disquietudes of sin-

ners, becomes the sweetest and most consolatory exercise of the faith of the just.

What, indeed, is the world even to the worldly themselves, who love it, who seem intoxicated with its delights, and who cannot do without it? The world? It is an eternal servitude, where no one lives for himself, and where, in order to be happy, we must bring ourselves to hug our chains, and to love our slavery. The world? It is a daily revolution of events, which successively arouse, in the hearts of its partisans, the most violent and the most melancholy passions, cruel antipathies, hateful perplexities, torturing fears, devouring jealousies, and corroding cares. The world? It is a land of curse, where even its pleasures are productive only of bitterness and thorns. Gaming fatigues and exhausts by its frenzies and by its caprices: conversation becomes wearisome through the contrariety of tempers and the opposition of sentiments: passions and criminal attachments are followed with their disgusts, their disappointments, and their unpleasant reports: theatres, no longer having as spectators but souls grossly dissolute and incapable of being roused but by the most shocking excesses of debauchery, become insipid while moving only those delicate passions, which only serve to show guilt from afar, and to lay snares for innocence. Lastly, the world is a place where hope itself, considered as a passion so sweet and so pleasing, renders all men unhappy; where those who have nothing more to hope, believe themselves still more miserable; where every thing that pleases soon ceases to please; and where inanity or listless insipidity is almost the best and the most supportable lot to be expected. Such is the world, my brethren; nor is this that obscure world, to which neither the great pleasures, nor the charms of prosperity, of favour, and of affluence are known: it is the world in its most brilliant point of view; it is the world of the court; it is you yourselves who now listen to me. Such is the world; nor is this one of those fanciful paintings of which the reality is no where to be found. I paint the world after your own heart, that is to say, such as you know it to be, and such as you yourselves continually experience it.

Such, nevertheless, is the place in which all sinners seek their happiness. That is their country. There they would willingly eternize themselves. Such is that world which they prefer to the eternal inheritance, and to all the promises of faith. Great God! how just art thou in punishing man through his passions themselves, and to permit that, wishing to seek his happiness elsewhere than in thee, who alone art the true peace of his heart, he form for himself a ridiculous felicity of his fears, his disgusts, his wearinesses, and his inquietudes!

But that which is so fortunate here for virtue, is, that the same world, so tiresome and so insupportable to sinners who seek their

happiness in it, becomes a source of the most soothing reflections to the righteous, who consider it as an exilement and a foreign land.

For, in the first place, the inconstancy of the world, so dreaded by those delivered up to it, supplies a thousand motives of consolation to the believing soul. Nothing appears to him either constant or durable upon the earth; neither the most flourishing fortunes, nor the warmest friendships, nor the most brilliant reputations, nor the most envied favour. He sees a sovereign wisdom through all, which delights, it would appear, in making a sport of men, by alternately exalting them on the ruins of each other; by hurling down those at the top of the wheel, in order to elevate those who, only a moment before, were groveling at the bottom; by introducing every day, on the theatre of life, new heroes to eclipse all those who formerly played on it so brilliant a part; by incessantly giving new scenes to the universe. He sees men passing their whole life in ferments, projects, and plots; ever on the watch to surprise each other, or to avoid being surprised; always eager and active to profit of the retreat, the disgrace, or the death of a rival; and of these grand lessons, so fitted to inculcate contempt of the world, make only fresh motives of ambition and cupidity; always engrossed either by their fears or by their hopes; always uneasy either for the present or for the future; never tranquil, all struggling for quiet, yet every moment removing themselves farther and farther from it.

O man! why art thou so ingenious in rendering thyself miserable? Such is, then, the reflection of the believing soul. That happiness thou seekest is more easily attained. It is necessary neither to traverse seas nor to conquer kingdoms. Depart not from thyself, and thou wilt be happy.

How sweet do the sorrows of virtue then appear to the godly man, when he compares them with the cruel chagrins and the endless agitations of sinners! How transported to have at last found a place of rest and of safety, while he sees the lovers of the world still sadly tossed about, at the mercy of the passions and of human hopes! Thus the Israelites, formerly escaped from the danger of the Red Sea, seeing from afar Pharaoh and all the nobility of Egypt still at the mercy of the waters, felt all the luxury of their own safety, thought the barren paths of the desert delightful, and were insensible to every hardship of their journey; and comparing their lot with that of the Egyptians, far from giving vent to a complaint or a murmur, they sung with Moses that divine hymn of praise and of thanksgiving, in which are celebrated, with such magnificence, the wonders and the tender mercies of the Lord.

Secondly. The injustice of the world, so humbling to those who love it, when they see themselves forgotten, neglected, and sacrificed to unworthy rivals, is also a fund of soothing reflections to a

soul who despises it and fears only the Lord. For, what resource is left to a sinner who, after having sacrificed his ease, his conscience, his wealth, his youth, and his health, to the world and to his masters; after having submitted in silence to every circumstance the most mortifying to the mind, sees at once, and without knowing why, the gates of favour and advancement for ever shut against him; sees places snatched from him to which he was entitled by his services, and of which he thought himself already certain; threatened, should he dare to murmur, with the loss of those he still enjoys; forced to crouch to more fortunate rivals, and to be at the beck of those whom, only a little before, he had deemed unworthy of even receiving his orders? Shall he retire far from the world, to evaporate, in continual invectives against it, the spleen and the rancour of his heart, and thus revenge himself of the injustice of men? But of what avail will be his retirement? It will afford only more leisure for retrospection, and fewer relaxations from chagrin. Shall he try to console himself with similar examples? But our misfortunes never, as we think, resemble those of others; and, besides, what consolation can it be to have our sorrows renewed by seeing their image reflected from others? Shall he entrench himself in strength of mind, and in a vain philosophy? But, in solitude, reason soon descends from its pride; we may be philosophers for the public, but we are only men with ourselves. Shall he fly, as a resource, to voluptuousness, and to other infamous pleasures? But, in changing the passion, the heart only changes the punishment. Shall he seek, in indolence and inactivity, a happiness he has never been able to find in all the fervency of hopes and pretensions? A criminal conscience may become indifferent, but it is not thereby more tranquil. One may cease to feel misfortune and disgrace, but infidelities and crimes must always be felt. No, my brethren, the unhappy sinner is so without resource. Every comfort is for ever fled from the worldly soul from the moment that he is deserted by the world.

But the righteous man learns to despise the world even in the contempt which the world has for him. The injustice of men, with respect to him, only puts him in mind that he serves a more equitable Master, who can neither be influenced nor prejudiced; who sees nothing in us but what, in reality, there is; who determines our destinies upon our hearts alone, and with whom we have nothing but our own conscience to dread: consequently, that they are happy who serve him; that his ingratitude is not to be feared; that every thing done for him is faithfully recorded; that, far from concealing or neglecting our sufferings and our services, he gives us credit even for our good wishes; and that nothing is lost with him but what is not done solely for him.

Now, in these lights of faith, what a fresh fund of consolation

for a believing soul ! How little is the world, in this point of view, with all its scorns and ill usage, capable of affecting him ! Then it is that, throwing himself into the bosom of God, and viewing, with Christian eyes, the nothingness and vanity of all human things, he feels in a moment all his inquietudes, inseparable from nature, changed into the sweetest peace ; a ray of light shines in his soul, and re-establishes serenity ; a trait of consolation penetrates his heart, and every sorrow is alleviated. Ah ! my brethren, how sweet to serve him, who alone can render happy those who serve him ! Why, O blessed condition of virtue, art thou not better known to men ! And wherefore art thou held out as a disagreeable and sorrowful lot, thou who alone canst console the miseries and alleviate all the sufferings of his banishment ?

Lastly, the judgments of the world, source of so many chagrins for the worldly, complete still more the consolation of the believing soul. For the torture of the lovers of the world is that of being continually exposed to the judgments, that is to say, to the censures, to the derisions, to the malignity of each other. In vain do we despise the men : we wish to be esteemed even by those we despise. In vain are we exalted above others : the more we are exalted, we are only the more exposed to the criticisms and to the observations of the multitude, and we much more poignantly feel the censures of those from whom homages alone were to have been expected. In vain may the suffrage of the public be in our favour ; contempt is so much the more stinging as it is unusual and rare. In vain may we retaliate with censures yet more biting and keen ; resentment and revenge always suppose a sense of guilt ; and, besides, the chagrin of having encountered scorn is much more lively than any pleasure that can accrue from retorting it. Lastly, from the moment that you live solely for the world, and that your pleasures or your vexations depend wholly on it, the judgments of the world can never be indifferent to you.

Nevertheless, it is in the midst of all these vexations that happiness must be at least professed. Every thing attributed to you, either by truth or vanity, is called in question : your birth, your talents, your reputation, your services, your success, your prudence, and even your honour. If you go to wreck, your incapacity accounts for it : if successful, the honour is given to chance, or to your inferiors : if you enjoy the good opinion of the public, the judgment of the more knowing is appealed to from the popular error : if possessed of the art of pleasing, it is immediately said that you have made a thorough use of your talents, and that you have been only too agreeable : if your conduct be superior to any attack, the most poignant ridicule is directed against your temper. Lastly, be whom ye may, high or low, prince or subject, the most desirable situation for your vanity is that of being unacquainted with the world's

opinion of you. Such is the life of the world. The same passions which bind us together, disunite us : envy and detraction blacken our noblest qualities : and our gratifications find censurers even in those who copy them.

But a believing soul is sheltered from all these uneasinesses. As he courts not the esteem of men, neither does he fear their scorn ; as he has no intention of laying himself out to please, neither is he surprised to find that he has not done it. God, who sees him, is the only Judge he fears, and who, at the same time, consoles him for the judgments of men. His glory is the testimony of his own conscience. His reputation he seeks in the fulfilment of his duty. He considers the suffrages of the world as the rock of virtue or as the reward of vice ; and, without even paying attention to its judgments, he is satisfied with giving it good examples. But what do I say, my brethren ? The world itself, all worldly as it is, so full of censures, malignity, and contempt for its own worshippers, is forced to respect the virtue of those who hate and despise it. It appears that virtue imprints, on the person of a real righteous man, a dignity, a something, I know not what, of divine, which attracts the veneration and almost the worship of worldly souls ; it appears that his intimate union with Jesus Christ occasions his being irradiated, as I may say, like the three disciples on the holy mount, with a part of that celestial splendour which the Father shed around his well-beloved Son, and by which all liberty ceases of refusing homage. It is an inalienable right which virtue has over the heart of men ; and, by a deplorable caprice, the world despises the passions it inspires, and respects the virtue it strives against. Not that the esteem of the world, so worthy itself of being despised, can be any great consolation to the believing soul. But his consolation is, that he sees the world condemned even by the world, its pleasures decried even by those who hunt after them, sinners become the apologists of virtue, and the life of the world to pass sorrowfully away in doing what they condemn, and flying from what they approve.

