

# THE GOSPEL IN PARIS:

## *SERMONS*

BY THE

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OF L'ÉGLISE DE L'ÉTOILE, PARIS.

*WITH PERSONAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR*

BY THE

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## V.

### *OBEDIENCE.*

“As obedient children.”—1 PETER i. 14.

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

Why must we obey? I might answer: First of all, because obedience is the universal law, the divinely-appointed law, the law which none of God's creatures can escape. My reason tells me that a created and dependent being must serve its creator, and my experience convinces me that every earthly being, without one exception, is formed for obedience. Seek throughout the world one being that comes not under this law. In material creation you will not find a single atom which is not, at every instant of its existence, governed by a general law; if it were not so, the world would be a mere chaos. Likewise in human society; if this society subsists, it is owing to a marvellous concourse of particular obediences which all contribute to the harmony of the whole. All these things: force, necessity, instinct, interest, civil law, honour, ambition, moral law, are as many motives (why not say as many masters?) to which all beings obey. At the lowest step of the social ladder, men obey; need I demonstrate this assertion? At the summit, men obey still. The higher we rise, the greater is the weight of responsibility which we draw upon ourselves; and what is a responsible being but a being that obeys?

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

ly exchanged the willing obedience to duty for the most servile abjection.

No, the Divine laws cannot be disregarded. Sooner or later they are avenged on whoever forgets them. Now, when God created us He bid us obey. To Him directly should all obedience be paid, and then harmony would reign everywhere. By sin, man has marred this harmony, he has denied his God, but it does not necessarily follow that he escapes the necessity of obedience; he changes masters, that is all. Some, who well-nigh resemble the brute, obey mere necessity or instinct; hunger and thirst bid them "Work!" and they work; might bids them "Submit to order!" and they submit. Others, superior to the former, obey public opinion; they perform this action or that, because in the judgment of men it must be performed. This religion which, under its most common form, is the most contemptible thing in the world, may rise to the brilliant worship of honour. Above these we find the slaves of duty, but duty is incomprehensible without a God who commands and compels; for such, therefore, duty becomes a magnificent brazen idol resting upon a pedestal of clay. Finally, at the highest stage of the moral world, we find the soul that obeys the impulses of charity; but what is charity if it proceeds not from a loving God? The Christian alone directly obeys Him who is truth, right, and love. Such, brethren, is your privilege; you are no longer the slaves of passions, idols, or lifeless abstractions, but the servants of God; you alone, I dare affirm, attain the true end of existence, for you alone realise the purpose which the Creator had in view when He placed you here below. God wanted a being superior to the rest of the material creation. There were beings enough who obeyed him fatally; He wanted one who would freely respond to His love, who would freely accomplish His will. Now, what constitutes the greatness of the Christian is that he realises this intention of His Creator. That is why the Christian soul is greater than worlds. Worlds! God takes and scatters them like dust in the immensity of the heavens! They fatally obey fatal laws; but the Christian soul freely obeys the God it loves. When I say that you are born to obey, I bring before you your vocation in its grandest and most glorious character. Oh, that this thought might take full possession of the soul of the humblest Christian in this assembly! Oh, that I might make him understand that, in accomplishing his task, however small, ungrateful, and insignificant it be, but in accomplishing it for God, he understands life in its truest and most elevated sense. True, brother, in this vast *ensemble* of creation which is like the palace of the Lord, your place is, of all, the most obscure and lowly, and the thought sometimes rises in your mind: "How doth God know me?" Yes, He knows you better than the great and the noble who fill the earth with the noise of their fame, but who in reality labour for vanity, because God is not the object of their life. He knows and loves you; He approves and encourages your struggles, your efforts, your sacrifices.

Oh, you are indeed blessed, for you obey the best of masters, Him who is greater than the world, greater than the lords of the earth!

