

FRÉDÉRIC
O Z A N A M

By

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Of the Friars Preachers

PARIS, 1856
Jacques Lecoffre et C^e, Libraires
Rue du Vieux-Colombier, 29

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PARIS. — Imp. Simon Raçon et Comp., rue d'Erfurto, 1

**Translated by the Brothers CHRISTIAN,
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FRÉDÉRIC OZANAM [1813-1853]

In relating the life of Agricola, Tacitus begins in this way:

“It is an age-old custom to transmit to posterity the actions and ways of illustrious men, and our age itself, although little interested in its own glories, yet did not fail to follow this example every time that a noteworthy virtue was able to overcome the usual fault of the greatest as well as of the most mediocre cities, namely, ignorance and envy of the beautiful. As for our fathers, just as there was a preference to complete matters worthy of being remembered, it was also a predilection to make them renowned, with no other ambition than to satisfy in one’s conscience the taste for the good. Moreover, writing one’s own life was attributed to an exalted conviction rather than to pride. Neither Rutilius nor Scaurus, in publishing theirs, incurred the reproach of their century, or inspired an inferior belief, so easy was it to appreciate virtue in those times which could easily bring it about. As for me, as I prepare to relate the life of a deceased individual, I had to be careful to justify my doing so.”

Just as Tacitus — if I have to justify myself — I want to say something about the life of a dead man, of a man who had in common with Agricola the acquisition of a glory which foretold an even greater one: that of his sudden disappearance, free from stain and incomplete, at the threshold of a universal admiration. Both of them were soldiers, one in the camps of Rome, the other in the camps of Christ; their youth was solid, their services favorable, their reputation unblemished, their demise premature and yet timely, their memory inspiring. Those animated traits from the pen of Tacitus unwittingly called to my mind that in Frédéric Ozanam we had lost the Christian Agricola — a loss made more cruel regarding this recipient of otherwise tender and lasting praise by virtue of faith, the highest attachment of souls, which was the principle of virtues and friendships that we miss in our Agricola. Had there been between us only the glow of devotion to the cause of God, that would have been enough for me to experience the generous envy about which Tacitus speaks, and to be charmed by his glory, with no other ambition, in celebrating it, than the delight of my conscience. But Ozanam, who was for all of us an eminent Christian, was for me even more so. His hand had approached mine, and his spirit, for twenty years, had been the faithful host of the regions where my spirit resided. We lived in the same truth, but also in the same century, in the same misgivings and in the same aspirations. When coming down from the eternal duties and summits, we would meet again below, where shadows begin, where doubts are possible, and where faith itself is no longer strong enough to hold together hearts closely embraced.

I am not the only person who was moved by this destiny so abruptly extinguished. A generation of men, young at the time but today more mature, had heard Ozanam's voice and had read his writings. He was for that generation an eloquent guide, a congenial apostle. In speaking about him, I

will speak for that generation; I will discharge its debt along with mine, and perhaps together we will erect a monument which will recall some golden days and nourish more than one virtue.

I

I have to go back many years to rediscover the time when I first saw Ozanam. I had not yet begun teaching, which soon thereafter would provide me with some followers and friends. Struck by lightning at the onset of my public life, separated from a renowned man — in whom I had believed to find the prodigy of behavior and of thought — I struggled in my mind with some painful uncertainties and dreadful forebodings. From what little renown I had acquired in premature contests, there flowed some bitterness which would have shattered my existence if some generous and always faithful attachments had not taken root in the very solitude where misfortune had rejected me. Ozanam was not among those first friends whom the remembrance of misfortune renders so dear; but he came at that very hour as the vanguard of the young men who would soon, by encircling my pulpit, relieve me of my troubles.

What did he [Ozanam] want from me? It was not the light of faith that he sought from me. At no time had the breath of a real doubt tarnished the brightness of his soul. A child of France by the blood he had inherited, he was also a child of Italy by his cradle. Nor was it in vain that, for his baptism, the city of Saint Ambrose and that of Saint Irenaeus had combined their traditions. He bore within himself the influence of two skies and two

sanctuaries. Lyons anointed him with a serious piety, Milan with something of a more fiery temperament. Far from weakening with age, these two springs of fervor had grown with the nourishment of a strong education. Ozanam had experienced the happiness of encountering at the end of his literary studies a teacher able to awaken his reasoning powers. By introducing him to the same viewpoints as those of faith concerning man, an eminent philosopher had brought about in his intellect that all-powerful agreement of discoveries and of aptitudes which enlarge and strengthen each other, making of the Christian a wise man, of the sage, a being who does not puff himself up either because of knowledge or of virtue. Such was Ozanam when he came into my room and sat down near my fireplace for the first time. It was in the winter of 1833-1834. He must have been twenty years old.

I do not recall being struck by anything about his person. He did not bear the comeliness of youth. Pale like the residents of Lyons, of unimposing height and indifferent carriage, his countenance cast lightning bolts from his eyes and retained nonetheless an overall expression of gentleness. Over a noble forehead, a head of thick and long black hair gave him a rather untamed countenance which, if I am not mistaken, the Latins conveyed by the term *incomptus* [rough]. His speech did not leave me with any memory at all. And yet, either I was made to notice him as a young man with expectations, or his fame has since revived my memory; I can picture him very well in the place where he was and such as he was.

