

THE GOSPEL IN PARIS:

SERMONS

BY THE

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WITH PERSONAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

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XXIV.

DISCOURAGEMENT.

“I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought and in vain; yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God.”—ISA. xlix. 4.

EACH epoch has its peculiar temptations and trials; the spiritual as well as the physical world is at certain times affected by general diseases which are all the more to be dreaded that, as everybody feels their influence, no one perceives the full danger. For the Christian in the present day, one of those maladies is discouragement.

Discouragement! Not under that demonstrative and passionate form which strikes us in the bitter and despairing complaints of the prophets and believers of bygone days. We rarely meet with such stirring dramas, with such explosions of grief on the part of noble souls whom the heart-rending spectacle of life and the world has deceived. We labour under a disease which is less violent, less dangerous apparently, but which is dull, slow, and treacherous.

We may account for this in many ways; the human mind in its onward march passes through successive stages of affirmation and doubt. There are times when men live upon generally accepted truths, which are all that is requisite for ordinary life and action. Thus it was, for instance, in the seventeenth century, when, in the social order, monarchical traditions, and in the religious order, the authority of the Church for Roman Catholics and that of the Bible for Protestants, were the very elements of the common life. Thus also it was, though in a very different sense, at the close of the eighteenth century, when confidence in the supremacy of human reason, in man's native goodness, in his unlimited progress, intoxicated both heart and mind, until the day when the Reign of Terror, in its formidable explosion, disclosed what lurked beneath all these dreams. There are other times when, far from believing and affirming, man, having missed his way, stops and tries to find out the right path. What till then he had accepted is now insufficient for him. He would analyse everything, sift everything, call everything into question anew. This tendency in itself is lawful, but it has its dangers. The aim of analysis is to *decompose* the objects which it studies; now, it is evident that the analytical spirit, if it predominates exclusively, is fatal to the creative spirit, to enthusiasm, to religious faith, to all those sentiments by which the soul instinctively apprehends the most sublime truths, You may, therefore, be assured that whenever analysis is carried to an extreme, the vital powers of the soul grow feeble, and are in danger of dying away. Well, one of the first fruits of that tendency in religious souls is languor. How is it possible for the soul to love, to act, to believe, when each of

its impulses is met by the phantom of a *peradventure*; when, behind the heart which feels and would live, rises inquiring reason with its arguments, negations, and sneers?

If this analytical spirit is injurious to individual inspiration, it acts more fatally still upon collective life. Nothing is rarer in the present day than energy in common impulses. The Church, as well as society, breaks up into fragments, each of which claims its independence, its right of free inquiry, and in many cases party spirit alone takes the place of declining solidarity. I do not judge this tendency; I believe it providential and necessary. I believe that the external and wholly political bonds which hitherto have united souls in one and the same Church by right of birth and tradition, must be broken, and that henceforth it is on the ground of a common faith that unity must be sought. But, without developing this thought, which does not enter into my subject, I state that this latent process of decomposition shakes us all; that, born as we are to be members of one spiritual family, born to love, to believe, to suffer with sister-souls, and feeling as we do that all our powers are increased tenfold by sympathy, we do not traverse our epoch uninjured. Impulse fails us, and for want of being carried away by one of those mighty currents of life and ardour which have often swept through the world, we labour under weakness and discouragement.

That is not all. Our epoch has another character; it aims at being positive. The marvellous progress of certain sciences, the wonders of industry, attract minds with a strange force towards the lower world. Men believe in what they see, in what they feel. An ill-disguised scorn meets the research which goes beyond the world of sense or of pure logic. The supernatural is laid down as mysticism, and this word, in the eyes of many, is an irrevocable condemnation. This tendency reacts upon the Church. It is a fact not to be denied that utilitarianism invades it.

