

THE GOSPEL IN PARIS:

SERMONS

BY THE

REV. EUGENE BERSIER, D.D.

OF L'ÉGLISE DE L'ÉTOILE, PARIS.

WITH PERSONAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

BY THE

REV. FREDERICK HASTINGS,

AUTHOR OF

"SUNDAYS ABOUT THE WORLD," ETC.;

AND EDITOR OF THE "HOMILETIC MAGAZINE."

LONDON:

JAMES NISBET & CO., 21 BERNERS STREET.

MDCCCLXXXIII.

IV.

FAITH AND SIGHT.

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

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

See how Jesus contemplates nature; for Him the invisible world is everywhere. He finds it in the spring which gushes forth at His feet, in the branches united with the vine, in the tree which covers Him with its shade, in the golden harvests, in the glowing skies, and even in the minutest details of the life of the publicans and sinners who surround Him. Everything, in his eyes, becomes a transparent image of the human soul and of its divine destinies. Beyond all which clouds our vision, He perceives the invisible world, He sees it so clearly that it is needless for Him to believe, and we would feel greatly surprised should any one speak of the faith of Jesus. Jesus sees heaven, He lives in it, He breathes in it, He bears it with Him everywhere upon earth.

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

present interests, to the security of that which is transitory.

But without accusing others, let us ask ourselves what place the invisible world occupies in our own life. How difficult it is for us to lay hold of it! That we may open our eyes to its pure light, are not a more painful operation, a more laborious preparation required than those which a blind man must undergo in order to recover his sight? And how quickly do we forget it, how easily is our attention diverted from it! What a mighty power do present preoccupations exercise upon our minds! How all eternal realities pale before them! Who knows this better than we do, we ministers of the Gospel? From our pulpits we speak to you of the things of eternity, we tell you of the approbation of God which you are to seek in preference to the praise of men, of the love of God which should consume all the worldly lusts and passions that dwell in your hearts, of the communion with God which is to be your delight in the world to come; we picture the unspeakable felicity of the redeemed, their peace, their unalterable joys. . . . And yet, must we confess it? How often do we not feel that this language surpasses our present impressions, and that it springs more from our imagination than from our soul! Oh! how easy it is to speak, and with what terrible temptations is even the preaching of the Gospel accompanied! What efforts, what unceasing watchfulness are required in order that our hearts may be continually penetrated with the truths we proclaim, that our emotion may not resemble that of the artist or poet, that the mean desire for the present success of our words may not absorb our thoughts, that we may not be wholly chained down to earth in the very moment when we pretend to open heaven to your enraptured gaze! That is the humiliating confession which now escapes my lips, but cannot you all join your personal avowals to mine? Heirs of the invisible world, what a contrast between your life and your Christian profession! Those hearts which are so unconcerned for the interests of Jesus Christ, so impassioned for their own; those minds which are so engrossed by the affairs or the news of the day, so indifferent to the progress of the reign of God; those existences which are carried away, absorbed, consumed by what is transient, do you not know them, and do you not feel how completely the visible world keeps you under its subjection?

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

"By faith and not by sight!" Before explaining these words, we cannot fail to observe how they clash with all the ideas and tendencies of the age. There exists a philosophical school which enjoys the immense advantage of knowing clearly what it aims at, and which is represented by men whose

talents and character exercise an incontestable influence. This school has written upon its banner the word *positivism*. It says to man: "What does it avail thee to let thy thoughts wander through the invisible world, and to pursue those fleeting shadows men call by the name of religions? Give up all those wild fancies which have ineffectually wearied the human soul during so many ages. Believe what thou seest. Lay hold of the visible world, study it, make of matter thy servant, mend the laws and constitutions of humanity; in this alone is progress possible, in this alone is happiness secured to thee." Such is the language of this school, and what constitutes its strength, is the fact that it unhesitatingly expresses the thoughts of the great majority in the present day. Its doctrines are re-echoed by all the voices of the age; some express them in grave language, others with cynical flippancy. What is the invisible world to most of our moneyed men? What place does it occupy in their ardent and feverish speculations? They do not so much as consider it worthy of their attacks. They do without it, they set it aside with the disdainful self-satisfaction you have seen—you, believers in the eternal realities, when, in your zeal to propagate your faith, you have so often encountered the icy indifference of the multitude whom reality fully satisfies.