So, what did he want from me? A weighty concern for a young man are those first meetings with men not of his own age, who came before him in life, and from whom he hopes, without really knowing why, to receive a friendly reception. Until then, he had only lived for the coddling of his family

and the informalities of his comrades. He did not see the man in himself; he had not arrived at the painful shore where so many waves deposit bitter plants and dig rough furrows. He is inexperienced, yet he believes. Moreover, for him, I was not a man, I was a priest. The child who has opened himself up to a priest retains from the experience an intuition of closeness. What a female is for a heart that arouses passions, so the priest is for the heart which works at becoming pure. And so, Ozanam came to me because he was a Christian, and because I was a minister and a representative of his faith, about whom he had been informed. But he also came, perhaps, by a sympathy of another order, a sympathy which in his mind was linked to everything he held most dear in the world: his faith, his homeland, truth, the good, the future of Christianity, and the future of truth.

II

No doubt there is nothing here below that walks on an equal footing with Jesus Christ and his Church. Empires are transformed, contests change, opinions waste away following a certain course, and the one who seeks to subordinate the destinies of the Gospel to human affairs — as holy and sacred as they may be — is like to a navigator who, when he encounters an island sitting on a rock in the depths of the ocean, would like to fasten it to his vessel and bring it from shore to shore under a new sky. But although grace is superior to nature, it is not foreign to nature; nature itself has laws which emanate from God and share in His immutability. Because Jesus Christ is God and the Church is his work, one must not therefore conclude that the world is nothing: indeed the world also has God as its author; it, too, rests on

eternal principles. It is from the coordinated movement of both — of the world and of the Church — that there follow the peace of both, the harmony of creation and of redemption, and finally, the beauty of the work which will become brighter by the light of day together with the light of Christ. Aware of these matters, even if the Christian places grace above nature, the Church above the world, he does not separate them in his thoughts and in his activity. And yet, if he does seem to separate them, to a certain degree and in a certain sense, it is only to unite them better by defending them from dangerous clashes. Thus, when the Roman Empire was on the verge of ruin, the popes — who were not unaware of the weakness of human behavior — continued to busy themselves with saving this large body. They endured the blows inflicted on them, because they saw in the Empire a principle of order, although corrupt, a guardian shelter, although antiquated. Others, such as Salvius, convinced that the restoration of the Empire was impossible and that it was no more than a cadaver tied to the flanks of the Church, called with their entreaties the children of the North, a barbarian race, it is true, but a brand new one, which allowed Christianity to found with them a society rejuvenated in its two sources: human virility and divine potency. Future events proved Salvius to be correct. Indeed, in these matters, when time projects itself onto eternity, the Church no longer has the same assurance to sustain itself in an established behavior; moreover, from one pope to another, from one century to another, the appearance of things can vary. Time reveals the concerns of time, just as eternity reveals the concerns of eternity. And yet, despite the difference between the two orders, they are not any less interconnected. Everything which interests human society interests divine society, and conversely, everything which interests divine society also interests human society — both are made up of men, and, indeed, of the same men.

Accordingly, when Ozanam did enter into the adult world, full of zeal and faith, he encountered there, like his forebears of all ages, a temporal question next to the eternal question. Had he been born two hundred years earlier, he would have had to choose to be for the League or for the King; to follow the popular movement which opposed a heretical prince, or to join the near totality of the bishops of France who remained faithful to the inheritance of blood. Having come later, he, too, had to choose. A revolution had changed the world, and had changed the situation of the Church in the world. Stripped of its possessions, banished from public affairs, deprived of a human arm to uphold its beliefs and laws, the Church once again saw itself refused the freedoms of the soul and of the intellect, while the world, by repudiating and repressing it, proclaimed for itself the reign of the most widespread liberty in the most perfect equality. In this lay the crime of the period in which Ozanam lived. His childhood had developed under the weight of this bloody contradiction; he reached the age of manhood, the age of speech and of the sword, facing the perversity of a public and insistent lie against God. There were no Christians who did not feel it; more's the pity, that the glory of the catacombs did not raise them all from servitude, and that a clear, methodical order covered this frightful subversion with a whitened shroud.

But if there was agreement on the evil, there was none on the remedy.

Some thought that the new society, born from a revolution which itself had as its sire a corrupt century, bore in its flanks a principle of death, irreconcilable with truth; that, whatever it did in spite of itself, by the needs of its origin, this society would refuse forever justice to God, to the Gospel, to the Church, to Jesus Christ; moreover, that beyond its native hatred of any institution of divine order, this society itself rested on defective foundations

— political liberty and civil equality being only deceptive illusions behind which anarchy lay hidden. From this, they [the holders of this viewpoint] concluded that the former society had to be restored at all costs, and that, if this hope was unrealistic, the only thing left to do was to cover one's head and await with resignation the final blows of hell.