Men look for a religion of facts and sentiments. When we expound the grand doctrines of Christianity, when we point to the Divine and superhuman side of the revealed truths, they give us but a divided attention. Our hearers unwittingly prefer that we should tell them of man rather than of God; if we speak to them of themselves, of their struggles and doubts, of their temptations and sorrows, we stir up their feelings and their sympathy; if we fathom the depths of the revealed doctrines, their interest flags. But allow me to tell you that this is fatal to the soul. It is neither good nor healthful for man to contemplate himself too long; it is not from this sight that he will derive strength and moral restoration. The Gospel teaches this admirably, for it always aims at raising our eyes on high towards "the hills from whence cometh our help;" on high, that is, towards the superior world, towards Him who upon earth has been the living image of the invisible God. The grand epochs of life, holiness, faith, and powerful action,

have been those when the heavens have opened upon humanity. Man, by looking to himself alone, can at most become a stoic, but the last word of stoicism is despair and suicide. Now, wherever religion has been, and has aimed at being, purely human, it has produced discouragement.

These are some of the causes which explain the state in which so many souls languish today. Add to them the influence of peculiar dispositions of mind and temperament, and the purely physical causes which act in so mysterious yet powerful a manner upon our moral condition. Add to them the inclination which the most serious minds have of looking at the gloomy side of human things; add to them those tendencies which exist in every age, but which, amid the general dispositions I have mentioned, develop themselves far more strongly and rapidly, and you will understand why nothing is more rare in the present day than the joyous, heroic, and serene faith which has characterised other epochs; you will understand that discouragement is an enemy that must be opposed at any cost. All feel this, and mourn over such a state of things. In certain spheres, people seek to escape falling into it by excesses of feverish ardour; they excite their imagination by the prospect of a speedy realisation of the promises of prophecy; they produce in this way an exaltation which is more or less sincere, but this galvanic excitement is soon followed by a prostration still more profound. Those factitious but fitful gleams do not long enlighten the soul's path, and those deceptions often result simply in changing its languor into unbelief. What then is to be done, you ask? I reply: Build up your life upon another foundation than that of your fleeting impressions; edify it upon the central and eternal truth which survives the fluctuations of opinions and beliefs; live in Jesus Christ, and, upon the heights where communion with Him raises you, breathe the vivifying air which alone can restore your strength. Then only will you be enabled to set faith against sight, that which is eternal against that which passes away, and thanksgiving against discouragement. But this is as much as to say that you are to be the children of God, that you are to become Christians, if you have never been, or if you have ceased to be such. Now, this remedy, which is the only one that can avail against the disease under which we all labour, cannot cure us in one day.

I admit this; consequently, now that I have pointed it out to you, I hasten to descend with you upon the ground of immediate action. Let us seek under what aspects discouragement most often seizes upon us, and with what weapons it must be repulsed. This invisible and gloomy enemy that attacks us secretly in the twilight of our waning faith, let us now bring it forth into the open day; let us look at it full in the face with a firm and steady gaze; for when it is well known, it is already half conquered.

When I look closely into it, I discover two principal causes of discour-

agement for the Christian. The first is the importance of the task which God sets before him; the second is his powerlessness to fulfil it.

I say, in the first place: the importance of the task which God sets before us. What! will some enthusiastic soul, doubtless, object, is it not that very greatness which kindles in the Christian's heart an ambition that nothing can extinguish? Yes, I admit this; we are so wonderfully made that each time the ideal of love and holiness to which the Gospel calls us is presented to us in its sublime beauty, our heart thrills with deep assent, and we feel that for this indeed we have been created. But when we must cease to admire in order to act; when we must no longer allow our imagination to be inflamed by a perfection which captivates it, but realise this perfection in our life, then with affright we measure the distance which separates us from it, and discouragement seizes upon our soul.

See what takes place in human things. Let a man having but an ordinary mind have in view an end as commonplace as himself, it will cost him but little effort to attain; whether artist, thinker, or poet, he will be easily satisfied. But let a true genius catch but a glimpse of some sublime ideal and endeavour to reproduce it; you will hear him bewail his failures; each of his attempts will no doubt produce a masterpiece which will satisfy all the world but himself; you will see the greatest poet of Rome order that his immortal work be burned after his death; you will see, according to one of the most beautiful legends of the Middle Ages, Saint Cecilia breaking to pieces her musical instruments on the day when she hears the distant choir of the angels.