Such is the manner in which the present age becomes a source of consolatory reflections to a Christian soul ; but, in the thought of futurity, he also finds consolations which are changed into inward and continual terrors for sinners : last advantage drawn by the just from the lights of faith. The magnificence of its promises sustains and consoles them : they await the blessed hope, and that happy moment when they shall be associated with the church of heavên, reunited to their brethren whom they had left on the earth, received eternal citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, incorporated in that immortal assembly of the elect, where charity will be the law that shall unite them ; truth, the flame that shall enlighten them ; and eternity the measure of their felicity.

These thoughts are so much the more consoling to the godly,

as they are founded on the truth of God himself. They know that, in sacrificing the present, they sacrifice nothing; that, in the twinkling of an eye, all shall have passed away; that whatever must have an end cannot long endure; that this moment of tribulation ought to be reckoned as nothing, when put in competition with that eternal weight of glory which he prepareth for us; and that the rapid passage of present things scarcely deserves that we should be at the pains of numbering the years and the ages.

I know that faith may subsist with criminal manners; and that the sanctifying grace is often lost without losing a sincere submission to the truths revealed to us by the Spirit of God. But the certitude of faith, so consoling to the righteous soul, is no longer for the sinner who still believes but an inexhaustible fund of inward anxieties and cruel terrors. For, the more that sinners like you, who bear upon your conscience the sink of a whole life of irregularity, are convinced of the truths of faith, the more inevitable must the punishments and the misery appear with which it threatens such sinners. All the truths offered to your faith, in the holy doctrine, excite fresh alarms in your breast. Those divine lights, which are the source of all consolation to believing souls, become, within you, only avenging lights, which disquiet, agonize, and judge you; which, like a mirror, hold up continually to your sight what you would wish never to see; which enlighten you, in spite of yourselves, on what you would wish to be for ever ignorant. Your faith itself constitutes your punishment before-hand. Your religion is, here below, if I may venture to say so, your hell: and the more you are convinced of the truth, the more unhappy do you live. O God! how great is thy goodness toward man, in having rendered virtue necessary even to his quiet, and in thus attracting him to thee, by making it impossible for him to be happy without thee!

And here, my dear hearer, allow me to recall you to yourself. When the lot of a criminal soul should not be so fearful for the age to come, see if, even in this world, it appears much to be envied: his afflictions are without resource, his evils without consolation, even his pleasures without enjoyment; his anxieties upon the present, endless; his reflections on the past and on the future, gloomy and sad; his faith is the source of all his anguish; his lights of all his despair. What a situation! What a miserable lot! What shocking changes are operated by one act of guilt, both internally and externally, on man! How dearly does he purchase eternal misery! And, is it not true that the way of the world and of the passions is still infinitely more arduous and painful than that of the gospel; and that there is more toil and vexation of spirit in gaining the kingdom of hell, if it be proper to speak in this manner, than in gaining the kingdom of heaven? O innocence of heart, what blessings dost thou not bring with thee to man! O man,

what lovest thou not, when thou lovest thine innocence of heart ! Thou lovest all the consolations of faith, the sweetest occupation of the piety of the righteous ; but thou also deprivest thyself of all the comforts of grace by which the lot of the godly is rendered so truly enviable here below.

PART II.—When comforts and consolations, says St. Augustine, are promised to worldly souls in the observance of the law of God, they consider our promises as a pious mode of speaking, employed to give credit and consequence to virtue ; and, as a heart which has never tasted of these chaste delights is also incapable of comprehending them, we are obliged, continues that holy father, to reply to them, “ How wouldst thou that we convince thee ? ” We cannot say unto thee, “ O taste and see that the Lord is good ! ” seeing a diseased and vitiated heart can have no relish for the things in heaven. Give us a heart that loves, and it will feel the truth of every thing we say.

My design, therefore, here, is not so much to enlarge upon all the inward operations of grace in the heart of the just, as to contrast the happy situation in which it places them, here below, with the melancholy lot of sinners, and, by this comparison, to overwhelm vice and to encourage virtue. Now, I say, that grace provides two kinds of consolations here below to the godly : the one internal and secret, the other external and sensible ; both of them so essential to happiness in this life, that no earthly gratification can ever compensate for them.

The first internal benefit accruing to the believing soul from grace, is the establishment of a solid peace in his heart, and a reconciliation with himself. For, my brethren, we all bear within us natural principles of equity, of modesty, and of rectitude. We come into the world, as the apostle says, with the precepts of the law written in the heart. If virtue be not our first bent, we at least, feel that it is our first duty. In vain does passion sometimes undertake secretly to persuade us that we are born for pleasure ; and that, after all, tendencies implanted by nature, and which every one finds within himself, can never be crimes. This foreign persuasion is ineffectual in quieting the criminal soul. It is a desire, for we would heartily wish to be lawful whatever pleases us ; but it is not a real conviction. It is a saying, for it appears honourable to be above all vulgar prejudices ; but it is not a feeling. Thus, we always carry within us an incorruptible judge, who incessantly adopts the cause of virtue against our dearest inclinations ; who blends with our most headstrong passions the troublesome ideas of duty ; and who renders us unhappy even amidst all our pleasures and abundance.

Such is the state of an impure and a sullied conscience. The sinner is the secret and constant accuser of himself ; go where

he will, he carries a torment within which the hand of man cannot allay. Unhappy in being unable to conquer his lawless tendencies: more unhappy still in being unable to stifle his incessant remorse. Enticed by his weakness, and withheld by his lights, the permission of every crime is a conflict with himself: he reproaches himself for the iniquitous gratification, even in the moment of its enjoyment. What shall he do? Shall he combat his lights in order to appease his conscience? Shall he suspect his faith to sin in tranquillity? But unbelief is still a more horrible state than even guilt. To live without God, without worship, without principle, and without hope! to believe that the most abominable transgressions and the purest virtues are merely names! to consider all men as only the vile and fantastical puppets of a low theatre, and merely intended for the amusement of the spectators! to consider himself as the offspring of chance, and the eternal possession of nonentity!—these thoughts have something, I know not what, of gloomy and horrible, that the soul cannot look upon without horror; and it is true that unbelief is rather the despair of the sinner than the refuge of the sin. What, then, shall he do? Continually obliged to fly himself, lest he find himself alone with his conscience, he ranges from object to object, from passion to passion, from precipice to precipice. He thinks to compensate the emptiness and the insufficiency of pleasures by their variety; there is none which he does not try. But, in vain is his heart successively offered to all the created; all the objects of his passions reply to him, says St. Augustine, “Deceive not thyself in loving us; we are not that happiness of which thou art in search; we cannot render thee happy: raise thyself above the created, and, mounting to heaven, see if He who hath formed us be not greater and more worthy of being loved than we.” Such is the lot of the sinner.

Not that the heart of the just enjoys a tranquillity so unalterable but that they, in their turn, experience troubles, dis gusts, and anxieties here below. But these are passing clouds, which shade, as I may say, only the surface of their soul. A profound calm always reigns within,—that serenity of conscience, that simplicity of heart, that equality of mind, that lively confidence, that mild resignation, that calm of the passions, that universal peace, which begins, even from this life, the felicity of innocent souls. Vain creatures, what control have ye over a heart which you have not made, and which is not made for you?—First consolation of grace, namely, peace of heart.

The second is love, which mitigates to the just all the rigours of the law, and, according to the promise of Jesus Christ, changes his yoke, so insupportable to sinners, into a sweet and consoling yoke for them. For a believing soul loves his God still more fervently, more tenderly, and more truly, than he had

ever loved the world. Every thing, therefore, even the most rigorous, that he undertakes for him, is either no longer a trial to his heart, or becomes its sweetest care. For the attribute of the holy love, when master of the heart, is either to mitigate the sufferings it occasions, or to change them even into holy pleasures. Thus a soul enamoured of God, if I may dare to speak in this manner, pardons with joy, suffers with confidence, mortifies itself with pleasure, flies from the world with delight, prays with consolation, and fulfils every duty with a holy satisfaction. The more his love increases, the more does his yoke become easy. The more he loves, the happier he is : for it is the height of happiness to love what is become essential and necessary to us.

But the sinner, the more he loves the world, the more unhappy he is : for the more he loves the world, the more do his passions multiply, the more do his desires inflame, the more do his schemes get perplexed, and the more do his anxieties become sharpened. His love is the cause of all his evils : its vivacity is the source of all his sufferings ; because the world, which is the cause of them, is incapable of furnishing him with their cure. The more he loves the world, the more is his pride stung by a preference ; the more does his haughtiness feel an injury, the more does he sink under a disconcerted project ; the more does a disappointed desire afflict him, the more does an unexpected loss weigh him down. The more he loves the world, the more do pleasures become necessary to him ; and, as no one can fill the immensity of his heart, the more insupportable does his weariness become : for weariness is the inseparable attendant of every pleasure ; and, with all its amusements, the world, ever since it was a world, complains of its lassitude.

And think not that, to accredit virtue, I here affect to exaggerate the misery of worldly souls. I know that the world seems to have its happiness ; and that, amid all that whirlwind of cares, motions, fears, anxieties, a small number of fortunate individuals is seen, whose happiness is envied, and who seem, in appearance, to enjoy a smiling and tranquil lot. But investigate these vain outsides of happiness and gladness, and you will find real sorrows, distracted hearts, and agitated consciences. Draw near to these men who, in your eyes, appear the happy of the earth, and you will be surprised to find them gloomy, anxious, and sinking under the weight of a criminal conscience. Hear them in those serious and tranquil moments, when the passions, more cooled, allow some influence to reason. They all confess that they are any thing but happy ; that the blaze of their fortune shines only at a distance, and appears worthy of envy only to those who know it not. They confess that, amidst all their pleasures and prosperity, they have never been able to taste any pure and unadulterated joy ; that the world, a little searched into, is nothing ; that they are astonished themselves how it can be loved when known ; and that happy

are they alone, here below, who can do without it and serve God. Some long for the opportunity of an honourable retreat; others are continually proposing to themselves more orderly and more Christian manners. All admit the happiness of the godly; all wish to become so; all bear testimony against themselves. They are the forced rather than the voluntary followers of pleasure. It is no longer inclination, it is habit, it is weakness, which retains them in the shackles of the world and of sin. They feel this; they lament it; they acknowledge it; and they give way to the current of so wretched a lot. Deceitful world! render happy, if in thy power, those who serve thee, and then will I forsake the law of the Lord to attach myself to the vanity of thy promises.

You yourself, my dear hearer, since the many years that you served the world, have you greatly forwarded your happiness? Put in a balance, on the one side, all the agreeable moments and days you have passed in it, and, on the other, all the sorrows and vexations you have there experienced, and see which scale will preponderate. In certain moments of pleasure, of excess, and of frenzy, you have, perhaps, said, "It is good for us to be here;" but that was only a momentary intoxication, the illusion of which the following moment discovered to you, and plunged you into all your former anxieties. Even now, when speaking to you, question your own heart: are you at peace within? Is nothing wanting to your happiness? Do you fear, do you wish for nothing? Do you never feel that God is not with you? Would you wish to live and die such as you are? Are you satisfied with the world? Are you unfaithful to the Author of your being without remorse? There are twelve hours in the day; are they all equally agreeable to you? And have you, as yet, been able to succeed in fashioning a conscience so as to remain tranquil in guilt?