Others, younger in age, and perhaps overly-confident in events which they had not closely witnessed, indulged in less sad and less extreme conjectures. Born among the ruins, even if they did not love them, at least they understood them better. The revolution, they said, was undoubtedly a punishment, but punishment does not exclude benefit. Many things had to perish because many things had sinned. When the graves in Saint Denis basilica were opened and the bones of the kings appeared in the hands of children, history — without justifying the crime — could explain it; and God, Who judges kings on their thrones, also judges them in their graves. Let us lift up our eyes towards Him, let us learn with Him to draw good from evil, life from death. Why would the 19th century necessarily inherit forever the passions and errors of the preceding century? Did not God make the nations of the earth capable of improvement? Is it even certain that the 18th century gave birth to ours, which calls for civil, political, and religious equality? Are these thoughts and desires incompatible with Christianity? Was it not Christianity that revealed to men their equality before God, and is there so great a distance separating equality before God from equality before the law? If it is not of Christian origin — since the ancients knew of it — political liberty is nevertheless no stranger to Christianity: the Middle Ages had revived it under a form unknown to antiquity, and from that design, modern people emerged along with a limited monarchy which constituted their strength and their honor. As for religious freedom, it was the natural and

inevitable fruit of the difference of opinion between Christian communities. From the day when Christianity had split into several branches, it became necessary to choose between mutual persecution — dangerous for everyone, and sooner or later hateful to everyone — and an honorable liberty for the strong and for the weak, leaving to one side and the other the proselytism of intellect and virtue. These facts, it was said, have been accomplished in the world; they are the pivots of this century; if the Church has not yet taken advantage of this for its redemption, that is to say, for its singular emancipation, it is that, having been late in making itself heard — enemy of the most necessary ruins [*unclear*¹ - Trans.] — it hopes to receive from the experience a disclosure worthy of its profound and patient wisdom. For us, its children, who owe a lesser prudence to a lesser responsibility, why are we delaying to reclaim our own freedom in the name of freedom for all? A society, of whatever type, cannot treat as friends those who make themselves its enemies. In the cause of truth, one must never compromise with evil. But here, evil lies not in the principles, but in their mistaken application. On the day when the Church will enjoy its share in common liberty and equality, it will bring to those principles its standards along with its strength. Consequently, the working of minds will take on both greater precision and greater power.

On entering into this environment, Ozanam had heard this kind of language. But this language was controversial; it had not always been interpreted by well-balanced minds, and besides, it ran counter to everyday

¹ Perhaps: enemy of the revolution with its ruinous aftermath, which was nonetheless necessary in Divine Providence.

usage. Surely the choice was difficult for a young man. As regards the nature of absolute truths, evidence draws us; as for faith, an impressive authority guides us. But when intelligence comes face to face with a light mixed with shadows — in which facts intermingle with ideas, either to combat them or to support them — there remains even in conviction a certain fearfulness. There is a need for time, for experience, for profound readings in the past, and notable lessons in the present, in order to arrive at opinions which honor and direct life. Youth, then, should hold back and not speculate about its version of painful returns or of misleading obstinacies; but nature has, perhaps happily, denied it this prudence. Indeed, if maturity alone prevailed, the coldness of skepticism would easily replace the spirit of enthusiasm — and the world would lose its moral sense as well as its grandeur. In the heart of the young man are burrowed and anchored the fortresses of maturity; he who has unreasonably feared the hazards of error would never fear enough the hazards of indifference.

I am unable to say if there existed in the family tradition of Ozanam something which inclined him to one side rather than to the other. His origins are found in a Jewish family of Bresse, [in the Jura, eastern area of France. Trans.], converted by Saint Deodatus in the year 600 of the Christian era. One of his ancestors, Jacques Ozanam — whose eulogy was written by Fontenelle [1657-1757] — was in the seventeenth century a renowned mathematician and a strongly righteous Christian. The theological disputes of his time inspired him with these words which have come down to us: “It is the task of the doctors of the Sorbonne to analyze, of the Pope to decide, and for mathematicians to make their way to paradise standing upright.” Ozanam’s father, in a life cut short in an untimely manner by an accident, a reward for his charity, had

encountered very diverse experiences: by turns soldier, merchant, voluntary exile in Italy, later student, and medical doctor. But as much as his career had experienced its highs and lows, so much the more did his Christian faith remain the immovable anchor to which the constancy of his virtues was tied. He had renounced the war at the moment when, in our campaigns in Italy, it promised him a reward for the blood which he had already spilled for France. Subsequently, in giving him a woman worthy of himself, Lyons had imposed on his love the sacrifice of his personal tastes. After working eight years in the shadows, he was ready for a happiness which did not exclude the desire for more advanced occupations, in that they required a greater commitment. A change in luck freed him from the yoke. Milan, become French as a result of conquest, received him as in a refuge; its surroundings as well as his personal memories provided shelter against the very distressing presence of an all-powerful master. There, freer than he had ever been up to that point, he is found, at thirty-six years old, creating for himself the career which had previously escaped him, and gaining from his persistence in a foreign land, the fame of a wise doctor, capable and charitable. When Austria, following our setbacks, had placed on this poetic land its heavy and insolent scepter, Ozanam's father returned to request of France a better homeland. Twenty years of sojourn in Lyons once again attached him to the country while he waited for death to naturalize him there forever.