But that is not the only motive of your obedience. You are a Christian, and what are Christians but the redeemed of Jesus Christ? Take this word redeemed in its simplest, and at the same time most solemn and touching sense. God has redeemed you. You were guilty, condemned, separated from God, but you believe that, to snatch you from this fearful destiny, a wondrous act of love and sacrifice was accomplished for you eighteen centuries ago. You believe, that for you the Son of the Most High was made flesh, and that for you He became acquainted with all the infirmities and sorrows of mankind; yea, even with the anguish of condemnation and of the Father's desertion. You believe that you have been the objects of that love and of that sacrifice, and that the blood of Jesus has flowed to make you clean. Well, you who are the redeemed of Christ, you are no longer your own; you have become the property of God Himself, by a contract which the eternal Son has signed with His blood. Let those who pretend that the cursed tree tells only of pardon without obedience pass on to their everlasting condemnation; for, whoever draws near to it with a troubled conscience discovers in it a holier, more spiritual, more perfect, more inefaceable law than that which the hand of the Almighty had graven upon the marble of Sinai. Everything in the Gospel tells of obedience. "Obey," says conscience. "Obey," repeats that strange spectacle of the Son of God made flesh, suffering and learning obedience by the things which He suffered. "Obey," exclaims the Holy Victim agonising on the cross. "Obey," cries the blood which flows from His innocent brow and waters the earth. "Obey," says, in its turn, the patient and longsuffering mercy of a God who has borne with the sinner so long. Brethren, if obedience is not to be learned at the foot of the cross, why then have you gone thither? What is a faith which consists merely in words? Oh, fearful thought! The Gospel tells us, "Believe and thou shalt be saved." We may believe and yet be lost!

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

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

The obedience of the hireling, who serves God in the hope of obtaining a reward, has often been mistaken for Christian obedience. And yet, what a difference there is between the mercenary spirit and the spirit of the Gos-

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

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

might be fed. And now, because happiness has disappeared, they are angry, they rebel, they will not forgive God. If this be not the mercenary spirit, by what name will you call it? How will you style that interested hope of a servant who, in the fulfilment of duty, looks, first of all, for reward? Alas! that same spirit permeates all professions of faith; it creeps in the midst of the churches in which mercy is most faithfully preached; it glides like a serpent into the innermost recesses of the heart. Let each of us, therefore, examine himself, and ask himself if he has not harboured it in his own breast.

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

God will not be served by hirelings, neither will He be served by slaves. An obedience inspired by terror, a passive, uninspired, and loveless obedience has no value in His sight.

Servile obedience! How easy it would be for God to obtain it! For this, it were enough to open the heavens, to let loose the thunders of His wrath, to crush the rebels by the irresistible evidence of prodigy, to overthrow them by terror. Who, then, could resist Him still? What creature would be foolish enough to enter into open war with the Almighty, when one word of His mouth might plunge him into everlasting woe? God could thus have bowed beneath His yoke all rebellious wills; it has not pleased Him to do so. What is revelation, but the history of the repeated appeals made by God to the willing obedience of His creatures? An ancient poet, in a graceful figure,

said that the tempests which convulse the depths of the ocean serve only to form those precious gems which lie beneath the waters. May we not, likewise, affirm that all the plans of Providence, such as they appear to us in the Scriptures, that all God's threatenings, all His chastisements, all the trials He sends have no other aim than to produce that masterpiece of creation, that triumph of Divine love,—souls that freely consecrate themselves to God? What, in fact, is the Gospel, that wondrous mystery of the Son of God humbled, reviled, crucified, but the most solemn and touching appeal to our liberty? Do we not all read on the cross the words which the founder of the Moravian Church discovered there: "This is what I have done for thee; and thou, what hast thou done for me?" Let us not hesitate to affirm that in presence of the cross servile obedience is a derision.

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

Men speak of the effects of blind obedience. They tell us of the prodigies it has wrought. We certainly do not intend to deny them. Passive obedience is a formidable instrument of success. See what it obtains in war, when, in an instant, and on the signal of one man, it directs upon any given point the irresistible charge of thousands of soldiers. All despots have felt its power, and their loftiest ambition has been to obtain it. Nevertheless, with a profound conviction I say that I tremble when I see a man claiming and obtaining, were it with the best of intentions or in the best of causes, a power which God Himself will not use, for it is not the God of the Gospel who commands a servile or passive obedience, it is not in this that He will be glorified. You tell me of the mighty power for good which results from a vow of automatic and unreserved obedience; but have you never thought