Even then, when you have plunged to the very bottom of the sea of iniquity to extinguish your remorse, and have succeeded, as you thought, in stifling that remnant of faith which still pleads in your heart for virtue, hath not the Lord commanded the serpent, as he saith in his prophet Amos, to follow and sting you even in the abyss where you had fled for shelter? And, even there, have you not felt the secret gnawings of the ravenous worm? Is it not true that the days you have consecrated to God by some religious duty have been the happiest of your life; and that you have never lived, as I may say, but when your conscience has been pure, and that you have lived with God? No, says the prophet, with a holy pride, the God whom we worship is not a deceitful God; nor is he, like the gods which the world worships, unable to reward those who serve him: let the world themselves be the judges here.

Great God! what then is man, thus to wrestle his whole life against himself, to wish to be happy without thee, in spite of thee,

in declaring himself against thee; to feel his wretchedness, and yet to love it; to know his true happiness, and yet to fly from it? What is man, O my God! and who shall fathom his ways, and the eternal contradiction of his errors?

Would I could finish what I had at first intended, and prove to you, my brethren, that the lot of the godly is still more worthy of all our wishes; for this reason, that, when the internal consolations happen even to fail them, yet they have the external aids of piety to strengthen and to assist them: the support of the sacrament, which, to the reluctant sinner, is no longer but a melancholy tribute to decency, equally tiresome and embarrassing: the example of the holy, and the history of their wonders, from which the sinner averts his eyes, lest he see in them his own condemnation: the holy thanksgivings and prayers of the church, which, to the sinner, become a melancholy fatigue: and, lastly, the consolation of the divine writings, in which he no longer finds but menaces and anathemas.'

What invigorating refreshment, in effect, my brethren, to the mind of a believer, when, after quitting the vain conversations of the world, where the only subjects have been the exaltation of a family, the magnificence of a building, the individuals who act a brilliant part on the theatre of the universe, public calamities, the faults of those at the head of affairs, the events of war, and the errors with which the government is continually accused; lastly, where, earthly, they have spoken only of the earth; what a refreshment, after quitting these, when, in order to breathe a little from the fatigue of these vain conversations, a believing soul takes up the book of the law, and finds, every where in it, that it matters little to man to have gained the whole world, if he thereby lose his soul; that the most vaunted conquest shall sink into oblivion with the vanity of the conquerors; that the heavens and the earth shall pass away; that the kingdoms of the earth and all their glory shall waste away like a garment: but that God alone will endure for ever; and, consequently, that to him alone we ought to attach ourselves! The foolish have repeated vain things to me, O my God! says then this soul with the prophet; but, O how different from thy law!

And certainly, my brethren, what soothing promises in these holy books! What powerful inducements to virtue! What happy precautions against vice! What instructive events! What sublime ideas of the greatness of God, and of the wretchedness of man! What animated paintings of the deformity of sin, and the false happiness of sinners! We have no need of thine assistance, wrote Jonathan and all the Jewish people to the Spartans; for, having the holy books in our hands to comfort us, we have no occasion for the aid of men. And who, think you, my brethren, were these men who spake in this manner? They were the unfortunate remains of Antiochus's cruelty, wandering in the moun-

tains of Judea, despoiled of their property and fortunes, driven from Jerusalem and the temple, where the abomination of idols had taken place of the worship of the holy God; and, scarcely emerged from so afflicting a situation, they are in need of nothing, for they have the holy books in their hands. And, in an extremity so new, surrounded on all hands by nations of enemies, having no longer, in the midst of their army, either the ark of Israel or the holy tabernacle; their tears still flowing for the recent death of the invincible Judas, who was alike the safeguard of the people and the terror of the uncircumcised; having seen their wives and children murdered before their eyes; they themselves on the point every day of sinking under the treachery of their false brethren or the ambuscades of their enemies;—the book of the law is alone sufficient to comfort and to defend them; and they think themselves in a situation to disclaim that assistance which an ancient treaty and alliance entitled them to demand.

I am not surprised, after this, that, in the consolation of the Scriptures, the first disciples of the gospel should forget all the rage of persecution; and that, unable to bring themselves to lose sight of that divine book during life, they should desire it to be inclosed in their tomb after death, as if to guarantee to their ashes that immortality it had always promised to them; and likewise, as it would appear, to present it to Jesus Christ on the day of revelation, as the sacred claim by which they were entitled to heavenly riches, and to all the promises made to the righteous.

Such are the consolations of believing souls upon the earth. How terrible, then, my brethren, to live far from God under the tyranny of sin; always at war with one's self; destitute of every real joy of the heart; without relish often for pleasures alike as for virtue; odious to men through the meanness of our passions; insupportable to ourselves through the capriciousness of our desires; hated of God through the horrors of our conscience; deprived of the comforts of the sacrament, seeing our crimes permit us not to approach it; deprived of all consolation from the holy books, seeing we find in them only threatenings and anathemas; without the resource of prayer, seeing the practice of it is forbidden, or at least the habit of it lost by a life wholly dissolute. What then is the sinner but the outcast of heaven and of the earth!

Thus, know ye, my brethren, what shall be the regrets of the reprobate on that great day, when to each one shall be rendered according to his works? You probably think that they will regret their past felicity, and shall say, "Our days of prosperity have slipped away like a shadow, and that world, in which we had spent so many sweet moments, is now no more: the duration of our pleasures has been like that of a dream: our happiness is flown,

but, alas! our punishments are to begin." You are mistaken; this will not be their language. Hear how they speak in the Book of Wisdom, and such, as we are assured by the Spirit of God, they shall one day speak: "We never tasted pure delight in guilt; we have erred from the ways of truth, and the Sun of righteousness hath never risen upon us: alas! and yet that was only the beginning of our misfortunes and sufferings; we wearied ourselves in the way of wickedness and destruction; our passions have always been a thousand times more intolerable to us than could ever have been the most austere virtues; and we have suffered more in working our own destruction, than would have been necessary to secure our salvation, and to be entitled to mount up now with the chosen into the realms of immortality. Fools that we are! by a sorrowful and unhappy life to have purchased miseries which must endure for ever!"

Would you then, my dear hearer, live happy on the earth, live Christianly. Piety is universally beneficial. Innocence of heart is the source of true pleasures. Turn to every side; there is no rest, says the Spirit of God, for the wicked. Try every pleasure; they will never eradicate that disease of the mind, that fund of lassitude and gloom, which, go where you will, continually accompanies you. Cease, then, to consider the lot of the godly as a disagreeable and sorrowful lot; judge not of their happiness from appearances which deceive you. You see their countenance bedewed with tears; but you see not the invisible hand which wipes them away: you see their body groaning under the yoke of penitence; but you see not the unction of grace which softens it: you see sorrowful and austere manners; but you see not a conscience always cheerful and tranquil. They are like the ark in the desert: it appeared covered only with the skins of animals: the exterior is mean or unattractive; it is the condition of that melancholy desert. But, could you penetrate into the heart, into that divine sanctuary, what new wonders would rise to your eyes! You would find it clothed in pure gold: you would there see the glory of God with which it is filled: you would there admire the fragrance of the perfumes, and the fervour of the prayers which are continually mounting upwards to the Lord; the sacred fire which is never extinguished on that altar; that silence, that peace, that majesty which reigns there; and the Lord himself, who hath chosen it for his abode, and who hath delighted in it.

Let their lot inspire you with a holy emulation. It depends wholly on yourself to be similar to them. They perhaps have formerly been the accomplices of your pleasures; why could you not become the imitators of their penitence? Establish, at last, a solid peace in your heart; begin to be weary of yourself. Hitherto you have only half lived; for it is not living to live at

enmity with one's self. Return to your God, who calls and who expects you; banish iniquity from your soul, and you will banish the source of all its sorrows; you will enjoy the peace of innocence; you will live happy upon the earth; and that temporal happiness will be only the commencement of a felicity which shall never fade nor be done away.

SERMON XXXII.

ON THE DISPOSITIONS FOR THE COMMUNION.

“Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”—LUKE iii. 4.

BEHOLD what the church is continually repeating to us during this holy time, in order to prepare us for the birth of Jesus Christ; Prepare, says she to all her children, prepare the way of the Lord, who descends from heaven to visit and redeem his people; make his paths straight; let the hollows be filled up, and the mountains levelled; let the crooked ways become straight, and the rugged even. Or, to express the same meaning without metaphor, Prepare yourselves, says she to us, to gather the fruit of that grand mystery which we are going to celebrate, by humiliation of heart, meekness, and charity, rectitude of intention, uniformity of living, renunciation of your own wisdom and your own righteousness; mortifying the flesh and humbling the spirit.

Allow me to hold the same language to you, Christians, my brethren, who, on this solemn occasion, come to purify yourselves in the penitential tribunals, in order to give a new birth to Jesus Christ in your hearts, on receiving him at the sacred table,—prepare the way of the Lord. The deed you are going to perform is the most holy act of religion, and the source of the most special favours: undertake it not, therefore, without all the cares and all the precautions which it requires: do not expose yourselves, through your own fault, to lose the inestimable advantages which ought to accrue to you from it.

The communion ought to give birth to Jesus Christ in our hearts: but where would be the difference between the righteous man and the sinner, between the soul who discerns the body of the Lord, and him who treats it as a common food, were he equally to

have birth in the heart of all who receive him? Deceive not yourselves, then, my brethren; there is a way of receiving Jesus Christ, by which his presence is rendered useless to us; and would to God, that, in thus receiving him, we deprived ourselves only of those favours which follow a holy communion! Ah! my brethren, unless the communion gives birth to Jesus Christ in our hearts, it brings death to him there: if it does not render us participators of his Spirit and of his grace, it is the sentence of our condemnation: if it be not a fruit of life to our soul, it is a fruit of death. Terrible alternative, which ought to excite our fears, but which ought not entirely to keep us away from the sacred table. The bread which is there distributed is the true nourishment of our souls, the strength of the strong, the support of the weak, the consolation of the afflicted, the pledge of a blessed immortality. How dangerous would it then be to abstain from it?—but infinitely more so would it be to eat it without preparation. On that account I again repeat to you, my dearest brethren, with the church, “Prepare the way of the Lord:” let your preparations for receiving him be of long standing: banish from your hearts whatever may offend him: instruct yourselves in the dispositions which he exacts of those who receive him: use every effort to acquire them: there is no other mean of avoiding the risk of an unworthy communion, and of attracting Jesus Christ into your souls.

This is an important matter, which demands all your attention. On one side, there is question of making you shun the horrible crime of profaning the body and the adorable blood of Jesus Christ; on the other, of instructing you how to reap from the communion all the grace which it is capable of bringing forth in our hearts. What, then, are those preparations so essential toward a profitable and worthy communion? I reduce them to four, which shall be the subject and the division of this Discourse.