Frédéric Ozanam was born of this father during the time of exile, on 25 August 1813. His mother, Marie Nantas, daughter of a middle class merchant in Lyons, had also known in her childhood the roadways of the wanderer. The flow of immigration had carried her to Switzerland, to the town of Echallens, midway from Lausanne and Yverdun, between those two beautiful lakes of Geneva and of Neufchâtel. Fifty years later, Frédéric was reminded of his

mother and jotted down the impression he had experienced from this early pious encounter:

One of the sweetest moments of this trip from Switzerland was the half hour we spent at Echallens. We had not reckoned nor foreseen this stage of our pilgrimage. The matter had taken care of itself, just as everything does that happens for the better. Eschallens lay midway between Lausanne and Yverdon. I remembered that it was the place where my grandfather had withdrawn during the last months of the terror, and about which my mother had so often talked. What would I not have given to see the house in which my family dwelt! At least, I saw the small stand of trees and the lovely paths where they walked, drawn there to pick strawberries. The Carthusian uncle walked ahead as a scout, and when he had located a patch of strawberries, he called his happy nieces: "Come, young ladies; everything is red." And we returned with baskets overflowing with these delightful small fruits which were eaten with exceptional milk. I visited the church in which my dear mother had made her first communion, under the direction of this fine pastor who repeated to her: "Both of us will go, both of us will go to paradise." I found the church just as my mother had described it to me, shared, unfortunately, between the two creeds: the chancel reserved for Catholics and enclosed with a wooden grill; the nave, common to Catholics and Protestants; on one side, the pulpit of the *curé* and the baptismal font; on the other, the pulpit of the *pasteur* and the communion railing. This precious church

is in a deplorable condition: nevertheless I prayed there with more emotion than usual. I thanked God for the graces He had given in this place even to the young exiled girl. In duty to pray for the dead, I prayed for my sweet mother; and yet, since I consider her to be happy and influential in heaven, I asked her to watch over us, to help us end happily this overly-long voyage, and especially to obtain for her children a few of her charming virtues. My wife and my mother-in-law prayed with me, and my small Marie knelt well-behavedly in front of the sanctuary grill. Amélie wanted to pick a few flowers on the small rise where the church stands; these flowers are not the ones which our sweet mother trampled on when going to Mass but they do bear them a resemblance. Would to God that we resembled Him as much!

It was in the last months of 1851 that Ozanam brought into Paris the memories of his childhood, the fruits of his education, and the ardor of his eighteen years.

It was not anyone's intention that upon his departure from college he be exposed so soon to the high seas. By a decision — perhaps strange, when one considers all that this young man had already demonstrated of practical enthusiasm and of early maturity — his parents held him close to themselves, binding him to the thankless labors of a solicitor's office. He wore this chain with an altogether filial simplicity, while continuing to intermingle poetry with the study of law, and adding to the ancient languages which he already knew a smattering of Hebrew and Sanskrit. Everything was blossoming at the

same time, and everything blossomed quickly in this soul which time and eternity pressed to live fully. Even then — and indeed quite some time before — he plunged himself into the risks of publication. At sixteen, he wrote for *L'Abeille française* [The French Honeybee], a periodical collection of Lyons; his young brow as a rhetorician [rhetoric: first year of our college - Trans.] was crowned with expectations which surprised his teachers even more than his fellow students. His teachers had foreseen it. One of them preserved carefully some fragments of Latin verses originating from his brilliant academic inventiveness. Another, his philosophy professor, enjoyed taking his as a companion on his walks in the isolated and steep pathways which surround Lyons on all sides, and render this city very dear to those spirits who are touched with a pensive wistfulness. Why would I not name the teacher who so invited to his friendship an inconspicuous adolescent? Why would I not bring to mind those famous fellowships and conversations which, in the time of Socrates, gathered in a voluntary school the elite of Athenian youth? It is true that such glory did not extol the memory which preoccupies me: and yet, if glory was not there, truth was indeed there, — a truth which Socrates and Plato never knew. For twenty years, at a time when Christian philosophy had so few voices, a modest man who had written nothing, Father Noiret, led into the intense realm of reason a crowd of young spirits among whom Ozanam was the greatest. Like him, several others attained fame, and all, at varying points in their lives, gave credit to their communal teacher for the unshakable clarity of their faith.

III

This faith was more uncommon than it has become. When Ozanam arrived in Paris, there was emerging the terrible war which the political opposition had declared against religion, in the name of liberty. In the hands of this party, everything had been a weapon against Christianity, the rostrum, the press, education, poetry. Moreover, by a mishap worthy of weeping over, no popular voice had been raised in favor of Christ during the storm, not that the Church of France had lacked speakers and writers but because all had marched with flag unfurled in the opposite direction to that which was sweeping the nation. The voices of Count de Bonald, of Count de Maistre, of Father de Lamennais, reached the crowd only as the lost echo of a past never to return. It was Cassandra's lament over the ruins of Troy. While it was less than that, it was also more, because the victors, not sitting on the throne, maintained in their victory the fears and passions of the conquered. Only one man, Viscount de Chateaubriand, notwithstanding his faith as a royalist and a Christian, had retained an immutable influence on public opinion. But he was alone, a type of leper hated by his own and wearing on his forehead the *Génie du christianisme* [Genius of Christianity], like an everlasting scar which spoke only for him. Beside these notable spirits lacking favor or power, the Church once again had as defenders unskilled men, those who, believing to make them strong, in fact exaggerated faults, and who, with the best of intentions to save everything, would lose God Himself, if He could be lost. We ponder the fate of these young generations, split between these two camps. Doomed to an education which no longer concealed its hostility, these generations emerged from childhood despising the Gospel, while freedom, rushing ahead of them, cloaked with its magnanimous vision the godlessness

which was devouring them. The remainder, that is to say, those few souls who by chance had escaped, found itself gathered in a pious association sheltered by illustrious names, in which the privilege which appeared to be promised as a reward for their faith, instead attracted to them suspicion, hatred, and insult. Still, that fragile and painful structure no longer existed; the 1850 Revolution had kicked it down. Ozanam arrived unblemished, sincere, intense, before a desolate and silent emptiness.