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

prayer, nor in the hopes whose accomplishment eternity alone will see. And yet, this world which believed in nought beyond itself, what had it arrived at? On what shore had it stranded? Did it believe in progress? did it believe in justice? did it believe in liberty? had it preserved a ray of hope? Ah! who is not fully aware that never before had a more shameful abasement, a more complete degradation, a more universal disregard for the native nobility and dignity of man been witnessed? Who restored it to life? Who saved it from sinking into nothingness? Who reminded humanity of what constitutes its true greatness? Those men, those believers who opposed to the present world the world to come, and who refused to limit man's destinies to the present life. That is a striking and evident fact which alone would be sufficient to justify the Gospel against the accusations to which I have referred. Now, this fact has not been accomplished once for all. During the eighteen centuries which form the history of our religion, how often has the world been on the point of sinking back into the state in which Christianity had found it, on the point of giving up its best conquests to believe only in what may be handled and seen! At every one of these epochs, what has restored it to life has been an energetic appeal to the invisible world, the testimony of those who have walked by faith and not by sight.

It was to be so, and we should form a strange idea of Christianity if we believed that it teaches us to despise the earth and the present life. I know that many causes may have favoured this error. Monastic life, opposed by Roman Catholicism to active and social life, and considered by it as more elevated and more perfect, the deplorable exaggerations of certain Christians who have neglected the most important duties of existence, alleging that their eternal interests required all their thoughts, have but too often furnished unbelief with weapons. But Christianity itself is innocent of these errors and excesses. Never, I repeat it, has it taught us to forget, or even to neglect the world or its duties; on the contrary, it bids us regard both, but without allowing ourselves to be completely absorbed in either. Earth is not, neither can it be the aim of the Christian, but it is the scene of his activity, the place in which his eternal future is prepared. Doubtless, the thought of eternity will hush many of the preoccupations by which we are absorbed, it will reduce to their real value all selfish joys and pleasures, all that pertains only to the present hour; but what a mighty impulse will it not give to all that is generous, noble, and useful, to all that contributes to the good of others and to the glory of God! It is maintained by many that eternity lowers the present life; but I assert, on the contrary, that it gives it an incomparable grandeur. What is man, what are all his desires, hopes, labours, affections, if everything is to disappear with the fleeting hour? What is there worth beginning here below? What cause is worthy of our sacrifices? Why should we renounce all that is visible, immediate happiness, actual enjoy-

ment, sensual delights? Let us limit our horizon, let us ask of the passing hour all it is capable of giving us, let us make merry, for tomorrow we die. Why speak of the higher emotions, of the nobler aspirations of human nature? Those emotions, those aspirations will soon die if there is no eternity for them, just as the plant withers and perishes when deprived of air and sunlight. And, in fact, do you not hear that eternal refrain: "Vanity of vanities," ringing incessantly in your ears, and does it not leave in the depths of your soul an ineffaceable impression of discouragement? Do you not hourly see your efforts rendered fruitless, your best intentions misjudged, your affections scorned? No, if there is nothing for me beyond this world, if this earth is my only fatherland and my only heritage, life henceforth is meaningless for me, it remains a cruel and inexplicable enigma, and I can but write upon its threshold these true but mournful words of the apostle: "Without God, without hope!"