REFLECTION I.—The eucharist is a hidden manna; it is the food of the strong, a sensible and permanent testimony of the love of Jesus Christ, the continuation and the fulfilment of his sacrifice. Now, it is necessary to know how to discern this hidden manna from common food, lest it be taken unworthily: first preparation. It is the food of the strong: we ought, therefore, to examine ourselves before we venture to make use of it: second preparation. The testimony of the love of Jesus Christ; it can be received, therefore, only in remembrance of him, that is to say, in feeling aroused in his presence every tender and exquisite sensation which can be excited by the remembrance of a dear and beloved object: third preparation. It is the fulfilment of his sacrifice; every time, therefore, that we participate in it, we show his death, and we ought to bring there a spirit of the cross and of martyrdom: fourth preparation. A respectful faith which enables us to discern, a prudent faith which makes us examine, an ardent faith which enables us to love,

an exalted faith which makes us to immolate. This is the summary of the apostles' doctrine, in relating to us the institution of the eucharist, and likewise that of all the saints with regard to the use of that adorable sacrament.

First preparation,—a respectful faith which makes us to discern. Think not, my brethren, that I mean here to speak of that faith which distinguishes us from unbelievers. Where is the merit of believing when the prejudices of childhood have accustomed reason to it, and when belief is, as it were, born with us? Exertion would even be necessary to cast off its yoke; and, to pass from faith to error, a greater effort is perhaps required than to return from error to truth. I speak of that lively faith which pierces through the clouds which surround the throne of the Lamb; which sees him not mystically, and, as it were, through a glass, but face to face, if I may venture to say so, such as he is: of that faith which, in spite of the veil with which the true Moses covers himself on this holy mountain, fails not, however, to perceive all his glory, and to feel the inability of supporting his presence: of that faith which, without rashly examining into his majesty, is, nevertheless, overpowered with its lustre; which sees the celestial legions covering themselves with their wings, and the pillars of the firmament shaking before this King of terrible majesty: of that faith to which the senses could add nothing, and which is blessed, not because it believes without seeing, but because it almost sees in believing. I speak of that respectful faith which is seized with a religious trembling at the sole presence of the sanctuary, which approaches the altar as Moses did the burning bush, and the Israelites the thundering mountain; of that faith which feels the whole weight of God's presence, and, in fear, cries out, like Peter, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." I speak of that faith of which the respect approaches almost to a dread, and which it is even necessary to comfort; which, from the farthest spot that it discovers Jesus Christ upon the altar, feels an éclat of majesty which strikes and agitates it, and overpowers it with the dread of having ventured to come there without his order.

Behold, my brethren, what that discernment of faith is which the apostle demands of you. Great God! but doth any faith like this still remain on the earth? Ah! in vain dost thou still manifest thy presence to the world; it knows thee no better than formerly: thy disciples themselves often know thee but according to the flesh; and, by being constantly with thee, their eyes become habituated, and almost no longer discern thee. When thou shalt show thyself in the heavens upon a bright cloud, men shall be consumed with terror, and the impious shall seek to hide themselves in the deepest caverns, and entreat the mountains to cover their heads: ah! art thou not the same in the sanctuary as upon a cloud of glory? Are the heavens not opened above thee? When

the priest pronounces the awful words, do not the heavenly spirits come down from heaven to officiate as thy servants, and to surround thee with their homages? Dost thou not judge men upon that mysterious tribunal, and cast looks of discernment upon that multitude of worshippers which fills thy temples? Dost not thou separate the goats from the sheep? Dost thou not there pronounce sentences of life and death? In one hand dost thou not hold thy wrath, and in the other crowns? Dost thou not separate me there, and stamp, with an invisible hand, upon my forehead, the mark of my election or of my eternal reprobation? Alas! and, while thou art perhaps condemning me, I have the presumption to draw near; while thou art casting me off from before thee, I boldly present myself there; while thou perhaps layest open the abyss to mark out my place, I impudently come to take it at thy table; while thou perhaps art ranging me with the children of wrath, I come to seat myself among the children of thy love: thy body, which giveth life, to me is a body of death; the Lamb without stain, which breaks the seven seals of the book of death, is the last seal which fills up and closes that of mine iniquities; and thou, who shouldst be my Saviour, becomest my guilt.

Ah! my brethren, God could not be seen in former times without instant death being the consequence. A whole people of Bethshemites was exterminated for having only too curiously examined the ark: the angel of the Lord covers Heliodorus with wounds, because he had dared to enter into the sanctuary of Jerusalem: the Israelites in the desert were not permitted even to approach the holy mountain from whence the Lord gave out his law; the thunders of heaven defended its access; terror and death every where preceded the face of the God of Abraham. What! because whirlwinds of fire no longer burst forth to punish the intruders and the profaners of our sanctuaries, respect and dread no longer accompany us there! Weak men, over whom the senses have such dominion, and who are never religious but when the God whom they worship is clothed in terror! for, say, were we to discern the body of the Lord,—did the faith of his presence make those grand impressions upon us which it would undoubtedly do were we openly to see him, ah! would we tranquilly and almost unfeelingly come to seat ourselves at his table? Should a few moments, employed in reciting, with a languid heart and an absent mind, some slight formula, prepare us for an action so awful? Should a communion be the business of an idle morning, perhaps gained from a customary slumber or the vain cares of dress? Ah! the thoughts of it should long previously occupy and affect us: time should even be necessary to strengthen us, if I may venture to say so, against our feelings of respect, and against the idea of his majesty: the days previous to this sacred festival should be days of retirement, of silence, of prayer, and of mortification:

every day which brings us nearer to that blessed term, should witness the increase of our anxieties, our fears, our joy. The thoughts of it should be mingled with all our affairs, all our conversations, all our meals, all our relaxations, and even with our sleep itself: our mind, filled with faith, should feel its inability to pay attention to any thing else; we should no longer perceive but Jesus Christ: that image alone should fix all our attention. Behold what is meant by discerning the body of the Lord.

I know that a worldly soul experiences inward agitations at the approach of a solemnity in which decency, and perhaps the law, require his presence at the altar. But, O my God! thou who fathomest these troubled hearts, are such those religious terrors of faith which should accompany a humble creature to thy altar? Ah! it is a sadness which operates death; these are inquietudes which spring from the embarrassments of a conscience which requires to be cleared. They are gloomy and sad, like the young man of the gospel whom thou orderedst to follow thee: they dread these blessed days as fatal days: they look upon as dark and gloomy mysteries, all the solemnities of Christians; the delights of thy feast become a fatigue to them; they only partake of it like the blind and the lame of the gospel: that is to say, that the laws of thy church must drag these faithless souls, as if by force, from the public places, from the pleasures of the age, and from the highway of perdition, and bring them, in spite of themselves, into the hall of thy feast: they delay, as much as possible, this religious duty; the sole thought of it empoisons all their pleasures. Thou seest these unbelieving souls dragging on the load of a wavering conscience; long hesitating between their duties and their passions; softening at last, by the choice of an indulgent confessor, the bitterness of this step; appearing before thee, O God! who becomest their nourishment in this mystery of love, with as much reluctance as if they went to face an enemy; and, perhaps, in the course of a whole year, experiencing no other circumstance to grieve them than that of receiving a God who gives himself to them. Ah! Lord, therefore thou invisibly rejectest these guilty victims who oblige themselves to be dragged by force to the altar, thou who willest none but voluntary sacrifices: therefore thou reluctantly givest thyself to these ungrateful hearts who unwillingly receive thee; and, wert thou still capable of being troubled in the spirit, as thou permittedst to be visible over the tomb of Lazarus, ah! we should once more see thee groaning when thou enteredst those profane mouths which, in thy sight, are only open sepulchres, as they have long been troubled before they could prevail upon themselves to appear here to pay thee that homage.

Let us acknowledge, then, my dearest brethren, that the faith which makes us to discern the body of Jesus Christ is very rare. We believe, but with a superficial faith, which only skims the

surface, as I may say, without entering into the efficacy and the mysteries of this sacrament : we believe, but with an indolent faith, which grounds its whole merit in submitting without opposition : we believe, but with an inconstant faith, which professes to believe, but denies it in works : we believe, but with a human faith, which is the gift rather of our fathers according to the flesh, than of the Father of Light : we believe, but with a popular faith, which leaves us only weak and puerile ideas : we believe, but with a superstitious faith, which tends to nothing but vain and external homages : we believe, but with a faith merely of custom, which feels nothing : we believe, but with an insipid faith, which no longer discerns : we believe, but with a convenient faith, which is never followed with any effects : we believe, but with an ignorant faith, which fails either in respect through familiarity, or in love through its backwardness : we believe, but with a faith which enchains the mind, and leaves the heart to wander : lastly, we believe, but with a tranquil and vulgar faith, in which there is nothing either animated, grand, sublime, or worthy of the God which it discovers to us. Ah ! to discern thy body, Lord, through faith, it is to prefer this heavenly bread to all the luxuries of Egypt ; it is to render it the only consolation of our exilement, the tenderest soother of our sufferings, the sacred remedy of all our evils, the continual desire of our souls ; it is, through it, to find serenity under all the frowns of fortune, peace in all our troubles, and equanimity under all the stings of adversity ; it is to find in it an asylum against our disgraces, a buckler to repel the flaming darts of Satan, a renovated ardour against the unavoidable lukewarmnesses of piety. To discern thy body, Lord, it is to devote more cares, more attention, and more circumspection toward worthily receiving thee, than to all the other actions of life. To discern thy body, Lord, it is to respect the temples in which thou art worshipped, the ministers who serve thee, and our bodies which receive thee. Let every man examine himself, let him thereupon listen to the testimony of his own conscience ; and this is the second preparation, a prudent faith, which makes us to prove ourselves ;—let a man examine himself.

REFLECTION II.—I know that we are unacquainted with our own heart ; that the mind of man is not always informed of what takes place in man ; that the passions seduce, examples harden, and prejudices drag us away ; that our inclinations are always victorious over our lights ; that the heart is never in the wrong ; that, to examine one's self, is frequently only to harden one's self in error. Such is man, O my God ! delivered up to his own understanding : he is continually deceived, and nothing appears to his eyes but under fictitious colours ; he but imperfectly knows thee ; he hardly knows himself ; he comprehends nothing in all

that surrounds him ; he takes darkness for light ; he wanders from error to error ; he quits not his errors when he returns to himself : the lights alone of thy faith can direct his judgment, open the eyes of his soul, become the reason of his heart, teach him to know himself, lay open the folds of self-love, expose all the artifices of the passions, and exalt him to that spiritual man, who conceives and judges of all. By the rules of faith, then, my brethren, must we examine ourselves ; all human doctrines, the compromises of custom, the examples of the multitude, our own understanding, all are deceitful guides ; if ever it was of importance not to be deceived, it surely is in a conjuncture where sacrilege is the consequence of mistake.