He had no doubt that Providence sent him only to bring him to fullness, and that he was one of the instruments it chose to lift up anew before mankind the inalienable honor of truth. In this lay his mission, the goal of his life. On the day after the defeat, he was to be one of the first to change its meaning — the second, who in the name of Jesus Christ, would arrive at the sacred power of a spotless acclaim. The people who did not live during those two periods will never be able to picture for themselves the passage of one to the other; notwithstanding what we have to say, never will they comprehend the interest which is tied to the memory of Ozanam. For us, who belonged to one or to the other era, who have witnessed the contempt and who have seen the honor, just thinking about it floods our eyes with involuntary tears, and we kneel down in thanksgiving before the One Who is ineffable in His gifts.

And so, Ozanam had absolutely no doubt about the mission he was sent to accomplish. Just as any chaste young man, whose curiosity had not immersed itself too deeply into the mysteries of the world, he was shy and approached with difficulty the celebrities he aspired to know. He carried a letter of recommendation from Father de Bonnevie, canon of Lyons, a man of pompous ecclesiastical air such as I had seen in several members of the older French clergy, and which revealed at the same time the differentiation

of nature and the elevation of grace. Father de Bonnevie held young men in high regard; he greeted them warmly. The memory of his heart survived him more than his sermons. The letter which he had handed to Ozanam was for Mr. de Chateaubriand. Ozanam held on to it for several months without making any use of it. He was unable to make the decision to cross a threshold which in his eyes was guarded by glory itself. Finally, on the first day of 1852, he made up his mind, and at twelve sharp, trembling all the while, rang at the door of a “power of the world,” as Charles X, in Prague, characterized de Chateaubriand. The latter had just returned from hearing Mass. He greeted the student in a friendly and paternal fashion, and, after asking many questions concerning his projects, his studies, his tastes, he looked at Ozanam with a more attentive eye, and asked him if he intended to attend the theater. A surprised Ozanam hesitated between telling the truth, which was the promise given to his mother not to set foot in the theater, and his fear of appearing childish before his notable speaker. Because of the struggle which was taking place in his soul, he remained silent for some time. Mr. de Chateaubriand kept watching, as if he attached great importance to his reply. In the end, truth won out, and the author of the *Genius of Christianity*, leaning toward Ozanam to embrace him, told him affectionately: “I implore you to follow your mother’s advice; you would not gain anything at the theater, but there, you could lose a great deal.”

This advice struck Ozanam’s mind like a lightning bolt. When a few of his classmates, less scrupulous than he, invited him to accompany them to the theater, he stood his ground with this decisive retort: “Mr. de Chateaubriand told me that it was not worth going there.” He did, however, attend theater for the first time in 1840, at age twenty-seven, to hear *Polyeucte* [a tragedy about a martyred Roman centurion - Trans.]. The experience left him cold. Like all those

whose taste is steady and whose imagination is lively, he had learned that nothing equals the representation which the mind provides to one's self in the silent and solitary readings of the great masters.

But this was not the only lesson which he drew from this visit. The charm which it had impressed in his memory revealed to him the warm welcome given to young men by older men who inspired their admiration. When he himself had gone beyond the limits of ordinary recognition, when he was applauded by a sizable audience, was honored and sought after, he remembered his dark days and gave himself generously to the young who were recommended to him from everywhere, or who came on their own to introduce themselves. Five times a week, namely all the days when he did not have to appear before the public, his door was open to them from eight to ten o'clock in the morning. He received them graciously, and spent a long time talking with them. Although frequently engrossed by passion for the work which they had interrupted, he betrayed no hint of impatience or regret. He saw himself as a priest before these souls, and, like St. Paul, a "debtor to all." Moreover, a great number became attached to him; instead of isolating him — as is often the case — his fame stirred up warm friendships even in those whose age should have distanced them from his heart. Religion alone holds the secret to this patrician dignity, the highest and the last of all secrets, which leads to glory by making this dignity endearing and by attracting to him followers who aspire only to love what they admire.

