

OUR LADY OF VICTORIES

'ADVERSITY,' wrote Francis Bacon, 'like a toad ugly and venomous, yet holds a precious jewel in its head.' In our present adversity the ugliness and venom bulk so large that the precious jewel, the one redeeming feature best calculated to afford consolation, may be easily missed. To the thoughtful mind, and especially to the religious mind that is rooted in God as the one sure foundation of all things, this consoling side can most easily be seen in a comparison between the sort of victory that most were looking for and the kind of victory that must now be won.

Most people began with a short-sighted view of the war as a conflict for supremacy between certain combinations of nations. They hoped that we had a better combination than our opponents, and that in the long run we should beat them by the weight of our resources and superior position rather than, necessarily, in the field. That seemed the easiest way and the least painful to ourselves. It was but human nature to hope for victory without great suffering to ourselves. Such a view, however, misses both the deeper underlying nature of the conflict and the fact that such a victory would have no more chance, rather considerably less, of solving the real problems than did the victory of 1918. Not peace, but an armed truce would be again the state of the world.

True it was said, and rightly said, from the beginning of the war that we were fighting for no selfish gain to ourselves, but for the fundamental principles of truth and justice, freedom and the right to live without the constant fear of aggression. Words come easily to the lips, but much more hardly comes their true import to the heart. How many of this nation, who talked readily of our lofty aims, actually realised the true meaning and implication

of truth, justice, freedom and the rights of man? Certainly these notions did not immediately suggest to all minds the Supreme Maker and Ruler of all things and His Eternal Law on which they are based. Neither did all realise that unless their own individual lives are built upon and regulated by these fundamental principles, plus the great Christian law of Charity, and so orientated towards God as their first beginning and their last end, they cannot be said truly to be fighting for them.

But now that the whole character of the war has changed in our regard, people are beginning to realise more—with a realisation that will increase the more we are called on to suffer—that the conflict is much deeper than a mere conflict of nations for some political or territorial gain; that it is a battle between the forces of good and evil. The evil is materialism run riot, the apotheosis of brute force, and it demands from men that which by right belongs to God, the absolute submission of their wills. It is in these last few weeks of war that we have come to see what this evil means in practice. The sanctity of truth has been violated by the wholesale breaking of treaties and of the most solemn pledges. Justice, freedom, and the rights of men and nations, whose only crime was that they stood in the way of a Dictator, have gone down in a welter of blood and agony. We can now see more clearly what those principles mean and how necessary they are for the proper adjustment of the relations of man to man, by seeing the results of their ruthless abandonment.

Because we are opposed to these things by our best instincts we find ourselves fighting the instigators of such evil. We find ourselves fighting in a good cause; defending the Christian principles on which our civilisation was built and which have continued to inhere in it, however deeply buried, and that, at a time when so many have forgotten the very meaning of those principles as applied to their own living. For our nation, too, is not without grievous guilt. God has long ceased to have due part in

its councils, and some of its laws run counter to the immutable laws of God. Its greatest sin is that it has deliberately banished religion from the education of its children and so has brought forth godless citizens. Moreover, only a short time before the calamity of war fell upon the world our so-called Christian country extended its hospitality to the emissaries of Satan who met for their godless and anti-God congress in our midst. The only religious body that protested was the Catholic Church, but, like the voice crying in the wilderness, it was unheeded.

So to-day while we are fighting for right and justice and truth, and therefore are on the side of God and goodness, yet many of the nation have still to be converted and to turn to God in their hearts. And if in truth we are fighting for the right we shall pursue it to a successful issue only so far as the God of right is on our side, only if we are His faithful liegemen in the battle.

We should never have learnt this lesson from the kind of war and the kind of victory that the many may first have looked for. But the kind of war we have now to fight, and the kind of victory we have now to gain, can only be gained with the help of God. It will necessitate a conversion to God. The victory will be the victory of good over evil, and the good can triumph over evil only through suffering and seeming failure, as Calvary unmistakably teaches; thus that victory will be acknowledged to have come from God, to God will go the honour and the thanks, and on God the future world will be built. The jewel of consolation, therefore, that lies amidst our adversity is to realise that herein is the means, the divine way, to true victory.

The great task before every Catholic, and every believing Christian, of this country is to help the whole nation to take this way in its hour of peril. We know that the good cannot perish, but we may well believe that God is waiting until that moment when the chastened heart of the nation turns to Him.

Neither does turning to God and trusting in Him mean lessening our material war effort. If our cause is right and just, then by using spiritual arms and strengthening our spiritual armaments, we do the one thing that will cause God to bless our fighting forces and give them the ultimate victory. It is a fallacy common to the non-Catholic mind, by which also many Catholics are affected, that the appropriate time for prayer arrives when all hope, humanly speaking, is lost. To have recourse to prayer before such an extremity arises is, it is thought, to be defeatist. But once we have realised the true nature of the conflict, we shall realise that material arms and brute force belong to a department in which the prince of this world and the powers of darkness excel. Some may well think that the course of the war during these last few weeks seems to show something more cataclysmic than mere human ingenuity could devise and accomplish in the time. If we believe that we are fighting a profoundly evil thing, we should not find it hard to believe that Satan, the spirit of evil, will extend his utmost aid to the material instruments of its growth and domination.

If we have real faith in God, we must also believe in the power of the evil one. But we must also see the most effective weapon that can be used to defeat the satanic power over material things is the higher, nay the supreme and infinite power from which all things, even Satan himself, depend. We must trust first and foremost in this power, the power of God and His goodness, and then in ourselves and our armaments as the instruments of God in the cause of justice and freedom.