Now, suppose the Gospel had set before us no other end than worldly honesty, than that wholly external probity which looks to the outside of life, and is limited to the worship of honour and propriety, all would doubtless tend towards it, for all would believe it easily attainable. But when the point in question is to be holy before God, and not only before men, to submit to the Divine will, not only one's actions, but one's intentions, and day by day, hour after hour, to bow beneath the sanctifying discipline of the Spirit of God, then the more we advance, the further the end seems to recede, and the very greatness of our task sometimes stands out before us like the gigantic wall over which a man, labouring under the terrors of nightmare, imagines he must leap at any cost.

Again, let us suppose that the Gospel had held out to us no other ideal of charity than love of the fatherland, and called us to seek in humanity nothing more than the progress of some political cause, or the triumph of some system, none would have shrunk from this task. But you well know that it requires of us more than this: you know that it enforces upon us not only that love for our fellow-men which, after all, is but an enlarged selfishness, so to speak, but charity, that charity which shrinks not from sacrifice; you

know that it places before us all the miseries, all the sufferings of humanity as a field open to us; that it does not allow us to turn a deaf ear to the cries of distress which reach us from the extremities of the earth; you know that it forbids our falling asleep in the lap of luxury and in a satisfied egotism, that it renders us responsible to a certain extent for all the sorrows that surround us, that it cries to us as God did of old to Cain: "Where is Abel, thy brother?" and that, in presence of our cowardice, ever ready to shrink that sublime duty, it lifts, like an accusing image, the bleeding and Divine figure of crucified love.

Now, that is what alarms, what wounds and irritates us. Oh! how we would prefer a religion which would leave us to ourselves instead of invading our independence to such a degree and thus placing its hand upon our heart. Shall I dare to say it? There are days when all the evil powers of our soul rebel against that law of love and holiness; days when we say to God: "Why hast Thou revealed it to me? Why, whilst so many others are unconcerned and joyous, carried away by the current of pleasure, interest, or lust, why hast Thou placed before me that task which overpowers me by its very greatness? Why hast Thou produced in my conscience that thirst after holiness which troubles all my evil joys? Why hast Thou deposited in my heart that love which envenoms all my pleasures and causes me to feel, in their very enjoyment, their bitterness and their vanity?"

Thus we utter our foolish complaints against God, and yet, what would we have had Him do? Ask less of us, set before us an ideal meaner than holiness, meaner than love? But what God would this be whom so little could satisfy? Ah! you would not believe in Him a single day, He would be inferior to you, and your conscience would require what He Himself would have ceased to demand of you. Brethren, you must choose between lowering the Divine law to the level of your own cowardly nature, or raising your nature to the level of the Divine law. Alas! you know how the great majority of our fellow-men live on, gradually wearing away, in contact with the world, the image of God graven within their hearts, deforming their soul to shape it according to the morality of the day, stifling the voice of their conscience and of their heart. But you cannot do this. If for a moment I should counsel you to follow that course, if from this pulpit I should preach to you a low-toned morality which would flatter your selfishness, you would doubtless sound my praises, but in the depths of your soul there would be something which would despise my preaching. No, you are too well versed in these matters to renounce the ideal to which God calls you; all the arguments, all the sophisms of the world and of your own heart will vainly endeavour to deceive you; a supreme, imperious voice cries loudly in your ears that your life must be referred to God, to the God whose you are by right of creation and by right of redemption. Instead of lowering the Divine

law to the level of your nature, raise your nature to the level of the law of God, that is the only solution of this awful problem worthy of God and of you. But is this solution possible? It is possible, for there is no other; it is possible, for our conscience affirms it; it is possible, for God declares it; and He who knoweth our frame, He who knoweth our misery, our corruption, and our incurable weakness, places before us no other end than that of becoming like Himself. Dare to say that He is deceiving us, that He sets before us an end which we can never reach, that He makes sport of us in creating in our souls a desire without object, a hunger without satisfaction, an endless and fruitless search after truth; or rather, believe in the God of the Gospel who sets the ideal before us, and urges us constantly towards its realisation; in the God of the Gospel who calls, converts, and regenerates us, and who, after having commenced the work of our salvation, wishes to continue and to perfect it.

But I hear your objection. You admit with me that the end which the Gospel sets before us is the only one worthy of God and of yourselves; but to this affirmation you oppose your experience; you point me to your languid faith, to your useless life, to your fruitless efforts, and you are ready with the prophet to exclaim, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain." The non-success of his labour is, as we have already said, the second motive of discouragement for the Christian.