On the contrary, open eternity to me. Tell me that life is a journey, a march onward; tell me that I am walking towards my true home. Then I am able to begin and undertake everything, then the bitter feeling of vanity disappears. I can labour, and labour in vain, if need be, sow on an unfruitful soil, pursue even in the lowest condition, the meanest and most insignificant of tasks; I know that my sacrifices, my labours, and my tears are as so many seeds which will spring forth on the day when the sun of the invisible world shall arise. I can love, love in presence of death, although I know that the gloomy angel will dim those eyes that had answered mine, that he will still that heart which had throbbled with the same emotions as my own, that he will chill that hand whose loyal grasp had encouraged and strengthened me. But in my heart dwells an immortal hope which I oppose to all these crushing realities. That hope may for a moment be dulled and apparently quenched, but a breath from heaven will suffice to scatter the ashes with which it is covered, and to produce a brighter and more cheerful light than before. Yes, it is because I do not wholly belong to the present life that I am able to work upon earth; that is what gives such a solemn importance to my short and wretched existence. Let none, therefore, seek to deprive me of the invisible world in the name of the present interests of humanity; all within me protests against such an attempt, and history, agreeing on this point with my innermost experience, proves to me that the present life can be understood and explained only in the light of eternity.

Such would be my answer to those who disdainfully treat these grand words of St. Paul: "We walk by faith and not by sight." But let us overlook these attacks. You are Christians, these words of the apostle are your motto, you acknowledge with me that they sum up admirably the Divine plan of your destiny. And now, I have still to show that, though we accept this motto in theory, we openly deny it in reality. A few examples will be sufficient

to prove that, in the direction of our life, we almost always endeavour to substitute sight for faith, and that, in this way, we constantly labour to make the purposes of God of none effect.

What, in the first place, shall we say of those who will not accept religion unless it presents itself to them under a brilliant form, and with the approbation of men, with all that speaks to the senses and imagination? How often have we not heard Roman Catholicism point to the power, antiquity, and outward splendour of the visible Church, as the most evident demonstration of Christianity! To seek truth by such signs as these, is not that walking by sight? Jesus once said to the disciples who stood gazing admiringly at the beauties of the Temple: "See ye not all these things?" What then would He say to those who cannot understand truth if it is not accompanied by a gorgeous ceremonial or an imposing hierarchy? What would He say, in presence of those believers who, when the temporal power of the Church, or her earthly possessions, are threatened, are more deeply stirred than when impiety attacks, not the walls of the temple, but the altar, not the outward edifice, but the cross, not an earthly sovereign, but Christ Himself? "See ye not all these things?" And we, brethren, can we affirm that we have never been beset by this temptation? Has our faith never been shaken when we have seen the Church feeble, obscure and despised? Have we never desired to see her receiving the homage of the world, the support of distinguished men, the authority of numbers and of public opinion? Are we as faithful to truth when it is contemned as when it enjoys the respect and consideration of men? Well, asking these outward signs is wishing to walk by sight and not by faith. Ye who want such signs, what would you have done in the days of Jesus Christ? To believe, you require the prestige of appearance; where was it at Gethsemane, at Nazareth, in the Prætorium, on Calvary? You want the antiquity of tradition, the authority of men. Where were they when the whole of the Jewish priesthood looked upon Jesus as a blasphemer, and appealed to the law? You want the support of numbers and of public opinion. Would you have found it in the midst of that people who unanimously joined in cursing Jesus, and in crying out: "Crucify, crucify!" You want the approbation of superior minds. What would you have done, had you seen the Sadducees shaking their heads and sneering at the strange spectacle of a pretended king, of a worker of miracles, who, on the cross, had not even the strength to master His anguish? To believe, you must see. What would you have seen on the Mount of Olives, what would you have seen on Golgotha? What would that extraordinary solitude, that unparalleled humiliation, that fearful agony have taught you? No, no, it is not to sight, but to faith that truth is revealed; it is to the eyes of the soul that it has ever manifested itself. You will readily agree with me, for, since Truth has appeared upon earth crucified and crowned with thorns,

man has understood that outward glory is no longer the sign by which it is to be recognised. But we may, in another way, desire to walk by sight and not by faith.