Some of the most decisive battles of the world which have saved Christian civilization have thus been won. In what other way could they be won, if they are to achieve not only the defeat of an enemy who is being used by the powers of evil, but, more important still, the triumph of God and the principles of Christianity on which civilization is founded? The history of God's dealings with His

chosen people, as set down for us in the Old Testament, is our best commentary upon the way in which God has dealt with the world in ages past and is dealing with it to-day. This people won their greatest victories and secured their most dramatic deliverances when they trusted their small armies to Jahweh, the Lord of Hosts. But when they went aside after 'strange gods,' and sought safety in foreign alliances with pagan powers, then they knew defeat and bondage until they turned again, repentant, to God. At the last they failed Him, not knowing in their blindness and hardness of heart that the coming of the Saviour was not to decide whether the Jews or the Romans should rule this world, but whether Satan should continue victorious against God in regard to man. And for the accomplishment of His divine purpose God chose not the power and wisdom of man, but the gentleness of a maiden and the folly of the Cross.

It was God, and not the Church of God, that first chose Mary and exalted her to the unique position which she occupies both as the Mother of the Word Incarnate and as the second Eve, and therefore the spiritual Mother of all the faithful children of God. The office of the Church has merely been to define and to make more explicit these facts of Holy Scripture, so that all men might see and believe. Thus, because the Archangel Gabriel, God's messenger, proclaimed to her and to the world 'the Holy that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God,' Mary was defined by the Council of Ephesus to be the 'Mother of God.' Because the same messenger in the Name of God hailed her as 'full of grace' and 'blessed amongst women,' the Church in modern times has defined the doctrine of Mary's 'Immaculate Conception.' Only if she were so conceived without sin could she be 'full of grace' and so fitted to be the Mother of the Most High. Catholics have often been accused of paying an exaggerated honour to Our Lady, as if they put her on a par with God and adored her. What they do in reality is to try to give her honour

appropriate to the dignity which God Himself bestowed upon her, and to endeavour to sustain the standard of honour He Himself showed her when He sent His angelic messenger to address to her the first 'Hail Mary.' By reason of her perfect and sinless nature, and her exalted dignity as Mother of God, no honour, *short of divine honour*, can be too great to pay her. And because she is also our spiritual Mother it is an obvious course for us to seek her powerful intercession with God on our behalf. If she was the instrument of God in giving to men His greatest Gift, it is to be expected that she will have her part in obtaining all those lesser favours which come through the Saviour and are necessary for the salvation of body and soul.

Thus throughout all the Christian ages it is to the intercession of Mary that men have turned in the hour of their greatest need. Especially was this so when, from time to time, the power of evil became so strong that it threatened the very foundations of civilization, and Christian life was threatened with extinction. One of the most striking instances in this connection was the great battle of Lepanto, when Europe was saved from the hordes of Islam. The story of that epic victory of the Christian fleet is a fact of history enshrined and commemorated in the Feast of the Holy Rosary; for none could deny that it was in truth a miracle granted in answer to the intercessions of the Pope and his people made by means of that prayer.

We are faced to-day with a situation graver than any in past ages, for the future freedom and happiness not merely of Europe but of the whole world is involved. The stake at issue is higher, our extremity is greater, and that not only from a material point of view, but because the world of to-day lacks faith in God. For the faith that is wanted is the faith that wills to move mountains, the faith that demands miracles, and falters not when it realises what it is asking. But that is the faith that will go to Mary and

secure her powerful intercession on our behalf. If we are humble enough to be conscious of our own sins and unworthiness before God, we shall see the sense and the need of having on our side her who is worthy to stand in the sight of God and to ask favours because she is without stain and 'full of grace.' The first of Our Lord's miracles was worked at her request. We might not think that occasion worthy of a miracle, yet her sympathetic soul did so think, and at her request it was granted. It is deliberate blindness to maintain that the age of miracles is past, for Our Lady constantly makes her power apparent, showing that miracles can be obtained through her by those who ask with confidence and faith. Lourdes is a sign that cannot be contradicted. But perhaps in our present extremity it is to Walsingham, the home of Our Lady in England, that the eyes of all England should turn, or be turned. And because the majority of this people knows not Mary, it is for those who do know and love her to show them the way back to her shrine. This is the time, when the people is sore beset and in need of help, to put forth our utmost effort, that all may lift up their eyes to the mountains of God's power and majesty whence help will come. It should not be hard to persuade them that Our Lady, and perhaps her ancient shrine of Walsingham, will provide the way.

There was a time in England when at a crisis such as the present one every mind and heart would have turned to her for help and pilgrims would have bent their steps to that shrine to present to her there a confident petition on their own behalf and on behalf of their fatherland. If it were only a material victory that we sought, we might well be content to trust in the might and steadfastness of England. But because it is so much more than this, because the victory must be spiritual as well as material, the whole people must awaken, or be awakened, to the need of mobilising all our spiritual forces as we have mobilised all our material forces. It is the urgent duty of Catholics,

and of all those who realise the essential role of Our Lady in the divine economy of Redemption, to embark upon a whole-hearted campaign of prayer to her, and through her to her Son, and to be ready, when opportunity offers, to join and cause others to join in some national demonstration of devotion and confidence towards her who has been called, not without good cause, Our Lady of Victories.

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