that such a vow may with the same energy lead to evil, and this without the slightest scruple, since all the responsibility is cast by him who obeys upon the person who commands? Of those two men who, in the pale light of an evening in the sixteenth century, rise from the confessional with a peaceful brow, a calm heart, and eyes steadily fixed upon the work which awaits them, the one is about to depart, with the martyr's crown already adorning his brow, to bear the crucifix in Japan, and you exclaim: "What heroism!" but the other will direct his steps towards Holland, there to assassinate William the Silent, and I shudder with horror, for, in reality, the latter is as good a man as the former, and, both martyr and murderer have simply obeyed. Let us even suppose that this blind and passive obedience be used only for the noblest of causes, the holiness of the end will not make me forget the fatal and mortal sides of the means; and when I see that fearful instrument crushing on its passage every spontaneous burst of enthusiasm, every voluntary impulse, all the bloom of the human soul, I curse it as an instrument of death; no, not even in the service of religious truth is it allowed to break that which is the spring of the soul, and to reduce man to a state of passiveness. What though we often see the forced obedience which rests upon monastic vows, producing works which command our respect and admiration? the reason is plainly this: under the influence of public opinion, of light, and of liberty, the only domain in which it can still display its powers is that of sacrifice and charity; here it meets the vital forces of the soul, and, in all noble hearts, it transforms itself into voluntary obedience. But at all times and in all places, whenever and wherever it has escaped this control, it has become a fatal power which, in its burning zeal to bring the soul beneath the yoke of God, has produced nought but the calm of the wilderness and the peace of the grave.

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

Children! How simple yet full of deep meaning is this expression! It sums up most admirably all that is contained in the subject before us: absolute dependence upon God, holy respect and tender love. It reminds us of all the motives we have for submission, and removes whatever of servility or interest might mingle with our obedience. Children of God! This glorious title, this title of nobility, we have once lost it! If we have again entered into possession of it, it is by grace; none but Jesus Christ could have restored it to us, nought but His sacrifice could have made us accept it; consequently this word reminds us of all which is most serious and thrilling in the Gospel. I will not essay to picture what there is of unparalleled holiness

and tenderness in this relation between father and child; I long to tell you of the duties it implies; I long to tell you: Oh, ye who call the Lord your father, ye who have cast far away from you the calculations of the hireling and the fears of the slave, ye children of God, how do you obey?

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

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

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

The Christian's life is often compared in the Scriptures to a holy war. Now, in a pitched battle, all the troops have not the same part to act. If some are sent to the attack of the foe, and are thus enabled to display their valour in the thickest of the fight, there are entire regiments which, for many a long hour, are forced to remain exposed to the deadly fire of the artillery. Motionless, sword in hand, they see the enemy's bullets tracing bloody furrows in their ranks, and at eventide, well-nigh destroyed by this murderous fire, without having struck one blow, if the battle be won, no glorious trophies will they bear away from the field of slaughter, nor will their names be heard amid the enthusiastic acclamations of the multitude. Nevertheless, who would dare to say that their part was an easy one? On the contrary, it was so difficult that the best disciplined and most undaunted troops are always those which are chosen for those inglorious posts. Young men may be expected to display the enthusiastic ardour and the impetuous daring which are required to charge the foe, but veterans alone possess that calm and firm intrepidity which can coldly and unflinchingly brave an unhonoured death. Thus it is in the battle of life. If God places some in the vanguard, if He calls some to conflicts whose fame is spread far and wide, there are others whom He orders to wait and to suffer in silence and in seeming inactivity; but they all contribute to the victory, all alike serve the purposes of the Lord. Well, you whom God surely

calls to one or other of these tasks, how do you obey?

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

Such is the current of the times; now, bring into it some of those souls for which revolt has a mysterious and fascinating attraction, then judge of their temptation! There are in life terrible hours in which the independence of pride awakens in us with an extraordinary power. At such times, everything in our soul conspires to resist God. Imagination wanders away at random, it pursues its audacious dreams far beyond the limits of reason; passion springs up like a brute which starts out of its sleep and claims its prey; the intellect assumes absolute authority in the solution of all problems, and will aims at being completely self-dependent. Oh! these hours of fearful struggle, who has not known them? Then, from the depths of our pride, against God rise such murmurs as our lips dare not utter. Willingly would we say to Him: "Why hast Thou made of me a Christian? Why hast Thou given me that importunate conscience which leaves me not one moment's rest or peace? Why hast Thou raised in my path that Cross of Calvary upon which my eyes continually fall in the course of my wanderings? Why, when others are carelessly and joyfully walking according to the desires of their heart, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, why hast Thou given me such a full knowledge of the emptiness of all those joys that I can no longer share in them without remorse, and that, even in their very enjoyment, I am beset by the sentiment of their vanity? Oh! the fearful blasphemy of such thoughts! For is it not as though we said to the Almighty, in the anger of our hearts: "Thou cruel God, why hast Thou saved me?"