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

In the beginning, I see Him conversing with men through the medium of angels, I see constant signs and wonders; a pillar of cloud or of fire marks His presence; the thunder roars on Sinai. In one word, everything speaks to the sight; but with Jesus Christ, how everything changes! Jesus teaches us that there is a sign which more clearly attests the presence of God than all external miracles, and that this sign is love. When John, the forerunner, the prophet of the old covenant, asks of Christ: "Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" Christ, doubtless, answers by the enumeration of the prodigies He has accomplished: "The lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised up;" but He ends with these sublime words: "The poor have the Gospel preached to them." Yes, that is the strongest of proofs, the most decisive of arguments in favour of the presence of the Desire of the nations. Oh, John the Baptist, thou prophet of the old covenant, thou didst expect a glorious Messiah, and thou hast not been able to recognise that His works of love proclaim Him better than miracles or external majesty? If it be so, why should we ask for miracles? It is by faith we must walk and not by sight. No; God will not open the heavens; no, there will be given no sign to this unbelieving generation, no other sign than the sign of the cross, for he whom the cross leaves insensible, he who passes before it unsubdued, he who sees not in it the presence and the infinite mercy of God, he would not be moved though a dead man should rise

from the grave and stand before him. And ye who already believe, do not ask God for those visible signs of His intervention, for that would be as much as to say that a miracle attests the presence of God more clearly than the most striking proof He has ever given of His wondrous love; that would be as much as to say that, for you, there is something more convincing, more decisive than the astonishing sacrifice of Calvary, than the abyss of love over whose brink angels stoop wonderingly, because, in the splendours of heaven, in the abode of infinite glory, they have never beheld anything so grand or so sublime!

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

Again, we substitute sight for faith when we ask of God to mark His intervention in our life by continual deliverances, by immediate answers to our prayers. One of the many things by which Christians are often troubled is the fact that their prayers remain unanswered. If God permits this, we may rest assured that He has good reasons which we cannot understand, and, doubtless, one of these reasons is that He wishes us to walk by faith and not by sight. Imagine a life in which prayer would always be followed by immediate deliverance. What would such a life be, and who would not

long to be a Christian at that price? All would become followers of Christ, in the first place, from mere motives of interest, as the Jews who pressed around the Saviour so long as He gave them bread. How many would follow Him from love? Now, it is precisely this mercenary instinct which God wishes to destroy in our souls, for He has an infinite ambition for us. He aims at making us capable of loving Him with a disinterested love. Therefore, while He assures us that each of our prayers is heard, He seldom shows us how He means to grant our requests. Recall to mind the admirable example of the Syrophenician woman. What would she have obtained had she walked by sight only? Sight would have shown her in Jesus Christ a strange coldness, an unfeeling silence—let us be plain, a scornful indifference; and yet, she triumphs over appearances; her faith reaches beyond the countenance of Christ, and what is more striking still, beyond His words, even to His very heart.

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

These remarks, which I have applied to prayer, may also be applied to Christian activity. It is a singular but evident fact that those who have laboured most towards the progress of the kingdom of God have been men who had ceased to walk by sight. I have referred to Jesus Christ. Once again, I ask, what did He see in His ministry? What would He have done had He walked by sight? And we, brethren, what shall we do if we still desire to see, if we resemble children who, when they have buried a seed in the earth, return every instant to see whether it has not already sprung up? What become of the works undertaken in such a spirit, of the works pursued especially with a view to success? Alas! we have learned it but too

well, from many a humiliating experience! No, no, God's blessing rests only upon those who have enough confidence in His fidelity to trust Him with results, and to say with Luther: "It is Thy work, not mine." We are told that the immortal astronomer, whose penetrating genius discovered the laws of the motions of planets, saw his grand labours despised by his contemporaries. When lying upon his death-bed, and reduced to a state of extreme distress, he was asked by a friend if he did not suffer cruelly at the thought of dying without having seen his discoveries appreciated: "Friend," replied Kepler, "God has waited five thousand years till one of His creatures discovered the admirable laws which He has given to the stars, and cannot I also wait till justice be done to me?" Treasure up these words, ye who work the works of God. Act, if need be, without seeing a result, speak without being heard, love without being understood, cast your bread upon the waters, and, to win the world over to the cause of truth, walk by faith and not by sight.