Ozanam himself enjoyed the blessing of being the protege of an illustrious gentleman, and of having as his first residence in Paris a roof which sheltered all together old age, science, renown, and religion. Mr. Ampère — he is the one I am speaking of — stood in France as the patriarch

of mathematics. Moreover, he was a Christian, and never, during so perilous a time, did he misuse science to counter truth. But I am not saying enough: he was a Christian like Kepler, Newton, or Leibnitz. Whoever came upon him kneeling before God on the tiles of Saint-Étienne-du-Mont church, would not have seen a prayerfulness more effective to inspire faith while it disarmed pride. I am unaware of how Ozanam came to be the guest of such a well-known and uncommon spirit — whether it was due to his father, or whether to other circumstances brought about by the One who compares the lowly hyssop to the towering cedar and who allows small children to enchant. Mr. Ampère was overtaken with esteem and affection for the young student whom Providence had sent to him; he frequently conversed with him, took him aside in his study, and laid out his philosophy of the sciences. He even had him work under his supervision; some pages, half written by one, half by the other, have been preserved. In the soul of the wise man, those conversations concerning the marvels of nature gave rise to bursts of admiration for their source. Sometimes, holding his large head between both his hands, he cried out — totally carried away: “How great God is! Ozanam, how great God is!”

They lived together for two years, Ozanam’s first years spent in Paris. There, unprecedented horizons were opened for him, wider horizons than ever before available. He had the opportunity to meet and hear some famous men in Mr. Ampère’s drawing room. Mr. Ballanche [1776-1847], his compatriot, was the one who touched him the most. The latter was a charming man, of modest but genuine renown, from the fact that he patronized a world little frequented by his contemporaries, and that his art of speaking, as notable as it was, did not attract the rank and file of admirers. Just as in his thoughts, there was in his fame a touch of mystery; to enter into his works required a bit of courage, like that of an initiate at the gates of Eleusis [a shrine of Athens

in ancient Greece - Trans.]. Ozanam was greatly moved by one of his writings: *La vision d'Hébal (Hébé)* [The Vision of Hebe — Greek goddess of youth - Trans.]. Much later, when his saddened heart reflected on the vulnerabilities of his early times in Paris, he spoke to me again about how good this brief episode had been for him. In his last conversations, he would say: “Who will give us a Vision of Hebe?” Alas, it was God alone Who would give him one, when He called him to the splendors of the next life.

No doubt the reader will wonder what, in the end, this precocious student was doing, he who was so favored by nature and by Providence. He was doing what his family had expected of him. An obedient son, he brought to the benches of law school an amenable yet rebellious intellect, because all his instincts drew him elsewhere, to the vast shores of poetry, history, literary and philosophical erudition. He read the ancient and the modern masters; and, as a diversion in unexpected free moments, he occupied his mind with learning Italian, Spanish, English, and German. Some friends of his age, almost all natives of his birthplace, also began to surround him and make demands on his time. But neither the joys of friendship, nor those of study and of religion, were able to protect him from a touch of wistfulness. Indeed, his rich endowment of gifts was counter-balanced by weak health and a penchant for worrying about the future. Besides, what man with great gifts was ever happy? What container, inhabited by a noble soul, had not received from heaven that drop of wormwood meant to purify it? Although still quite young, Ozanam felt strongly the misfortunes of his century. If he had hated and despised it, he could have asked of his pride that it disregard ordinary destiny. But he liked this age, tormented by the good and by the bad; he expected much from it. He carried it in his heart just as a sick person strains to remain alive. Everything that tended to disparage him or to deflect him

from his course caused him perceptible distress. In addition, even though he was barely twenty years old, God, Who had predestined him to a brief but full existence, inspired him with a purpose which would not have been expected of a perfected man — a purpose which was to take its place among the most prolific and most memorable works of that time.

IV

Although Ozanam had never experienced in his faith any positive weakness, he always felt that this precious gift had to be nurtured in the midst of public disfavor and of the excessive introductions of philosophical and religious systems. The 18th century had achieved destruction, the 19th sought reconstruction. And yet, based on no supernatural faith or purpose, it could give itself no other principle except reason, for the most sublime goal: the betterment of mankind for all time. There followed vast new plans, foreign to all those which had preceded, announcing with enthusiasm the vague state of well-being on earth brought about by a holy rehabilitation of all pleasures, and a peaceful organization of all passions. The topics were diverse, the foundation did not vary. A multitude of minds, grounded in the physical and the mathematical sciences, but incompetent in conceiving ideas of a moral or religious nature, had plunged themselves in speculations that appeared to be momentous but that lacked vital force. These would crumble in the face of the inability to achieve even a momentary realization, just as everything that does not innately have the divine inspiration of common sense. Whoever does not admit as an element of the world the evil of the soul, which is sin, and the evil of the body, which is the punishment for sin, that one builds on nothingness. Just as there is in the breathable air a mortal principle, so there is in human

society a principle of corruption. It has to be resisted but cannot be denied; and in fighting it, there must be a certainty that it would never be uprooted from the soil where man is implanted. Man is a free being; each pulsation of his life produces good and evil — such is the contradiction wherein his liberty is exercised. But what is evident to the Christian is not always evident to prodigies themselves, and much less to the mediocre minds who believe in them. At the time when Ozanam was involved in the powder of jurisprudence [a reference to the powdered wigs of lawyers - Trans.], those systems hatched before the Revolution of 1850 had drawn a renewed energy from within the success of the political event. They assumed religious claims in the name of moral denial, they donned official uniforms, they readied temples on the heights of Paris, they shook up public opinion. One might fear that the commotion was not that of power.