But upon what shall we examine ourselves ? Upon what ! Upon the holiness of this sacrament, and upon our own corruption. It is the body of Jesus Christ, it is the bread of angels, it is the Lamb without stain, who admits none around his altar but those who either have not defiled their garments or who have purified them in the blood of penitence. And what art thou, forward soul, whom I see approaching with so much confidence ? Bringest thou there thy modesty, thine innocence ? Hast thou always possessed the vessel of thy body in honour and in holiness ? Hath thy heart not been dragged through the filth of a thousand passions ? In the sight of God, is not thy soul that blackened brand of which the prophet speaks, which impure flames had blasted and consumed from thine earliest years, and which is no longer but a shocking vestige of their fury ? Art thou not totally covered with shameful wounds ? Is there a spot upon thy body free from the mark of some crime ? Where wilt thou place the body of the Lamb ? What ! it shall rest upon thy tongue ; that pure and immaculate body upon a tomb which hath never exhaled but infection and stench ; that body immolated with so much gentleness upon the instrument of all thy vengeance and bitterness ; that crucified body on the seat of all thy sensualities and debaucheries. What ! he shall descend to thy heart ? But will he therein find where to repose his head ? Hast thou not changed that holy temple into a den of thieves ? What ! thou art going to place him among so many impure pleasures, profane attachments, ambitious projects, emotions of hatred, of jealousy, and of pride ; it is amidst all these monsters that thou hast prepared his dwelling-place ? Ah ! thou deliverest him up to his enemies, thou once more puttest him into the hands of his executioners.

You have examined yourselves, say you to me. Before drawing near, you have made your confession. Ah ! my brethren, and, with the same mouth from which you have so lately vented all your iniquities, you go to receive Jesus Christ ? And, the heart still reeking with a thousand ill-extinguished passions, and which to-morrow shall see in all their wonted vigour, you dare to approach

the altar with your present, and to participate in the holy mysteries? And, the imagination still stained with the ideas of those recent excesses which you have just been recounting to the priest, you go to eat of the pure bread of the chosen? What! on your departure from the tribunal, the communion, in your eyes, supplies the place, and answers the purposes of penitence? From guilt you rush headlong to the altar? In place of dissolving in tears with the penitent, you come to rejoice with the righteous? In place of nourishing yourself with the bread of tribulation, you run to a delicious feast? In place of lingering at the gate of the temple, like the publican, you confidently draw near to the holy of holies? In former times, a penitent came not to the table of the Lord but after whole years of humiliation, of abstinence, of prayer, and of austerity, and they purified themselves in tears, in grief, and in the public exercises of a painful discipline; they became new men; a heart-felt regret was the only vestige of their former life; no traces of their past crimes were to be recognized but in the grace of penitence, and of the macerations which, at last, had expiated them; and the eucharist was that heavenly bread which no man, a sinner, then ate but with the sweat of his brow. And, at present, to have confessed crimes is believed to have already punished them; that an absolution, which is only given under the supposition of a humbled and contrite heart, actually creates and renders it so; that all the purity required of those who receive the body of Jesus Christ is, that they have laid open all the virulence and infection of their sores. Unworthy communicants, my brethren! you eat and you drink your damnation! In vain may we comfort you: can man justify when God condemns?

Besides, it is pure and without leaven; it requires to be exempted from leaven to eat of it. Now, have those worldly persons, whom the circumstances of a solemnity determine to approach the holy table, quitted the old leaven in presenting themselves at the altar? Do they not bring along with them every passion still living in its roots? Judge thereof from the consequences. On their departure from thence they find themselves exactly the same; hatreds are not extinguished, the empire of voluptuousness is not weakened, animation in the pursuit of pleasures is not blunted, inclination for the world is not less violent; in a word, cupidity has lost nothing of its rights. We see no greater precautions than before against dangers already encountered; the society of the world again resumes its influence; conversations are renewed; the passions awaken; every thing resumes its former train, and, in addition to their former state, they have now to add the profanation of this awful mystery. How is this? It is that a simple confession is no examination of one's self.

Again, it is the food of the strong. A weak, sickly, and wavering soul, who turns with every wind; who gives way to the first

obstacle; who founders upon the first rock; who escapes every moment from the guidance of grace; who has a long experience of his own fragility; who never brings to the altar but promises a hundred times violated, but momentary sensations of devotion, which the very first pleasure stifles; who, from his earliest years, has been in the alternate practice of weaknesses and holy things, and who has seen a constant succession of crimes to repentance, and of the sacrament to relapses: is a soul of this description a strong soul? Is it not its duty to examine itself, to increase, to strengthen, and to exercise itself in charity? Scarcely in a state to digest milk, ought it to load itself with solid food, and such as can serve the purposes of nourishment only to the perfect man?

It is written in the law, that, if the sin-offering be placed in an earthen vessel, the vessel shall immediately be broken; but if in a brazen vessel, it shall be both scoured and rinsed in water. Would these circumstances, so carefully and minutely marked, be worthy of the Holy Spirit, did they not contain instructions and mysteries? Doth not a weak soul, who receives the true victim, resemble that earthen vessel which falls in pieces, as I may say, being unable to endure the violence of this sacred fire? On the contrary, the firm soul, like the brass, is purified, loses in it all its stains, and comes out from it more beautiful and brilliant than before. What is the consequence, according to Jesus Christ, of putting new wine into old bottles; do they not burst, and allow the wine to be lost upon the ground? What is the application of this parable? You put the mystical wine, that wine whose strength operates a holy intoxication in pure souls, into a decayed and worn-out heart, which long-established passions have almost consumed. Ah! I am not surprised that it is unable to endure its strength, that the blood of Jesus Christ cannot tarry there, and that, on the first occasion, you shed and trample it under foot; it required to have gradually accustomed your heart to it, to have prepared it by retirement, by prayer, by daily conquests over yourself; and, through the means of these continued and salutary trials, to have strengthened and rendered it capable of receiving Jesus Christ.

It is the passover of Christians: now, Jesus Christ celebrates his passover with his disciples alone.

Now, what is it to be his disciples? It is to renounce one's self, to carry his cross, to follow him. Are you mortified in your desires, patient under your afflictions? Do you walk in the ways in which Jesus Christ hath walked before you? To be his disciples is mutually to love each other? And how often have you come to eat of this bread of union? How often have you made your appearance at this banquet of charity, your heart inwardly loaded with gall and bitterness against your brother? How often have you come to offer up your present at the altar, without having reconciled yourself with him?

Lastly. It is a God so pure, that the stars are dimmed in his presence; so holy, that, after the fall of the angel, heaven was rent and the abyss opened that he might place an eternal chaos between sin and him; so jealous, that a single wandering desire injures and offends him. Thus, my brethren, it is necessary that you examine yourselves upon your own inclinations. Are not those desires of the age of which the apostle speaks, still nourished within you? Render glory to God, and, in his presence, search your hearts to the bottom. I go to eat of the body of Jesus Christ, and to convert it into my own substance; but, when he shall have entered into my soul, he who knows and discerns its intentions and most secret inclinations, will he find nothing there unworthy of the sanctity of his presence? He will immediately proceed to the spring and to the causes of my wanderings; he will examine whether their source be dried up, or their course only suspended; he will perceive what are still the dominant inclinations of my soul, and what is the weight which still turns the balance of my heart: alas! will he be enabled to say, as formerly when entering into the house of Zaccheus, "This day is salvation come to this house?" Have I sincerely cast off that passion so fatal to my innocence; that bitterness of heart, of which I have so lately expressed my detestation at the feet of the priest; that idolizing of riches, which leads me to grasp at even iniquitous profits; that madness of gaming, by which my health, my affairs, and my salvation are injured; that vexatious and variable temper, which the slightest contradiction inflames; that vanity which leads me to soar above the rank in which my ancestors had left me; that envy which, with malignant eyes, has always viewed the reputation and the prosperity of my equals; that proud and censorious air, which judges upon all, and never judges itself; that supreme influence over me of effeminacy and voluptuousness, which are, as it were, interwoven with the foundation and principle of my being? Has the avowal, which I come from making, of my weaknesses, to the minister of Jesus Christ, rooted them out from my heart? Am I a new creature? He alone who is regenerated can aspire to this heavenly bread which I am going to eat: in thine eyes am I so, O my God? Do I not bear the name of living, though still, in effect, dead? Will the Mighty, entering into my soul, possess it in peace, and will he not find there seven unclean spirits who shall chase him from it? Instruct me, Lord, and suffer not that thy Christ, that thy Holy, descend into corruption. Such, my brethren, is the way to examine ourselves. The Lord had formerly forbidden the Jews to offer up honey and leaven in the sacrifices: see if, in approaching the altar, you bring not with you the leaven of your crimes, and the honey of voluptuousness: that is to say, both that relish for the world and for pleasure, and that effeminate and sensual character, enemy of the cross, and incompatible with salvation. Approach not, if you do not feel yourself sufficiently pure: this holy body, says the prophet,

would not purge your iniquity, it would only increase it; your religion would be vain, your heart idolatrous, your sacrifice a sacrilege.

Examine, therefore, yourself, and afterward eat of the heavenly bread. But we are not to stop at the simply discerning and examining. Hitherto, you have only removed the obstacles; but you have not settled the last preparations: you have lopped off whatever might repel Jesus Christ from your soul; but you have not acquired what might attract him to it: you have arranged so as not to receive him unworthily; but you have not so as to receive him with fruit. It is not sufficient to be free from guilt; it is necessary to be clothed with righteousness and sanctity: it is little not to betray him like Judas; it is necessary to love him with the other disciples: it is little, in a word, to be no longer profane, worldly, voluptuous, effeminate, proud, and revengeful; it is necessary to be sedate, meek, humble, firm, chaste, believing, Christian. "As oft as ye do this, do it in remembrance of me:" this is the third disposition to communicate in remembrance of Jesus Christ.

REFLECTION III.—What is it to communicate in remembrance of Jesus Christ? It is, in the first place, internally to describe all that passed in the heart of Jesus Christ in instituting this adorable sacrament. "With desire," said he to his disciples, "I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer." He sighed for that blessed moment; he never lost sight of it; in the remembrance of it he was comforted for all the bitterness of his passion. What did he thereby mean to teach us? Ah! that we ought to bring to this divine table a heart inflamed, penetrated, consumed; an eager, earnest, and impatient heart; a hunger and a thirst after Jesus Christ; an inclination roused by love: in a word, what I have termed a burning desire which impels us to love. This bread, said a father, requires a famished heart. Ah! Lord, says then the believing soul, with St. Augustine, who will give me that thou mayest enter into my heart to take possession of it; wholly to fill it; to reign there alone; to dwell there with me even to the consummation of ages; to be mine all; there to constitute my purest delights; to shed through it a thousand inward consolations; to satiate, to gladden it, to make me forget my miseries, mine anxieties, my vain pleasures, all mankind, the whole universe, and to leave me wholly to thee, to enjoy thy presence, thy conversation, and all the delights which thou preparest for those who love thee? Perhaps, Lord, the tenement of my soul is not yet sufficiently embellished to receive thee; but come and be thyself all its ornament. Perhaps thou perceivest stains which repel thee from it; but thy divine touch will purify them all. Perhaps thou discoverest invincible enemies still there; but art not thou the Mighty? Thy sole presence will disperse them, and peace alone will

reign there when once thou shalt be in possession of it. Perhaps it has wrinkles which render it forbidding; but thou wilt renew its youth like that of the eagle. Perhaps it is still stained with the blemishes of its former infidelities; but thy blood will wash them entirely out. Come, Lord, and tarry not; every blessing will attend me with thee: despised, persecuted, afflicted, despoiled, calumniated, I will consider as nothing my sorrows from the moment that thou shalt come to alleviate them: honoured, favoured, exalted, surrounded with abundance, these vain prosperities will cease to interest me, will appear as nothing from the moment thou shalt have made me to taste how sweet thou art. Such are the desires which ought to lead us to the altar.