Before I answer, allow me to remind you of a fact which you will doubtless have observed as well as I. Do you know who are the Christians who most bitterly mourn over the failure of their efforts? They are almost always the most active and the most advanced. Yes; hear him, that man whose sanctified life is a pattern for you, who lives in the midst of the world as if he were not of the world, who preaches by his works far more than by his words, who, severe for himself, indulgent for others, astonishes you by his vigilance, his abnegation, and his charity. You will hear him bewail his weakness, his lukewarmness, his want of zeal; you will hear him speak with sincere terror of all the mercies which God has accumulated upon him for so many years, of the responsibility which weighs upon his soul, of the time he has wasted, of the opportunities he has allowed to slip; you will hear him without affectation apply to himself the most humiliating passages of Scripture, and ask God to forgive him, even those of his good works in which His discerning eye has detected the tares mingled with the wheat, and the dross mixed up with the pure gold. Or again, draw near to those giants of the spiritual order, to those of God's workmen who, at various epochs, have called themselves Elijah, St. Paul, Chrysostom, St. Bernard, Luther, or Whitefield, and who bewilder us by the immensity of the work they have accomplished, you will hear them mourn over the feeble results of their labours. Elijah cries to God: "Take away my life, for I am

not better than my fathers.” Isaiah utters the words of my text: “I have spent my strength for nought and in vain.” St. Paul trembles lest he be found to have been a useless servant. St. Bernard in his last letters expresses the distressing sentiment of having accomplished nothing of importance. Calvin, dying, says to those who surround him, “All I have done has been worthless. The wicked will rejoice at these words. But again I say that all I have done is worthless, and that I am a miserable creature.” What are we to infer from this? That these men have been inactive? No; but that in presence of the ideal which God had put it into their hearts to realise, their work has seemed to them well-nigh lost; for, in fact, it enters into the Divine plan to conceal almost always from us the results of the works we accomplish for God. In other domains, the success of truth is often visible and striking. Here, it seems as though the seed were lost, as though the bread were swallowed up beneath the waters upon the surface of which it had been cast; as though, in a word, all our labour remains fruitless.

Why does God permit this? Ah! first of all, that our faith may be tried. Picture to yourselves, were it but for a moment, a Christian life in which every effort would bear its fruits, in which the answer would immediately follow the prayer, in which sowing time would be rapidly succeeded by harvest, and long and painful sacrifices by the joy of deliverance. Who would not long to be a Christian on such conditions? All would become such from motives of interest, first of all, and the kingdom of God would be peopled with hirelings. But where would be the sublime spectacle of a faith that hopes, waits, and acts though it sees not? and how could God be glorified in it? Now God will not be served by mercenaries; He often hides from His children the fruit of their labours that it may be for Him they toil, and not for themselves; He hides it from them that they may seek their reward in Him, and not in the results of their work, nor in the outward success which would supply the place of His approbation, nor even in the progress of a sanctified life, for, if separated from God, perfection itself may become an idol.

But it is not only to strengthen our faith that God treats us thus, it is also to humble us. Ah! they are few, those who can bear success without tottering beneath its weight. You have perhaps admired some great man at a distance; so long as you have been acquainted with his works only he has appeared to you raised upon a lofty pedestal and surrounded with a pure halo of glory; everything in him seemed to be equal to his genius, and you believed him exalted far above all the petty passions of mankind. So you thought till the day when you came into closer relations with him; then you have been dismayed at finding in the soul of that scholar, artist, or writer, all the baseness which excited self-love and vanity can call up; you have seen him yield to envy, disparage his rivals, deny the genius of others, join

pedantry to ostentation; you have seen the finest talents associated with the meanest character, and you have suffered for the human race. Is this an imaginary picture, or is it not, on the contrary, a most notorious fact? That is because there is in success a fascination and an intoxication which very few can bear.