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

Come! But where shall we find Him? At Nazareth, obeying as a servant; in Gethsemane, exclaiming, "Not my will, but Thine;" on Golgotha,

draining to the very dregs, and for us alone, the bitter cup of anguish. Sinners, go to Him and plead your cause, if you dare. Complain at having to obey, in presence of a humbled Saviour; complain at having to bear your cross when He is nailed upon His; complain at having to suffer, when He, obedient even unto death, is compelled to exclaim, as His sole reward: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

But the number of those who are led into open rebellion is comparatively small. Few men dare thus to brave God face to face; most often we find other means of escaping Him. We apparently accept His yoke, we profess to serve Him, but we reserve to ourselves the right of obeying in our own way. The Church is full of Christians who are willing to serve God, but after their own manner, and who sacrifice their nearest duties to imaginary obligations; of Christians who, under cover of the Divine will, accomplish their own designs; we see them often pursuing with a mild but unyielding obstinacy a plan which they have fully determined in their mind; we see them setting aside the observations of their brethren, the indications of events as well as the most evident signs by which God aids our weakness; then we hear them justifying their conduct by alleging the *will of God*;—the will of God! a convenient expression indeed, but so often invoked in justification of all manner of caprices and follies, that it brings a scornful smile to the lips of the worldly. Ah! let us beware lest we profane such words, or use them too freely; let us beware lest we take the counsels of our imagination or the suggestions of our crafty hearts for Divine inspirations; for when we delude ourselves, we give up sacred things to the sneers of the scoffer. What a derisive spectacle is that of a Christian who wears the livery of obedience, and who, in reality, neglects the clearest, most evident, and most natural duties of his vocation! In order to dull his conscience, he redoubles his outward zeal, he pours forth his ardour in loud affirmations, and the name of the Lord comes all the oftener to his lips that His will is the more totally absent from his heart. Ah! when I see how frequent is this fact, I feel a fearful heart-sinking, for there is something profoundly sad in this manner of deceiving God and of imposing upon Him. Is that the policy of love? Does the heart that truly loves take pleasure in falsehood, and think you that God will be deceived by appearances of fidelity? No; your conscience is the voice of God, and, in such cases, I cannot suppose it will be silent, it must be heard. If you do not hear it, then speak to me no more of obedience, and beware lest you resemble the son in the parable who had said to his father: "I go work in thy vineyard," but whom the father found not there; beware lest the publicans and sinners go into the kingdom of God before you.

There is one more temptation which I would point out to you, and which I believe to be all the more dangerous that it proceeds neither from our

pride nor from our natural cunning, and that it seems to beset the most upright and sincere natures in preference to all others. When speaking of servile submission, we have said that obedience must, above all, be spontaneous and inward; that every action which does not proceed from a free impulse of love is worthless in the sight of God. But here is the conclusion we draw from this: When God calls us to obey we wait until an inward impulse moves us, and if it does not come, then we refuse to obey. Let us take examples. God commands us to pray—our heart is cold, we say; my prayer will be useless and formal; and we do not pray. God commands us to read His Word—our heart is dejected, the Bible would tell us nothing, and we do not read. God commands us to bear witness to our faith—our heart no longer feels the Divine realities, our words would not be the true expression of our present impressions, and we do not speak. God commands us to visit the poor and the sick—our heart is withered, we would bring them nought but fruitless and trivial consolations, and we do not visit them. Such is our temptation, such is the danger to which we are exposed, we who know so well that servile obedience has no value whatever in the eyes of God. I dare affirm that many a Christian life, which appeared to us full of strength and promise, has been shattered upon this reef.

