

## VIII.

## A Dying Man's Regrets.

## 6. SOLICITUDE ABOUT TRIFLING INTERESTS.

FEBRUARY 10, 1856.

MY well beloved, who give me a proof of your fraternal affection in again coming to partake with me of the Lord's Supper, one of the things that would trouble the mind of a man who is contemplating death as at hand, if he were not encouraged in this, as in everything else, by the free grace of God in Jesus Christ, is the recollection of that part of his life that has been lost, if it has not been more than lost, in trifling matters, instead of being occupied by the great interests that alone ought to be constantly before the eyes of a Christian. For this reason I wish to call your attention for a few moments to the great evil of the Christian occupying himself too much with trifling interests. But here let me explain that we must not confound the undue preoccupation about trifling interests, with the necessary attention due to little things. We are required by God to busy ourselves about a multitude of little things, for it is especially of such that life is made up. The manner in which we fulfil our smaller duties is a measure of our piety, quite as true, and sometimes even more true, than the manner in which we fulfil the greater duties—because in little things we have only God, ourselves, and our family for witnesses; whereas in the accomplishment of the greater duties we are, as it were, upon a theatre where our pride may find but too much satisfaction in seeing itself flattered. Besides, nothing is either great or small in itself; it only becomes so by the spirit in which it is carried out. In the eyes of God, what we call little is often as great as what we call the greatest, and what we call great as little as what we call the least, since God is infinite and eternal. A faithful servant who, for the love of God, takes an affectionate care of the child confided to her by her master, performs an act which is very great in the sight of God, and will have its reward; and a statesman who, from self-love, aspires to the highest honours of wisdom and eloquence, does what seems very little in the sight of God, and may draw down upon him more shame in heaven than glory upon earth. What is really important is, to carry into all we do a great and elevated mind, always turned towards God, and disposed to do all in the view of eternity; so that, having God constantly present in our hearts, He may likewise always appear present in our words and actions—so that there may be nothing little, or terrestrial, or transitory in our whole life.

The example of God himself may serve to illustrate what I have just said. God makes no difference in the care He takes of great or little things. He forms a blade of grass or a flake of snow with as much care as He takes in ordering the proportions, the connexions, and the movements of the planets; and whether He makes a grain of sand or a Mont Blanc, He does it in a godlike manner—that is to say, perfectly. But this God, who sees nothing too small to

deserve His attention, always has in view, even in His smallest works as well as in the greatest, eternity, His own kingdom, and glory; as He said himself, "I have created them for my glory." And there is absolutely nothing in all God's works, whether moral or physical, in which He has not manifested the immense weight of His infinite care and eternal interest. It was the same with Jesus—God made visible. Not only did He not neglect the poor little children that were brought to Him, and whom the apostles considered it beneath Him to bless, but He did not neglect even the fragments of bread and fish that remained, and would not allow anything to be lost, although He had just shown that He could by a word, or even without a word, multiply the loaves and fishes at His will. And this is the same Jesus who accomplished the most prodigious works in His incarnation—in His redemption—in His passion—in His resurrection—and in His glorious ascension. But He does all in the same spirit; and whether He becomes incarnate, or ransoms us, or dies for us, or rises again, or ascends up to heaven—whether He stops to bless the little children, or to gather up the fragments of bread and fish, or to address the least word of consolation to the afflicted, or to offer a glass of cold water to one that is thirsty—He has always in view in each of His actions, God, eternity, and the glory of His Father; and it is in this light that Jesus Christ appears to us in all His works, as always having His head in heaven, although His feet were upon the earth, and saying of himself, "He who is in heaven." As all is great and noble in His soul, so also are all His works and thoughts.

Well, my dear friends, this is the example proposed for our imitation; it is thus that we should walk, always occupied, not with the little interests of the earth, still less with its lusts and sins, but with God, His glory, His love, and the work of Jesus Christ for the glory of God, and the salvation of men, as well as for our own. Made in the image and resemblance of God, we ought to be His followers; and in the least as well as in the greatest concerns of life, our predominant thought should always be God and eternity. Whatever the Christian may say or do, he should be always great before God, who weighs true grandeur. Painters represent the saints with a glory around them; there is nothing of the kind in Scripture, excepting for one saint in the Old Testament—this is the only exception. The saints carry their glory within them, and diffuse it wherever they pass. The Christian—wherever he is seen, in the street, in the drawing-room, at table, in prison, or at the height of greatness—should always inspire others with the opinion that he is a man seeking God, intent upon advancing the great interests of humanity, and who thinks it is not worth living for anything but to glorify God, and make all his successes and all his reverses contribute to that end; who is ready to leave this world as soon as his work in this respect is accomplished, and, like his Master, goes about doing good. Oh! how holy, how happy would such a Christian be, free from covetousness, from envy, from anxiety, and all that can disturb the soul! Walking always with God, how would he make the gospel honoured! how victoriously would he put to silence gainsayers! and how many more souls would he bring to his Saviour by the humble influence of a holy life, than by the most powerful language!

But where are such Christians to be found? my God, where are they? How much easier it would be to find sincere men—true Christians, I mean—who, if they were called out of this world, would resign their souls into the Lord's hands—who really wait upon Him, but who allow themselves to be led away and unduly occupied by trifling interests—by the love of money—by the thirst for human glory—by their jealousy of a competitor—by the ardent desire for personal success—by an ambition that leads them beyond the path that God has marked out for them—by impatience under suffering—by their repugnance to submit to humiliations and crosses—by the great vexation that a word, perhaps even a word misunderstood, may cause them, or an insignificant accident, which at their death, perhaps even in an hour, will have left no trace! O my God, how few in number are consistent Christians! And this is the reason, my friends, that the gospel is so often compromised by those who profess it, and that it is so often said that, after all, the Christians pursue the same interests that others pursue, and that what disturbs others disturbs them too. And it is in this way, my friends, that the gospel is so often wounded by those who seek their peace and salvation in it, and who ought to employ all they have of life or strength to glorify God, going forward with their head elevated—their head in heaven like Jesus, while their feet are upon the earth—but breathing in heaven and finding there the spring of all their actions and the strength of all their life.

If you knew, my friends, how all these illusions disappear when death approaches—how very little all that is little appears—how that alone which is great before God appears great—how much we regret not having lived for God as Jesus lived, and how much we wish, if we had to begin life again, to live a more serious life, more full of Jesus Christ, of His Word, of His example, if you knew it, you would at this moment put your hand to the work, you would supplicate God to make your conduct consistent with your sentiments and your faith; you would succeed in your efforts, as so many have succeeded, because they cried to God, and formed sincere resolutions before Him: and this handful of God's children now assembled in this room, around this bed of suffering, and probably of death, these Christians, with all their miseries and all their languor, would do more for the advancement of God's kingdom, and for the good of humanity, than a compact crowd possessing all possible gifts; and they would do things so much the greater, that all thoughts of vainglory would be for ever banished from their heart. This is my ardent prayer for you, and it is the prayer that I entreat you to offer to God for me, that during the time that still remains for me, whether it be long or short, I may think only of living for the glory of God and for the good of my fellow-men, which will at the same time be living for my own eternal happiness. Amen.