Therefore picture to yourselves success in a Divine work thus becoming a source of seduction for the man who obtains it, exciting his mind, inflating his heart, and filling it with the most unworthy vanity in the very hour when he is speaking of what is grandest and most sacred in the world. Picture to yourselves, O blasphemy! a St. Paul full of self-conceit, intoxicated with his own glory, seeking to win for himself a name, labouring only for the furtherance of his own schemes. Now, that is the scandal which God has wished to spare His Church, and whilst in all other dominions the deepest selfishness and the most arrogant pride often obtain the grandest results, it has pleased God that, in His kingdom, the dominion of souls should belong only to those who are capable of self-denial. Accordingly, to save His servants from the temptations of success, it pleases Him to hide from them the results of their labour, and to send them, in the midst of the most fruitful activity, the most bitter motives of discouragement. Severe discipline of love by which He chastens those He loves, and corrects those of whom He makes His choice instruments!

At this school He teaches them not only humility but meekness and compassion. Success alone would never develop these virtues. Success gives strength. Strength! ah, that is much, doubtless, but something more than strength is needed to do good here below. If there are hours when a powerful arm is necessary, there are others when what is especially required is a soft and delicate hand that will not break the bruised reed. When Jesus pronounced these sublime words: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," He did not add: "Come unto Me, for I am strong;" He said: "Come unto Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart;" admirable expression, which shows all the power of humble and obscure virtues, of tenderness and compassion! He possessed those virtues in their fulness, He whom the Bible calls in turn the Lion of Judah and the Lamb of God; but He will create them, O wonder of wonders! in the soul of a former Pharisee, of Saul of Tarsus; He will make of this hero of faith, of this giant, of this indomitable combatant, a man who will be able to speak to the Galatians "as to his own dear children;" He will produce in that rude, lofty, arrogant nature the finest features of the most exquisite charity. How will He do so? By breaking his strength, by leaving him a thorn in the flesh, by placing him under the stern discipline of patience. Is not that what alone can explain the gentleness of Paul and the tender solicitude for the feeble which breathes throughout all his epistles?

I appeal to your own experience; when you suffer, when your soul falters beneath the oppression of doubt, what you want, is it simply one of those firm souls whose serene and never disturbed faith cannot enter into your perplexities? No, you want a soul which, like yours, has sorrowed, which has felt the sufferings and the doubts that oppress you, which has trod your own dark paths. Oh! you who like us have known the anguish of discouragement, you who have prayed in vain, you who have laboured for nought, what has been most comforting to you in those bitter hours? Has it not been confessions like that of our text? When you have heard Elijah complain at having toiled in vain, or Isaiah exclaim, “I have spent my strength for nought and in vain,” have you not blessed those sister-souls in which you discovered your own struggles, your own deceptions, your own griefs; and have you not felt your heart grow calm and your faith grow firm at the thought that, though separated from them by the distance of centuries, you are merely passing through the trials out of which those mighty believers of the past came forth triumphant?

That is why, so far at least as we are able to understand the Divine purposes, God hides from us the results of our labour. Nevertheless, these results are simply hidden, they will appear in their own time. No, none in serving the Lord has the right to say: “I have laboured for nought.” He may say so, the man whom success has always attended, and who has thought only of self, the man who has seen his coffers filled, his projects realised, his cup overflowing with prosperity. He may say so, even though crowds should surround him with congratulations upon his immense labours, upon his well-employed life, upon his prodigious success; for as he has worked for himself alone, his work is indeed a work of vanity. But the believer who has referred his life to God never has the right to say, “In vain have I laboured;” no, not though he had merely accomplished in secret the lowliest of tasks, not though he had merely bewailed his inutility in the forced inaction of sickness. There is no work, however insignificant it be, but God gathers and rewards, if its principle has been an impulse of love for Him. You never can tell how much good you do when you do what is right. Did they know, those heroes of the Bible, who, faithful to duty, humbly died in performing it, did they know all they would leave behind them of strength, courage, and edification, as an inheritance for all coming ages? Did he know—he, St. Stephen, the first of the martyrs—when, falling beneath the blows of those that stoned him, he turned towards heaven an angelic glance and prayed for his murderers—did he know that this look and this prayer would produce an ineffaceable impression on the conscience of one of the witnesses of that scene, and that, by a marvellous solidarity, the magnificent apostleship of Paul would be connected with his death? And you, when you utter a firm and humble word in testimony of the truth, do you

know whither the wind will bear that precious seed, and in what heart it will germinate? Do you know what that sacrifice which has been mis-judged, what that act of devotion which has been sneered at, what that seemingly fruitless but patient love will one day bring forth?