There is a last lesson which may be drawn from these words. They are wrong who attempt to describe beforehand the path which the Christian is to follow. The Christian life is like an immense region which thousands of pilgrims have already travelled through; each of them has followed the way which God had traced out for him; some have found it smooth and easy, they have walked beneath a cloudless sky, and joyful hymns have been the sounds which have most often escaped their lips; others have walked through a darkness illumined by no other light than the sinister rays of terrible temptations; others have mournfully pursued their monotonous course through a dull and barren wilderness. And yet these various paths all led to the true fatherland, and no one has a right to say that the road he followed is that which all must tread; for, if this road were known, if it could be described, those who would enter upon it would walk by sight and not by faith. Let us, therefore, accept all unforeseen circumstances; let us expect that God will destroy our plans and disappoint our hopes, and whether He sends joy or sorrow, let us walk by faith, allowing Him to lead us on. If He sends us happiness, let us enjoy it without misgiving, for happiness is a mighty power; if He sends trial, let us accept it also; but in joy as well as in sorrow, let us walk by faith. Alas! need I say that we will more probably meet with trial than with pleasure? If happiness could sanctify us, God would surely not refuse it; but does it sanctify us sufficiently, does it make us meet for the invisible world? Doubtless, when by a luminous break in the cloudy sky, prosperity descends like a divine ray on a peaceful hearth, on a united family, on beloved children, the soul of the Christian, the grateful soul easily rises from the earth which the smile of God illumines to God Himself. But how often also is it not satisfied with remaining here below! How often is it satisfied with seeking God on the earth which He enlightens

with His smile! How often does it cast off faith to walk by sight only! Then the wind of trial rises, it sweeps away, it scatters that joyous home, those cherished beings. The soul seeks them upon earth where it would still see them. Alas! it finds them no more, and, earth failing it, it must needs soar heavenward. Thus faith takes the place of sight, the invisible world is enriched with the spoils of earth; the more desolate the latter grows, the more attractive heaven becomes.

This explains to us how it is that trials often burst with incredible fury against those who seemed to us to be the most holy. Formerly, perhaps, God had led them by sight; He had manifested His presence to them by evident proofs of His fatherly goodness. Thus their piety had grown, protected as it was against all rude trials; but that time is over. All these visible signs of Divine intervention have disappeared; all that was pleasant to sight is withdrawn. The stronger their Christian life becomes, the more severe and joyless it appears.

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

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

that they must walk by faith and not by sight.

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

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

thing beyond—death with its cold mystery, death with its eternal silence. Is that the good part, and is it worth our while to seek it, and sacrifice our soul to it?

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

Will you say that he is mistaken, that he is pursuing a vain dream in which his imagination wanders? Will you say that he is mistaken? I appeal to all the departed saints who have walked by faith. I appeal to their dying eyes already lit up by the beams of the eternal morning. I appeal to the words of firm assurance and of triumph which they uttered with their latest breath. Have you ever heard of a man who, on his death-bed, regretted he had walked by faith? Have you ever heard of one who, in that solemn hour, declared that his hope had been deceived? Question all those who have believed in God, from the righteous men of the old covenant to St. Paul, from St. Paul to those who left us but yesterday, and whose last words we have treasured up in our hearts; once again I ask, which of them regretted that he had pursued the invisible realities, that he had lived for eternity? Again and again have we seen men who had lived only by sight bitterly repenting, in their last hour, that they had followed mere phantoms which now escape their grasp. We have seen men to whom the world had given all it can bestow, exclaim that all is vanity. We have seen a great minister, loaded with honour, when informed on his death-bed that Louis XIV was about to visit him, answer with these fearful words: “Go and tell that man to let me alone, for if I had done for God all I have done for him, I would not now be afraid to face eternity.” Yes, in that supreme hour when illusion is an impossibility, it has a thousand times occurred that all which the world called realities has been found to be mere phantoms; it has a thousand times occurred

that human glory, fortune, pleasure have vanished like a fleeting cloud behind which eternity has unfolded itself in its frightful solemnity. But that which has never been seen, that which will never be seen, is a Christian declaring on his death-bed that his God has deceived him!

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