

PATRIOTISM

My dearest brethren, I desire to utter, in your name and my own, the gratitude of those whose age, vocation, and social conditions cause them to benefit by the heroism of others, without bearing in it any active part.

When, immediately on my return from Rome, I went to Havre, to greet our Belgian, French, and English wounded; when, later, at Malines, at Louvain, at Antwerp, it was given to me to take the hands of those brave men who carried a bullet in their flesh, a wound on their forehead, because they had marched to the attack of the enemy, or borne the shock of his onslaught, it was a word of gratitude to them that rose to my lips. "O valiant friends," I said, "it was for us, it was for each one of us, it was for me, that you risked your lives and are now in pain. I am moved to tell you of my respect, of my thankfulness, to assure you that the whole nation knows how much she is in debt to you."

For in truth our soldiers are our saviours.

A first time, at Liege, they saved France; a second time, in Flanders, they arrested the advance of the enemy upon Calais. France and England know it; and Belgium stands before them both, and before the entire world, as a nation of heroes. Never before in my whole life did I feel so proud to be a Belgian as when, on the platforms of French stations, and halting a while in Paris, and visiting London, I was witness of the enthusiastic admiration our Allies feel for the heroism of our Army. Our King is, in the esteem of all, at the very summit of the moral scale; he is doubtless the only man who does not recognize that fact, as, simple as the simplest of his soldiers, he stands in the trenches and puts new courage, by the serenity of his face, into the hearts of those of whom he requires that they shall not doubt of their country. The foremost duty of every Belgian citizen at this hour is gratitude to the Army.

If any man had rescued you from shipwreck or from a fire, you would assuredly hold yourselves bound to him by a debt of everlasting thankfulness. But it is not one man, it is two hundred and fifty thousand men who fought, who suffered, who fell for you so that you might be free, so that Belgium might keep her independence, her dynasty, her patriotic unity; so that after the vicissitudes of battle she might rise nobler, purer, more erect, and more glorious than before.

Pray daily, my brethren, for these two hundred and fifty thousand, and for their leaders to victory; pray for our brethren in arms; pray for the fallen; pray for those who are still engaged; pray for the recruits who are making ready for the fight to come.

In your name I send them the greeting of our fraternal sympathy and our assurance that not only do we pray for the success of their arms and for the eternal welfare of their souls, but that we also accept for their sake all the distress, whether physical or moral, that falls to our own share in the oppression that hourly besets us, and all that the future may have in store for us, in humiliation for a time, in anxiety and in sorrow. In the day of final victory we shall all be in honor; it is just that to-day we should all be in grief.

To judge by certain rumors that have reached me, I gather that from districts that have had least to suffer some bitter words have arisen towards our God, words which, if spoken with cold calculation, would be not far from blasphemous.

Oh, all too easily do I understand how natural instinct rebels against the evils that have fallen upon Catholic Belgium; the spontaneous thought of mankind is ever that virtue should have its instantaneous crown, and injustice its immediate retribution. But the ways of God are not our ways, the Scripture tells us, Providence gives free way, for a time measured by Divine wisdom, to human passions and the conflict of desires. God, being eternal, is patient. The last word is the word of mercy, and it belongs to those who believe in love. "Why art thou sad, O my soul? and why dost thou disquiet me? *Quare tristis es anima, et quare conturbas me?*" "Hope in God. Bless Him always; is He not thy Saviour and thy God? *Spera in Deo quoniam ad huc confitebor illi, salutare vultus mei et Deus meus.*" (Psalm xlii, 5.)

When holy Job, whom God presented as an example of constancy to the generations to come, had been stricken, blow upon blow, by Satan, with the loss of his children, of his goods, of his health, his enemies approached him with incitations to rebellion; his wife urged upon him a blasphemy and a curse. "Dost thou still continue in thy simplicity? Curse God, and die." (Job ii, 9.) But the man of God was unshaken in his confidence. "And he said to her Thou hast spoken like one of the foolish women: if we have received good things at the hand of God, why should we not receive evil? *Dominus dedit, Dominus abstulit; sicut Domino placuit ita factum est. Sit nomen Domini benedictum.*" (Job ii, 10; i, 21.) And experience proved that saintly one to be right. It pleased the Lord to recompense, even here below, his faithful servant. "The Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before. And for his sake God pardoned his friends." (Job xlii, 8, 10.)

WHAT BELGIUM HAS SUFFERED

Better than any other man, perhaps, do I know what our unhappy country has undergone. Nor will any Belgian, I trust, doubt of what I suffer in my soul, as a citizen and as a Bishop, in sympathy with all this sorrow. These four last months have seemed to me age-long. By thousands have our brave ones been mown down; wives, mothers, are weeping for those they shall never see again; hearths are desolate; dire poverty spreads, anguish increases. At Malines, at Antwerp, the people of two great cities have been given over, the one for six hours, the other for thirty-four hours, of a continuous bombardment, to the throes of death. I have traversed the greater part of the districts most terribly devastated in my diocese (7); and the

(7) Duffel, Lierre, Berlaer Saint Rombaut, Konings Hoyck, Mortsel, Waelhem, Muysen, Wavre Sainte-Catherine, Wavre Notre-Dame, Sempst, Weerde, Eppeghen, Hofstade, Flewy, Rymenam, Eoort Maerbeck, Wespelaer, Haecht, Wechter-Wackerzael, Rotselaer, Tremeloo; Louvain and its suburban environs, Blauwput, Kessel-Loo, Boven-Loo, Linden, Herent, Thildonck, Bueken, Relst, Aerschot, Wesemael, Hermselt, Diest, Schaffen, Molenstede, Rillaer, Gelrode.