

stacles are multiplied to weaken, and, if possible, to destroy the beneficent action of the Church! And, meanwhile, as if to add derision to injustice, the Church herself is charged with having lost her pristine vigor, and with being powerless to stem the tide of overflowing passions, which threaten to carry everything away.

We would wish, Venerable Brothers, to entertain you with subjects less sad, and more in harmony with the great and auspicious occasion which induces Us to address you. But nothing suggests such a tenor of discourse—neither the grievous trials of the Church which call with instance for prompt remedies; nor the conditions of contemporary society which, already undermined from a moral and material point of view, tend toward a yet more gloomy future by the abandonment of the great Christian traditions; a law of Providence, confirmed by history, proving that the great religious principles cannot be renounced without shaking at the same time the foundation of order and social prosperity. In those circumstances, in order to allow souls to recover, to furnish them with a new provision of faith and courage, it appears to Us opportune and useful to weigh attentively, in its origin, causes and various forms, the implicable war that is waged against the Church; and in denouncing its pernicious consequences to indicate a remedy. May our words, therefore, resound loudly, though they but recall truths already asserted; may they be hearkened to, not only by the children of Catholic unity, but also by those who differ from Us, and even by the unhappy souls who have no longer any faith; for they are all children of one Father, all destined for the same supreme good; may Our words, finally, be received as the testament which, at the short distance that separates Us from eternity, We would wish to leave to the people as a presage of the salvation which We desire for all.

During the whole course of her history the Church of Christ has had to combat and suffer for truth and justice. Instituted by the Divine Redeemer Himself, to establish throughout the world the Kingdom of God, she must, by the light of the Gospel law, lead fallen humanity

to its immortal destinies; that is, to make it enter upon the possession of the blessings without end Which God has promised us, and to which our unaided natural power could never rise—a heavenly mission in the pursuit of which the Church could not fail to be opposed by the countless passions begotten of man's primal fall and consequent corruption—pride, cupidity, unbridled desire of material pleasures; against all the vices and disorders springing from those poisonous roots the Church has ever been the most potent means of restraint. Nor should we be astonished at the persecutions which have arisen in consequence, since the Divine Master foretold them and they must continue as long as this world endures. What words did he address to His disciples when sending them to carry the treasure of His doctrines to all nations? They are familiar to us all: "You will be persecuted from city to city, you will be hated and despised for My Name's sake; you will be dragged before the tribunals, and condemned to extreme punishment." And wishing to encourage them for the hour of trial, He proposed Himself as their example: "If the world hate you, know ye that it hath hated Me before you." (St. John xv. 18.)

Certainly, no one, who takes a just and unbiased view of things, can explain the motive of this hatred. What offence was ever committed, what hostility deserved by the Divine Redeemer? Having come down amongst men through an impulse of Divine charity, He had taught a doctrine that was blameless, consoling most efficacious to unite mankind in a brotherhood of peace and love; He had coveted neither earthly greatness nor honor; He had usurped no one's right; on the contrary, he was full of pity for the weak, the sick, the poor, the sinner and the oppressed; hence His life was but a passage to distribute with munificent hand His benefits amongst men. We must acknowledge, in consequence, that it was simply by an excess of human malice, so much the more deplorable because unjust that, nevertheless, He became, in truth, according to the prophecy of Simeon, "a sign to be contradicted."

What wonder, then, if the Catholic Church, which continues His Divine mission, and is the incorruptible depositary