But, alas! many bring there only a criminal disgust and repugnance: occasions are required to induce them to determine upon it; of themselves they would never have thought of it. But, what do I say, occasions? Thunders and anathemas are required. Good God! that the church should be reduced, through the lukewarmness of Christians, to make a law to them of participating in thy body and in thy blood! That penalties and threatenings should be required to lead them to thy altar, and to oblige them to seat themselves at thy table! That the Christian's only felicity on earth should be a painful precept to him! That the most glorious privilege with which men can be favoured by thee should be an irksome restraint to them! Others approach it with a heavy heart, a palled appetite, a soul wholly of ice: people who live in the commerce of pleasures and of the sacrament; who participate at the table of Satan and at that of Jesus Christ; who have stated days for the Lord, and days allotted for the age; people to whom a communion costs only a day of restraint and reservation; who, on that day, neither gamble, show themselves, see company, nor speak evil. But this exertion goes no farther; all devotion ceases with the solemnity; it is a deed of ceremony; after this short suspension they are at ease with themselves; they tranquilly return to their former ways, for that was a point agreed upon with themselves; they smoothly continue to live in this mixture of holy and of profane; the sacrament calms us upon pleasures; pleasures to be more tranquil on the side of the conscience lead us to the sacrament; and they are almost good in order to be worldly without scruple. Thus they bring to the altar a taste cloyed with the amusements and the delights of the age, with the embarrassments of affairs, with the tumult of the passions: they feel not the ineffable sweets of this heavenly food; they retrace, even at the foot of the throne of grace, the images of those pleasures they have so lately left: interests which occupy us, projects which puzzle us, ideas which force us from the altar to drag us back to the world, make much deeper impressions upon the heart than the presence of Jesus Christ. But is it not, Lord, against those monsters of Christians that thy prophet, incensed, formerly said to thee, "Ah! Lord, let thy table become a

snare before them; and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap?"

In the second place, to communicate in remembrance of Jesus Christ, is to wish to awaken, through the presence of this sacred pledge, every impression which his memory can make upon a heart which loves him. The firmest bonds are loosened by absence: Jesus Christ well foresaw, that, ascending up to heaven, his disciples would insensibly forget his kindnesses and his divine instructions. Alas! Moses remains only forty days upon the mountain, and already the Israelites cease to remember the miracles that he had wrought to deliver them from Egypt. We wot not, said they among themselves, what is become of this Moses, the man that brought us out of the land of Egypt; let us make gods who shall go before and defend us against our enemies. Jesus Christ, to guard against these inconstancies of the human heart, wished, in ascending to the heavenly Sion, to leave us a pledge of his presence: it is there that he wishes we should come to console ourselves for his sensible absence; it is there that we ought to find a more lively remembrance of his wonders, of his doctrine, of his kindnesses, of his divine person; it is there that, under mysterious signs, we come to see him born at Bethlehem, brought up at Nazareth, holding discourse with men, and traversing the cities of Judea, working signs and miracles which no one before him had ever done, calling as followers rude disciples, in order to make them masters of the world, confounding the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, announcing salvation to men, leaving marks every where of his power and goodness, entering in triumph into Jerusalem, led to Mount Calvary, expiring upon a cross, conqueror of death and of hell, leading with him into heaven those who were captives, as the trophies of his victory, and forming afterwards his church with the overflowing of his Spirit and the abundance of his gifts; in a word, we shall there find him in all his mysteries.

You envy, said St. Chrysostom, the lot of a woman who touches his garments, of a sinful one who bathes his feet with her tears, of the woman of Galilee who had the happiness to follow and to serve him in the course of his ministry, of his disciples with whom he familiarly conversed, of the people of those times who listened to the words of grace and of salvation which proceeded from his mouth; you call blessed those who saw him; many prophets and kings have vainly wished it; but you, my brethren, come to the altars, and you shall see him; you shall touch him, you shall give him a holy kiss, you shall bathe him with your tears, and your bowels shall bear him even like those of Mary. Alas! our fathers went into the holy land to worship the traces of his feet, and the places that he had consecrated with his presence. Here, they were told, he proposed the parable of the good shepherd and the lost sheep; here he reconciled an adulteress; here he comforted a sinful woman; here he sanctified the marriage and the feast

with his presence; here he multiplied the loaves to fill a famished multitude; here he checked his disciples who wanted to bring fire from heaven upon a criminal city; here he deigned to hold converse with a woman of Samaria; here he suffered the children around him, and rebuked those who wanted to drive them away; here he restored sight to the blind, made the lame to walk, delivered those possessed with devils, made the dumb to speak, and the deaf to hear. At these words our fathers felt themselves transported with a holy joy; they shed tears of tenderness and of religion upon that blessed land; this sight, these images, carried them back to the times, to the actions, to the mysteries of Jesus Christ, inspired them with fresh ardour, and consoled their faith; sinners found there a sweet trust, the weak a new force, and the righteous new desires.

Ah, Christians! it is not necessary that you cross the seas; salvation is at your hand; the word which we preach to you will be, if you wish it, upon your mouth and in your heart; open the eyes of faith, behold these altars; they are not places consecrated formerly with the presence, it is Jesus Christ himself: approach in remembrance of him; come to rekindle all that your heart hath ever felt of tender, affecting, and lively, for this divine Saviour. Let the remembrance of his meekness, which would not permit him to break the reed already bruised, nor to extinguish the yet glimmering lamp, quiet your transports and impatiencies: let the remembrance of his toils and of his troublesome life overwhelm you for your effeminacy; let the remembrance of his modesty and of his humility, which made him fly when they wanted to make him king, cure you of your vanities, of your schemes, of your frivolous pretensions: let the remembrance of his fast for forty days reproach you for your sensualities: let the remembrance of his zeal against the profaners of the temple teach you with what respect, and with what holy dread, you ought to enter there: let the remembrance of the simplicity and frugality of his manners condemn the vain superfluities and the excesses of yours: let the remembrance of his retirement and of his prayers warn you to fly the world, to retire sometimes into the secrecy of your house, to pass, at least, some portion of the day, in the indispensable practice of prayer; let the remembrance of his tender compassion for a famished people give you bowels of commiseration for the unfortunate: let the remembrance of his holy discourses teach you to converse innocently, holly, and profitably with men: in a word, let the remembrance of all his virtues, there more lively, more present to the heart and to the mind, correct you of all your weaknesses. This is what is called to communicate in remembrance of him.

But, to bring continually to the altar the same weaknesses; to familiarize ourselves in such a manner with the body of Jesus Christ, that it no longer awakens in us a new sentiment, but leaves us always such as we are; to nourish ourselves with a

divine food, yet not to increase; frequently to approach this burning furnace without any additional heat to your lukewarmness; to appear there with faults a hundred times detested, yet still dear, with habits of imperfection, which, though light in themselves, are no longer so, however, through the attachment and the bent which render them inevitable to us, and through the circumstance of the sacrament which there is the risk of profaning; to make profession of piety, of estrangement from the world, to be almost every day in the commerce of holy things, and to have determined, as it were, upon a limited point of virtue, beyond which never to rise, and, after ten years' exercise of piety, to be no farther advanced than at first; on the contrary, to have rather relaxed from the first fervour; to be continually applying to this divine remedy, yet to feel no alteration for the better in the disease; to heap sacrament upon sacrament, if I may dare to say so, yet never to empty the heart in order to make room for this heavenly food; to nourish envies, animosities, secret attachments, a fund of sensuality, of vain desires to please, to be courted, to be prosperous; to permit, in conversation, the habit of witticisms and every freedom of speech upon others, of endless nothings, of sentiments wholly profane, of quibbles which wound sincerity, of concealments by which falsehood becomes familiar, of hastiness and bursts of passion; to be jealous to an extreme wherever self is concerned; to rise indignant at the smallest appearance of neglect, and to be incapable of digesting a single disobliging gesture; and yet, with all this, to feed upon the bread of angels: O my God! how much less than this ought to make us tremble!

But, is it to eat of this bread unworthily, to eat it with so many imperfections and weaknesses? Who knows this, O Lord, but thee? All we know is, that it is not communicating in remembrance of thee; that many righteous shall appear in thy sight, at the great day, as a soiled cloth; that many, who had even prophesied in thy name, shall be rejected; and that every thing is to be dreaded in this state. Peter is not admitted to thy supper till after thou hast washed his feet; nevertheless thou assurest us that he was altogether pure. Magdalene is sent away, and thou sayest to her, "Woman, touch me not," because a too sensible affection was the cause of her eagerness; and, nevertheless, her love had been great, and she had washed thy sacred feet and her own sins with her tears. And we, Lord, full of wants, empty of sincere fruits of penitence, made up wholly of effeminacy and sensualities, lukewarm, and without desire, fixed in a certain state of languishing and imperfect piety, more sustained by habitude and the engagements of a holy profession than by thy grace or by a lively and solid faith, alas! we make thy body our ordinary food. What inexplicable gulfs, Lord! What a train of crimes, perhaps, not known, unrepented of, multiplied to infinity, and which arc as the shoot upon

which a thousand new profanations are afterward grafted ! What gulfs, once more ! And what terrible secrets shall thy light make manifest to us at the great day ! In thy sight, O my God, what am I ! I can neither offend nor please thee by halves ; my condition admits not of those middle states of virtue which hold, as it were, a mid-way between innocence and guilt ; if not a saint, I am a monster ; if not a vessel of honour, I am a vessel of shame ; if not an angel of light, there is no room to hesitate, I am an angel of darkness ; and, if not a living temple of thy Spirit, I must be its profaner. Good God ! what powerful motives for vigilance, for self-examination, for circumspection, for approaching thine altars with trembling ; for humility, tears, and compunction, while waiting the manifestation of thine adorable judgments ! But still, my brethren, it is not enough to communicate in remembrance of Jesus Christ ; and in order to retrace his life, it is likewise necessary, and this is the last disposition, to renew the remembrance of his death, and to show him whenever we eat of his body and drink of his blood ; and this is what I call a noble faith which leads us to sacrifice.

REFLECTION IV.—As oft as you shall eat of the body and drink of the blood of the Lord, you will show his death until the kingdom of God shall come. How this ? Literally speaking, his death is shown, because this mystery was a prelude to his passion ; because Judas there determined to betray him ; because Jesus Christ, eager to undergo that baptism of blood with which he was to be baptized, anticipated its fulfilment, and sacrificed himself beforehand by the mystical separation of his body and of his blood ; because the eucharist is the permanent sacrifice of the church, the fruit and the fulness of that of the cross : lastly, because Jesus Christ is there as in a state of death ; he hath a mouth, and speaks not ; eyes, and uses them not ; feet, and walks not. But, my brethren, in that sense the impious, equally with the just man, shows the death of the Lord as oft as he eats of his body : it is a mystery, and not a merit ; it is the nature of the sacrament, and not the privilege of him who receives it ; it is a consequence of its institution, and not a disposition for approaching it. Now, the design of the apostle here is to prevent the abuses, to instruct believers how to eat worthily of the body of the Lord, to explain to them, in the mysteries contained in this sacrament, the dispositions which it requires. There is a way, therefore, of showing the death of the Lord, which should be wholly in our hearts, which disposes and prepares us, which fits the situation of our soul to the nature of this mystery, which makes us to bear upon our body the mortification of Jesus Christ, which immolates and crucifies us with him. Let us resume the reasons we have touched upon, and change the letter into spirit.