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

our churches are full to overflowing, our works grow interesting, our gifts are multiplied, our poor are loved and cared for; tomorrow the glad tidings of the Gospel will be proclaimed in deserted sanctuaries, our works will be left to suffer, our poor will be neglected. Let us not be mistaken. Nothing can be done without rule. It is with Christian life as with a gushing stream—enclose it in a deep and narrow bed, and it will bear life and fruitfulness far and wide, it will set the most powerful machinery in motion. Allow it, on the contrary, to wander in the sands; it will soon disappear or be transformed into a fetid marsh.

We are, therefore, to obey at all times; in the day of trial as well as in the day of blessing, with tears if we cannot do so with joy, with a failing heart if ardour and enthusiasm are wanting. And who can tell but this obedience, passive and joyless in the first instance, will not soon be transformed into a cheerful accomplishment of His will? If love is the source of obedience, may we not also say that obedience is the source of love, and that we become attached to God by reason of the sacrifices we have made for Him? Experience attests this. How often have we begun painfully and with secret repugnance a sacrifice which we have achieved with tears of gratitude. How often have we fallen upon our knees, repeating words which called forth no sincere amen from our hearts; these hearts were harder than the rock, and yet, as under the blows of the prophet's rod, the waters have gushed forth, and we have risen comforted! How often have we bent our steps slowly, with a divided heart, towards the dwelling of the poor and the sick, looking perhaps for the first obstacle which might turn us away from our path, and yet we have been given strength enough to raise his drooping heart and to show him a proof of the sympathy which he sadly needed! How often, ye preachers of the Gospel, have you entered your pulpits, wondering whence you would bring forth light, you who were then passing under a dark cloud; whence you would draw forth love when your own heart was so cold, and, behold! light and grace have descended, and you have been able to bless God that your words had stirred souls and had not returned unto Him void. How often, my brother, when assailed by a sudden temptation which found you, not only disarmed, but disposed to go over to the enemy, have you fled, but with a bowed head, bearing with you the shame and remorse of a crime, the consummation of which hung merely upon a moment of hesitation and weakness; and yet, ere you had gone far, you have felt that your feet were firm upon the rock, and you have been enabled to look with disgust upon that sin which but a moment ago had seemed so full of attraction.—Such are the fruits of obedience, the fruits which it brings forth under the blessing of God!

One word more—one word to those who do not possess truth, but are still seeking it. If they ask me what are the means of obtaining faith, or of

strengthening it when once possessed, I will not hesitate to answer, Obey! Obey the call of duty, and its voice, cold and stern at first, will speak to you in accents ever more tender and persuasive; it will become truly living, and you will recognise in it the voice of God. An eloquent writer, the unhappy child of an unbelieving age, and who knew from a painful experience the influence of actions upon faith, Rousseau, wrote these beautiful words, "If thou wouldst believe in God, live in such a way that thou mayest ever need His existence." These words, so profoundly true, were but the echo of this declaration of Christ, "If any man will do the will of God, he will know that My doctrine is divine." You, therefore, who still doubt and hesitate, obey and you will believe; obey, first of all, the moral teaching of Christ, the holiness of which your conscience affirms, and you will believe in Christ. Obey truth, and truth will enlighten you. Until then you will discuss in vain, ever seeking but finding never, causing the needle of the balance in which you are weighing your objections to oscillate according to your fleeting impressions, and ignoring that this balance will incline on the side of a positive faith only on the day when you will have cast in the full weight of your obedience. Live in such a way that you may always need to believe that justice, holiness, and the love of God are realities, and you will always believe in them; the greater the sacrifices you will make for truth, the dearer will truth be to you. Give up for it the factitious splendour of lying vanities, and your eyes being opened, they will see it shine with a pure and serene light which will enchant them more and more. Give up for it all the coarse pleasures of the flesh, the evil joys of pride, the delightful illusions of self-love, and you will find in it compensations which you have never dreamed of. O Divine truth! thou hidest thyself from the proud reason which seeks in Thee mere food for its curiosity—for it Thou wilt ever remain an impenetrable mystery—but to those who will hear Thy voice only that they may follow it, to those who call Thee only that they may obey Thee, to those Thou revealest Thyself ever grander, more sublime, more adorable, and all the sacrifices which Thou requirest of them are nothing in comparison with the pure, profound, and infinite joy with which Thou fillest their heart!