Uneasy but not troubled, several young men had gotten together with Ozanam to deal with all these matters, and to resist — in the name of the Gospel and of Jesus Christ — the prophetic pride of the newcomers. I say “prophetic pride” because it was the custom of newcomers to map out a rosy future for themselves. While recognizing the benefits of Christianity in the past, they judged it incapable of uprooting evil from the world, a goal which Christianity, in fact, was not pursuing. After their numerous discussions of history and philosophy, God, Who remains with those who seek Him, enlightened the hearts of these young men. There were eight of them, and I do not tarnish the memory of any one by asserting that Ozanam, while their associate, was the St. Peter to their modest literary society. He himself had never claimed this honor. A few months before his death in Florence, he told a large assembly of young Tuscans about the origins of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. He said only that he was one of the eight to whom

Christianity was indebted, after God, for its establishment. And so, he was one of the eight, and that is enough for his memory; (but note that) if God made him first among peers, He also made him first in death.

It was in the month of May 1833 that these eight young men had the inspiration to prove one more time that, as regards the poor, Christianity was capable of something which no other belief had done with it, or after it. While the innovators wore themselves out in theories which were to change the world, the eight, more modestly, set about climbing to the floors where the misery of their neighborhood hid itself. Yesterday's students, they were seen, in the flower of their years, visiting without flinching the most abject hovels, to bring to their unknown miserable inhabitants the vision of charity. Charity is beautiful in whoever accomplishes it. It is beautiful in the grown man who curtails one hour of his business to provide it to the business of suffering; it is precious in the woman who, for a moment, moves away from the happiness of being loved to bring love to those who know nothing more than the word; it is noble in the pauper who nonetheless finds a word and a penny for another pauper. It is in the young man, however, that charity appears in its fullness, just as God sees it in Himself in the springtime of His eternity, just as Jesus, on the day of his pilgrimage, saw it in the face of St. John. Ozanam and his friends wanted to confer on charity, daughter of faith, their admiration, as if to a mother. It was their hope that charity would serve as mediator to the generations of their century, and provide them with enlightenment which bewildered reasoning attempted to do only in vain.

Twenty years later, at that reunion in Florence which I mentioned earlier, Ozanam lay dying. He drew from his throat the final eloquent words which he would deliver in public. He could say with confidence about the

man who had completed his task, in the sight of and with the help of God:

Instead of eight, in Paris alone we number two thousand, and we visit five thousand families, that is, about twenty thousand individuals, namely, a quarter of the poor this immense city harbors. The conferences of France alone total five hundred, and we have others in England, Spain, Belgium, America, and as far away as Jerusalem. This is how, by beginning modestly, we can arrive at great things, like Christ Jesus who, from the abasement of the manger raised Himself up to the glory of Mount Thabor [i.e., site of the Transfiguration - Trans.].

O holy fruitfulness of divine works! NO! Society of St. Vincent de Paul, which our eyes saw come to life in Paris from a few young men, exposed to all the marvels of their century and to all the dangers of their age, NO! — you will never perish from our memory. Nor will the hope which you have given us about the blessings of God ever perish!

Providence had decided long before to prepare for the work which it destined to a very speedy and admirable expansion. Ozanam had drawn the seed from his own blood. When he climbed the stairway to the poor, there he could find again the steps of his father and of his mother. In fact, both of them had the habit of visiting the poor in person; both of them, already aged, forbade each other to climb beyond the fourth floor [our fifth - Trans.]. But charity outsmarted their reciprocal prudence; occasionally, in obvious fault, they happened to meet each other on the very same landing. Taught in such a school, Ozanam had not at all separated faith from works; he had learned early on to join to the movements of the soul, which carried him toward God,

the movements of a tenderness more apt to keep him from deceiving himself. He saw Jesus Christ in the poor so as to be more certain of seeing Him and of holding Him in his heart. Although ordinarily the taste for speculations of the spirit leads to a forgetfulness of the painful realities of life, Ozanam had received together two gifts: an extreme scientific excitement and a sensitivity no less active to the sufferings of his brothers. He treated the poor with most tender respect. If they came to his residence, he had them sit on his easy chairs as distinguished guests. If he went to their residence, after having given them his money, his words, and his time, he did not neglect to remove his hat and tell them, with the gracious bow that he favored: "I am your servant." On Easter Sunday, he brought them small gifts, such as a font for holy water, a statue of the Virgin or of Christ, or some tasty bread, especially chosen.

The morning of New Year's Day 1852 — the last one Ozanam was to see in Paris, and the next to last which he was to see in the world — he told his wife that such-and-such a family was quite distressed because it had been obliged to pawn a chest-of-drawers, dating to their marriage, the remnant of former comfort. Moreover, he had a mind to return it to them as their New Year's gift. His wife dissuaded him of it for plausible reasons and so he gave up. That night, after returning from the official visits, Ozanam was sad; he cast a pained look on the toys heaped at the feet of his daughter, and would not touch the candy which she offered him. It is easy to understand that he regretted the missed good work from that morning. When his wife begged him to pursue his original intent, he left immediately to redeem the furniture. After having accompanied its delivery to the residence of those indigent people, he returned to his home very happy.