And even though no traces of them would be left upon earth, even though your labours and sacrifices would seem to be for ever buried beneath the world's indifference, still would the prophet's consolation be yours: "My judgment is with the Lord, and my work is with my God." Yes, in this lies the never-failing strength of the Christian. Solitary, forsaken, despised of men, he has as his witness, as his approver, as his judge, the invisible Master whom nothing escapes and who forgets nothing. God has seen him, that is enough for him; he has not lost his reward.

Does this mean that, in an indirect manner, I wish to appeal to interested motives, and exhort you to labour in view of an assured salary? Many cast this reproach at us. I hear an arrogant philosophy tell us that, after all, we labour merely for success; I hear our modern stoics, from the heights of their serenity, attack our hope in a supreme retribution. They tell us, these would-be sages, they repeat again and again, that the approbation of conscience is sufficient, and that the honest man requires nothing more. What do they mean by this? That the right must be loved for its own sake, and not from any outward motive; that God must be served, not because He rewards, but because He is truth itself? Is that their idea? But it has been ours long before, and a thousand times, in the name of the Gospel, we have opposed that servile, interested motive which seeks itself while pretending to serve God. But if we condemn that vulgar motive, that low attraction of reward, shall we go so far as to say that the approbation of conscience is sufficient? No, to affirm this would be to take a mistaken view of human nature, to wound it in its noblest instincts. We cannot be our own aim, our own judge, or our own reward. We need a witness of our actions, a look to encourage us, a heart to understand us. This is claimed likewise by the imperious desire for justice which demands that good may never be lost, but that it may find its sanction in the will and approbation of the universal Judge. If you leave man nothing but his conscience, you will have the grand but desperate spectacle of stoicism committing suicide to escape the triumph of evil; if, on the contrary, you point us to a God who understands and encourages us, who numbers all our sighs and tears and sacrifices, you will kindle in the heart of humanity a courage which nothing will ever destroy, no, not even the most cruel failure! Count, if you can, all the souls which this mere sentiment prevents from falling into despair!

Oft on the Sabbath morning when we unite in song and prayer, and feel that our faith is strengthened in brotherly communion, I think of those to whom these blessings are denied; I think of that lonely pastor, painfully

pursuing his ministry in the midst of an indifferent, or, it may be, hostile population, praying without answer, working without success, and compelled to say, as he casts a retrospective glance upon the past: "I have laboured in vain; I have spent my strength in vain, and for nought." I think of that missionary in a distant heathen land, gathering about him a few proselytes who scarce understand him, and feeling that all the enthusiasm of his heart will be met by an icy indifference or by a dull and stupid opposition. For them each of these Sabbaths, which are the festivals of the Church, are like a new trial by which their faith is to be exercised, and in which the bitter sentiment of the vanity of their efforts haunts them unceasingly. Ah! those are the heroes of faith! The world often looks to those ministries which are rendered easy by success, and exclaims: "What ardour; what zeal! "And I, I will tell you, like Jesus Christ, "See ye all these things?" Is it so grand a task or so difficult a mission to speak to sympathetic hearts and minds, to preach the truth to a congregation whose attention and approval one is sure to obtain? Ah! if God in His Divine wisdom did not take care to mingle with such a ministry some secret crosses, some unknown humiliations, it were indeed to be feared that those who pursue it would walk by sight rather than by faith, and place the approbation of men above the approbation of God! No, the true combatants, the true heroes, are there in those unknown and inglorious posts, alone in presence of an unbelieving world, alone to believe, to hope, to love, called by a severe dispensation to sow without reaping, and scoffed at perhaps by infidelity which casts at them these words of the Psalm, "Where is thy God!" Ah! I know that God who sees them and knows their anguish has secret compensations in store for them; I know that, in their loneliness, they enter more deeply than we do in the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ, and that they feel more closely united to the crucified Witness of condemned Truth who, He also, saw His ministry despised, who stretched out His arms towards a rebellious people, who wept over Jerusalem, and whose dying eyes beheld nought but a cursing multitude. But what would they do, I ask, if they had not this refuge? What would they do if they could not say with the prophet: "My judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God?"