First. The death of the Lord is shown, because this mystery was

a prelude to his passion. In former times the eucharist was a prelude to martyrdom. From the moment that the rage of the tyrant was declared, and the persecution began, all the believers ran to provide themselves with this bread of life; they carried this precious trust into their houses: death seemed less terrible to them when they had before their eyes the beloved pledge of their immortality; they even desired it; and the ineffable consolations which the presence of Jesus Christ, hidden under mystical veils, already shed through their soul, made them to long for that torrent of delight with which he will overflow his chosen when they shall behold him face to face. Were they dragged to prison, and, like felons, loaded with irons, they of whom the world was unworthy?—they carefully concealed the divine eucharist in their bosom; they feasted upon it in the hope of martyrdom; they grew fat upon this heavenly food, like pure victims, that their sacrifice might be more pleasing to the Lord. Chaste virgins, fervent believers, holy ministers, partook altogether of the blessed bread; and what delight even in their chains! What serenity of mind in these dark and gloomy abodes! What songs of thanksgiving in these horrible places where the eye encountered nothing but the sad images of death and preparations for the most cruel tortures! How often did they say to Jesus Christ, present with them in this adorable sacrament, Ah! we fear no ill, Lord, since thou art with us: though hosts surround us, yet will we not be afraid: our enemies may destroy our bodies, but thou wilt restore them to us glorious and immortal; for who can destroy those whom the Father hath bestowed upon thee? Blessed chains which thou deignest to sustain! Holy prisons which thou consecratest with thy presence! Beloved dungeons in which thou fillest our souls with so many lights! Precious death which is to unite us with thee, and to withdraw the veil which conceals thee from our sight! Thence what fortitude under their tortures! Filled with the body of Jesus Christ, washed in his blood, they quitted their prisons, says a holy father, like lions out of their den, still raging and thirsting for death and carnage; they flew upon the scaffolds, and, with a holy pride, launched here and there looks of confidence and magnanimity which appalled the most ferocious tyrants, and even disarmed their executioners: they showed then the death of the Lord in preparing themselves for martyrdom by the communion.

The tranquillity of our ages and the religion of the Cæsars, leave us no longer the same hope; death is no longer the reward of faith, and the eucharist makes no more martyrs: but have we not domestic persecutors? Has our faith only tyrants to dread? And is there not a martyrdom of love as well as of blood? In approaching the altars, then, my brethren, a believing soul sighs for the dissolution of this mortal body; for, could he love this life, and show the death of Jesus Christ, and renew,

in these mystical signs, his quitting the world to go to his Father? He complains of the length of his exilement; he bears, to the foot of the sanctuary, a spirit of death and of martyrdom, "Ah! Lord, since thou art dead and crucified to the world, why detain me there? What can I find upon the earth worthy of my heart, seeing thou art no longer there? The mystery itself, which should console me through thy presence, recalls to me thy death; these covers which veil thee are an artifice of thy love; and thou half concealest thyself, only to inspire my heart with the desire of fully beholding thee. Vain things, what offer ye to me but an empty shadow of the God whom I seek? What answer do ye make when my softened heart bends toward you to soothe its anxieties? Return, say you, to him who hath made us; we groan in awaiting his coming to deliver us from this servitude, which makes us subservient to the passions and to the errors of men: seek him not among us; thou wilt not find him; he is risen; he is no longer here: if he appear, it is only to die again: recall the desires and the affections which thou meant to place upon us, and turn them toward heaven; the Bridegroom hath been carried away, the earth is no longer for a Christian now but a vale of mourning and tears. Such is what they answer to me. What, then, detains me here, Lord? What are the ties and the charms which can attach me to the world? Restless in pleasures, impatient in absence, tired of the conversations and the commerce of men; afraid of solitude; without relish for the world, without relish for virtue; doing the evil I would not, and leaving undone the good that I would,—what keeps me here? What delays the dissolution of this body of sin? What prevents me from soaring with the wings of the dove upon the holy mountain? I feel that I should then be happy; I could then feast at all times upon this delicious bread. I taste no real delight but at the feet of thy altars: these are, indeed, the happiest moments of my life; but they are so short, and I must so soon return to the insipidities and disgusts of the world; I am under the necessity of being so long absent from thee: no, Lord, there is no perfect happiness on the earth, and death is a gain to whoever knows to love thee."

Are these our sentiments, my brethren, when we draw near to the altars! Where are now the Christians, who, like the first believers, await the blessed hope, and hasten, by their sighs, the end of their banishment, and the coming of Jesus Christ? This is a refinement of piety of which they have no idea: it is merely a language of the speculist: it is, however, the groundwork of religion, and the first step of faith. The necessity of dying is considered as a cruel punishment; the sole idea of death, with which our fathers were so comforted, makes us to shudder: the end of life is the term of our pleasures in

place of being that of our sufferings; the attentions paid to the body are endless; our precautions extend even to absurdity; or, if it sometimes happen that this last moment is desired, it is in consequence of being wearied of life and its chagrins; it is a disgrace, a habitual infirmity preying upon us, a revolution in our worldly matters which leaves no more pleasures to be expected here below, the disappointment of an establishment, a death, an accident, or, lastly, a disgust and a wish of self-love; we tire of being unfortunate, but we are not eager to go to be reunited with Jesus Christ; and, with all this, they come to eat of the Lord's Supper, to renew the remembrance of his passion and to show his death until he shall come: what an outrage!

Secondly. His death is shown in this mystery, because Judas there finally determined upon delivering him up. Now, what does this remembrance exact of us? Ah! my brethren, an ardent desire of repairing, by our homages, the impiety of so many shocking communions which crucify Jesus Christ afresh. So many impure, revengeful, worldly, and extorting sinners, of every people and of every nation, receive him into profane mouths: we ought to feel the insults which Jesus Christ thereby suffers; to humble ourselves before him, seeing that his most signal blessing is become the occasion of the greatest crimes; to tremble for ourselves; to admire his goodness, which, for the profit of a small number of chosen, hath graciously been willing to submit to the indignities of that endless number of sinners, of all ages and of all times, who have, and still continue to dishonour him; to avert, by the tears of our heart and a thousand inward lamentations, the scourges which unworthy communions never fail to draw down upon the earth. For, if the apostle formerly lamented that general plagues, epidemical diseases, and sudden deaths, were only a consequence of the profanation of the sacrament; ah! thy finger has long been upon us, Lord; the cup of thy wrath is poured out upon our cities and provinces: thou arimest kings against kings, and nations against nations: nothing is now spoken of but battles and the rumours of war; our fields are stricken with sterility; our families are consumed by the sword of the enemy, and the father is deprived of the only prop and consolation of his old age: we groan under burdens, which, though keeping the enemy of the state from our walls, yet leave us a prey to famine and want; the arts are now almost of no avail to the people; commerce languishes, and industry can hardly supply the common necessaries of life; yet what are even the public calamities, when compared with the private miseries known to thee alone? We have seen our citizens mowed down by hunger and death, and our cities turned into frightful deserts; the enemy of thy name takes advantage of our dissensions, and usurps thine inheritance.

Whence proceed these scourges, great God! so continued and so terrible? Where are formed those clouds of wrath and indig-

nation which have so long been pouring out their torrents upon us? Is it not to punish the sacrilegious that thou art armed? Do not the outrages which are every day committed against thy body, at the feet of the altars, draw down upon us these marks of thy wrath? O strike us then, Lord, and avenge thy glory; stop not the arm of thy angel who hovers over us; let the houses where the traces of a profane blood are still imprinted not be spared: thine anger is just. But no; give us not the water of gall because we have sinned against thee: give peace in our days; listen to the cries of the righteous who entreat it of thee: "Lord," say they with the prophet, "we looked for peace, but no good came; and for a time of health, and behold trouble." Terminate the profanations which are ever the attendants of war; cease to punish sacrileges by multiplying them on the earth; once more restore majesty to so many temples profaned, worship and dignity to so many churches despoiled, peace to our cities, abundance to our families, consolation and gladness of heart to Israel; let the child be restored to his father and the husband to the desolate wife; and, if our evils touch thee not, O pay attention to the miseries of thy church.

Thirdly. The death of the Lord is shown in this mystery, for Jesus Christ sacrifices himself in it, by the mystical separation of his body and of his blood. What follows from thence? That we must be at the foot of the altar as if we were at the foot of the cross: that we must enter into the dispositions of the disciples and of the women of Jerusalem who received the dying sigh of Jesus, and were present at the consummation of his sacrifice. Now, what hatred had they not against a world which had crucified their Master? What measures did they think it necessary to keep with his murderers? Were they afraid of declaring themselves the disciples of him who had so openly declared himself their Saviour, and that at the price of his blood? Did they not say to the heavenly Father, Ah! strike us, Lord, who are the guilty, and spare the innocent. What horror at their past faults, which had attached so good a Master to the cross! What a lively impression in their heart of his sufferings! Thus, my brethren, still to keep measures with the age, to be afraid of declaring openly for piety, to be ashamed of the cross of Jesus Christ, to calculate your works of devotion in such a way that an air and a savour of the world may still pervade the whole: not boldly to confess Jesus Christ; to be afraid of abstaining from a theatre where he is insulted, from an assembly where he is offended, from a proceeding by which innocence must suffer, from I know not what train of life which the world makes a necessity to you, from certain maxims which wound the gospel, and which custom has established as laws; to pretend to keep up all those conciliatory measures with the world, and yet to come to eat the passover with the disciples of Jesus Christ; to preserve a correspondence with

his enemies, and yet to seat yourselves at his table; to esteem the maxims which crucify him, and yet to wish to be the spectators and the faithful companions of his cross;—ah! it is a contradiction.

He hath overcome the world; he hath fixed it to his cross: along with himself he hath given death to its maxims and errors: consequently, to show his death in the communion is to renew the memory of his victory. And, if the world lives and still reigns in your heart, my brother, do you not annihilate the fruit of his death? Do you not contest with Jesus Christ the honour of his triumph? And, in place of showing his death, do you not come to renew it with his enemies?

Besides, in the fourth place, his death is shown in this mystery, for it is the consummation of the sacrifice of the cross, and he applies the fruit of it to us. Now, what gives us a right to the fruit of the cross, and, consequently, to the communion? Sufferance, mortification, and a penitent and inward life. For, say, living in delights, shall you dare to nourish a body, like yours, enervated by pleasures, flattered, caressed; shall you dare, I say, to nourish it with a crucified body? Shall you dare to incorporate Jesus Christ, dying and crowned with thorns, with delicate and sensual members? Would this connexion not be horrible? Will you dare, by converting his body into your own substance, to transform it into an effeminate and voluptuous body? Ah! it would be the perfection of iniquity. To be nourished with the body of Jesus Christ, your members must become his members, his body must take the figure of your body. Now, his body is a crucified body; his members are suffering members; and, if you live without suffering; if you bear not upon your body the mortification of Jesus Christ; if, perhaps, you have never practised a single instance of self-denial; if your days are passed in a tranquil effeminacy; if afflictions excite impatience; if you feel hurt at every thing which opposes your humour; if you prescribe to yourself no works of mortification; if those sent to you by heaven are unwillingly and unthankfully received; how will you that you unite your body to that of Jesus Christ? This is never reflected upon, my brethren; and, nevertheless, a soft and sensual life can be a presage only of an unworthy communion.

Lastly. The death of the Lord is shown in this mystery, for he is there himself as in a state of death. He hath a mouth and speaketh not; eyes, and useth them not; feet, and walketh not. View then, my brother, and act according to this model; behold how you ought to show his death in partaking of his body: you must bring there eyes instructed to be closed for the earth; a tongue accustomed to silence, or to sayings of God, as St. Paul says; feet and hands immoveable for the works of sin; senses either extinguished or mortified: in a word, to bring there a universal death over your body. The state of Jesus Christ in the eucharist is the state of the Christian on earth; a state of retreat,

of silence, of patience, of humiliation, of divorce from the senses. For, what is Jesus Christ in the eucharist? He is in the world as if not there; he is in the midst of men, but invisible; he hears their vain discourses, their chimerical plans, their frivolous expectations, but he enters not into them; he sees their solitudes, their agitations, and their enterprises, and he allows them to act; divine honours are paid to him, and he is insulted; and, ever the same, he seems insensible alike to the insults as to the homages: he looks on while families, empires, and ages are renewed; manners are changed; the taste of men and of ages are incessantly fluctuating: he sees customs sink into decay and then revive; the figure of this world in an eternal revolution; his inheritance divided; wars, seditions, and unexpected revolutions; the whole universe shaken; and he is tranquil upon its ruins; and nothing withdraws him from his close and ineffable study of his Father; and nothing interrupts the divine quiet of his sanctuary, where he is always living for the purpose of interceding for us. Once more, consider and act according to this model: let us bring to the sacred table eyes long since closed upon every thing which may hurt our soul; a tongue surrounded with a guard of circumspection and of modesty; ears chaste and impenetrable to the hissings of the serpent, and to the luxury of those sounds and voices so calculated to soften the heart; a soul alike insensible to scorn or to praise; a soul beyond the reach of the things of this earth, and proof against all the revolutions of life; the same in good or in bad fortune; viewing, with indifferent eyes, every occurrence here below, esteeming the good or the evil which occur to him as a matter that does not regard him; and, through all the agitations of the earth, the tumult of the senses, the contradiction of tongues, the vain enterprises of men, always watchful to guard over his peace of heart, to move continually with a steady pace toward eternity, never to lose sight of his God, and to have his conversation always in heaven.

Not that I would exclude from the altar all those who have not yet attained to this state of death: alas! it is the business of a whole life; and the body of Jesus Christ is an aid established to fortify and to assist us in this undertaking. But our inclination ought to bend to it, lest we approach the altar unworthily; we must be at open war with the senses, with our own corruption, with our own weaknesses, and be continually gaining the advantage in some article; Christian self-denial must be practised; the daily victories, which the impressions of the world and of the senses gain over us, must be expiated by retirement, by silence, by tears, and by prayer; we must rise with fresh vigour from every backsliding. But I mean you to understand that a communion is not the concern of a day, or of a solemnity; that our whole life ought to be a preparation for the eucharist; that all our actions should be as steps which lead us up to the

altar; that the life of too many in the world, even of those who are not in debauchery, who restrict themselves upon nothing, who live according to the senses, who are warm only on the interests of the earth, is a life which shows not the death of the Lord, and which, consequently, excludes you from this mystery. I mean you to comprehend, that the eucharist is a festival, if I dare to say so, of mourning and death; that delights, pleasures, and vain decorations disfigure this sacred table, and occasion your being rejected equally as him who appears there without the wedding garment; that the meats of the earth and the bread of heaven cannot be eaten at the same time; and that, on the morrow after the Israelites had eaten of the old corn of the Land of Canaan, the manna ceased, neither had they any more of that heavenly food. I mean you to comprehend, that this sacrament is the fruit and not the mark of penitence; that those communions, determined by a solemnity, gave rise to more profaners than true worshippers; that the body of Jesus Christ cannot be eaten without living by his spirit; that the plenitude of the Holy Spirit must even rest upon a soul, as upon Mary, before Jesus Christ can enter into it, as it were, to assume once more the human nature. I mean you to comprehend, that the reading of the holy books, and the salutary rigours of penitence, should prepare an abode in our hearts for Jesus Christ, to the end that we might be like holy arks, and that this heavenly manna may rest there amidst the tables of the law, and the rod of Aaron. I mean you to understand, that nothing should alarm you more, you who live in the dangers of the age and who love them, than all the communions of which you have partaken without preparation. I mean you to understand, that the bread of life becomes a poison to the majority of believers; that the altars witness almost more crimes than the theatre; that Jesus Christ is more insulted in his sanctuary than in the assemblies of sinners; and that the solemnities are no longer but mysteries of mourning for him, and days set apart to dishonour him. I mean you, in a word, to understand that, in order to approach it worthily, a respectful faith is required which enables us to discern; a prudent faith, which leads us to examine ourselves; a lively faith, which causes us to love; a noble faith, which induces us to sacrifice ourselves: without these, it is rendering one's self guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord; it is eating and drinking their own condemnation.

Ah, Lord! how little have I hitherto known the innocence and the extreme purity which thou requirest of those who come to eat of this heavenly food! The Centurion, that man of so fervent, so humble, and so enlightened a faith; that man so rich in good works, who loved thy people, who raised up edifices to thy name, and appropriated them to public prayers, and to the interpretation of thy Scriptures; that man does not think himself worthy even to receive thee in his house. Even the purest of virgins, when informed

by the angel that thou wert to descend into her womb, is terrified at it; she contemplates her own nothingness; and, if the power of speech still remains to her, it is to ask, How can this be? And who am I, Lord, to dare to seat myself at thy table with so little precaution;—I, who come to appear empty before thee; who have nothing to offer to thee but the refuse of a heart so long engrossed by the world; who bring to thine altars only feeble aspirations after holiness and unsubdued attachments to the world, but unavailing lights, but sentiments which evaporate in vain wishes?

Ah, Lord! the fruits of a holy communion are so abundant, so sensible; the soul quits it so overflowed with thy blessings and thy grace, that, when I had no other proof of the unworthiness of my communions than their inefficacy, I ought to tremble and be humbled. When thy body is eaten worthily, we abide in thee, and thou abidest in us; that is to say, that thy precious blood, which still flows in our veins, leaves us thy inclinations, thy traits, thy resemblance, and that we are another thee; noble and heavenly inclinations should alone be seen in us, and sentiments worthy of the blood we have received: and, nevertheless, I still find my affections drawn to the earth. When thy body is eaten worthily, thou tellest us that we live for thee, and eternally: and I have still continued to cherish worldly pursuits and schemes of ambition. What then must I do, Lord? Must I retire from thy table? What! this fruit of life should be forbidden me? What! the bread of consolation should no longer be broken for me? No, Lord, thou dost not mean to exclude me from it, but only that I be prepared for it; thou refusest me not the bread of children, but thou wouldst that mine unworthiness force thee not to give me a serpent in place of it. Prepare, then, thyself in mine heart an abode worthy of thee; make the rough and crooked ways of it smooth, and let the heights be levelled; purify my desires; correct my inclinations, or rather create within me new ones. Thou alone canst be thy precursor, and prepare the way for thee in souls. Fill us, then, Lord, with thy spirit, to the end that we may eat of thy body worthily, and live eternally for thee.

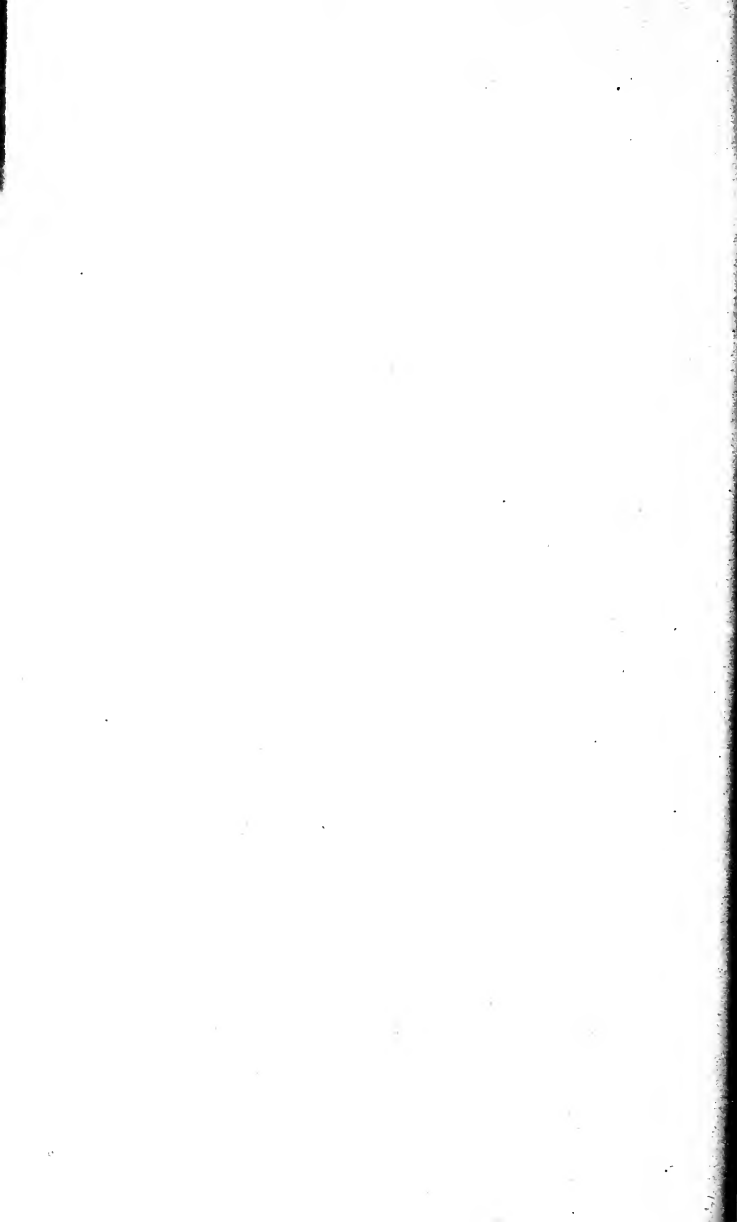
Now, to God, &c.

THE END.









per question and