But why should I choose such extreme examples? Look at the question closely and you will see that we all have to bear this trial if we are truly the disciples of Christ. The best portion of our life escapes the eyes of the world, for the world sees only what is external. There are virtues and sacrifices which are already here below rewarded by gratitude and love. But these are few. Do you know what maintains life in the world and saves humanity? It is those thousands of obscure actions, of silent sacrifices of which God alone is the witness and which would never have been performed without Him. Yes, if there are Christian nations which are the bear-

ers of the world's future, that is, of progress, liberty, faith, and hope; if there is upon earth an asylum open to suffering souls; if there is a Church in which the Gospel may be preached, all this has become possible only by dint of heroism in the past, of sacrifices buried in oblivion. Like those Roman walls which are composed of tiny stones joined together by an indestructible cement, and which have braved the efforts of centuries, so the foundations of the Church consist of little virtues which none can ever count. We are the heirs of eighteen centuries of devotion, and the world sees but an insignificant portion of all this wealth. No ear hath heard, no voice can ever tell all the anguish, but also all the sublime firmness and courage which have been displayed in those dungeons, in those oubliettes where the martyrs of faith have perished by thousands; neither can any one tell all that Christian faith daily obtains around us of forgiveness, of generous forgetfulness of the past, of acts of self-denial, of victories over the flesh and over pride. But these triumphs so dearly bought and which often cost so many tears, how would they ever be possible if the Christian could not say: "My judgment is with the Lord, and my work is with my God?"

At work, then, ye discouraged souls. Shake off that dull apathy which paralyses you, that unwholesome melancholy in which you seem to delight. At work! and to so many days wasted in the past add not days wasted in the future in useless regrets. At work! since your work is with your God, since He is pleased in His mercy to count your slightest efforts without disdain- ing one. Ah! why should you not bring to the service of that adorable Mas- ter as much of your time, heart, and life as the worldly know how to devote to the vanities that are losing them! Is it not in the service of the world that one may say: "I have laboured in vain; I have wasted my strength for nought, and in vain?" And if they cannot say so today while their eyes are still dazzled by its passing splendours, will they not be compelled to admit it in the fearful hour when illusions will vanish, when death will speak, when the world will have neither hope nor consolation for them, when they will have to give God an account of the talents with which He has entrusted them? O despair! O misery! to have lived for self alone; to have perhaps acted a great part, attained a high position, gained a fortune and a name, and after all be forced to acknowledge that their lives have been wasted, and that they have forgotten the essential! To learn all this, but too late; to see the night of their agony illumined by the light of the Gospel as by the lurid glare of lightning, and to understand how they should have lived in the hour when they are about to die!

You, my brother, do not dread so fearful a surprise. You know what is the direction of your life, for towards eternity it tends, and whatever be your trials, you have the ineffable joy of serving the living and faithful God. And it is you who know all the greatness, all the beauty of a Christian

life, you who believe that not one of your efforts is lost, you who add your stone to the edifice which God is raising from age to age, it is you who mourn, you who walk with a bowed head, you who allow your arms to droop with fatigue and your heart to fail! You believe in the triumph of redeeming love, and it is you who give the world the spectacle of a languishing and melancholy piety, of a joyless religion, of an extinguished hope! And what success, what victory do you pretend to gain, what proselytism do you expect to exercise? No, no, it is not by contemplating yourselves alone, it is not by contemplating your fruitless labours, but by looking to the Author and Finisher of faith that you will feel strengthened. Safety, strength, salvation, victory lie in the sight of the Sun of Righteousness that riseth with healing in its wings. Look heavenward, ye disciples of Jesus Christ! Set the ineffable beauty of heavenly blessings over against all the ills of nature, against all the sorrows of the soul, against all the deceptions of earth. Above this world which misjudges and despises you, see the eye of your God resting upon you; hear the applause of the saints. Rejoice even for those who sneer at your efforts, for they will be the heirs of your sacrifices; and if anything can save them, it will be your unwavering fidelity, your unwearied love. Courage! and after all your failures and defeats, repeat these words of faith: "My judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God."