Like all who do good, Ozanam was sometimes deceived. For quite some time, he had come to the aid of an Italian who asked him for some translations, for which he had no need. This stranger, placed in employment by him, abandoned his workplace. Pressed by misfortune, he returned to the one whose heart and door he was familiar with. For the first time, Ozanam received him harshly and refused him alms. But as soon as he was alone, remorse entered his conscience. He was telling himself: “One should never reduce a man to despair; no one has the right to withhold a piece of bread even from the basest scoundrel. He himself could one day have need that God not refuse him mercy, as he had just done for one of His creatures, redeemed by His blood.” Unable to bear it, he picked up his hat and ran as fast as his legs could carry him in search of this poor soul. Having located him in the Luxembourg Gardens, Ozanam offered him along with the alms a proof of his repentance and of his charity.

A final trait will complete the portrait of charity in his life. Ozanam understood that when the poor have no regular budget, depending on alms is always uncertain, and less than the amount which is their due. This is why every year he drew up a fixed budget for the poor which amounted, usually, to a tenth of his expenses, sometimes higher. In this way, once the sacrifice had been made, nobody’s face was important to him. He knew that his small treasure was set aside. The only question was the amount of happiness he would gain in distributing it appropriately.

Accordingly, such was the origin of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Ozanam’s first project — and, as I have said before, he was only twenty years old.

But, before going any further, I cannot omit this observation. Since the restoration of the Catholic religion, namely, from the first years of the century, all private associations founded in the name of faith, had been tarnished by a foreign element. Political affinities were the unseen leaven which more or less hid itself behind the genuine sincerity brought to charity by people. Ozanam and his friends broke away from this tradition. They declared that in a work of charity, no less than toward the Church before Jesus Christ, there was “neither Jew nor Greek,” and that, whoever loved the poor would be welcomed among their band, without ever inquiring about the opinions that lay behind their thoughts. Not that they disdained opinions or that they wished to base their work on the indifference of current events. Current events are always either good or bad, true or false, useful or harmful; as a result, a Christian weighs them appropriately. Nevertheless, they are only passing matters, while the gift of Christ is to elevate us higher into regions where human contradictions are no longer noticed, or, at least, are forgotten in an approach that is the great tranquility of God. St. Vincent de Paul, chosen by Ozanam and his fellow-laborers as a rallying sign, was himself a peaceful name, a name as dear to the world as to the Church. Emanating from heaven and from earth, his prestige was appropriate for every generous soul as well as for every excellent goal.

Moreover, once the gate was opened, no one who was able to give to God an hour of his time was left outside. Thus, the St. Vincent de Paul Society became, according to the well-chosen expression of St. Vincent de Paul himself, “the party of God and of the poor,” the universal *agapé* [selfless love] — the restoration of the unity between those who choose to labor for the salvation of the world without taking on the uniform of an apostolate too demanding for their vocation or their virtue. The revolutions themselves,

which had eradicated so many other activities, respected this one. The wholesome fragrance of charity kept suspicion at bay. Its sincerity was believed because it was indeed sincere.

V

The reader has perhaps persuaded himself that the care of the poor, added to the study of the law and the culture of languages impaired Ozanam's activity, but that would be a mistake. There were at the Sorbonne and the 'College of France' some rostrums dear to young people, but, too often, they lacked justice and truth regarding Christianity. Ozanam attended the most celebrated courses. Appreciating excellence, even in enemies, he listened to everything with pleasure, but also with caution. Having taken his notes, he went home, researched the facts at their source, and corrected them; then, more often alone than with friends, sometimes even with unknown young men, whose signature he requested, he sent the professor a serious and reasoned letter in which he advised him of his errors and entreated him in a tone of pure innocence to repair the damage that he had inflicted on the minds to whom he owed enlightenment. One day, Mr. Jouffroy received one of these letters, signed "Ozanam, student." The former had known in his infancy the breath of God, and even before his death, he had received some replies which honored his memory. Ozanam's letter touched him. It had been said that many young men who attended his course were Christians and that they suffered painfully to see a man like him — eloquent, generous, and no doubt sincere — allow himself to attack their faith, attacks to which they could not reply because the respect of order and of his person required of them absolute silence. In the lecture which followed, Mr. Jouffroy acknowledged to the

audience the observations which he had received, praised the author for the aptness and the knowledge of which they were proof, then, with an honesty which deserves to be recalled, he disavowed what he had said to the prejudice of truth. "Gentlemen," he added, "five years ago I received only objections dictated by materialism. Spiritual beliefs aroused most lively resistance; today, spirits have greatly changed, the opposition is altogether Catholic."

Since that day, and up to the times when passions festered, a circumspection which had never before been shown by the most accredited professors was now being noticed.

But this was only a palliative, a decrease in inferiority. Ozanam was grieved that, in the presence of so many hostile or indifferent university chairs and in the presence of so many young people, there was not in Paris one university chair whose brilliance stood as the counter-balance to the laurels accorded to error and contested their increase. Undoubtedly, truth will never reign alone; its fate is to do battle, and, consequently, to have renowned enemies. But if, in order to be great and durable, its empire has to be contested, truth is not prohibited from having defenders worthy of itself. In fact, throughout the Church's history, one can always see the father of the Church next to the eloquent sophist: Origen facing Porphyry [philosopher 233-305 - Trans.], St. Basil next to Libanius [ca 314-ca 394 - Trans.]. A list of these opposites would be substantial; it began with Lucifer and the Archangel St. Michael; it will not end until the last day of the world. Moreover, although he knew the ways of God, did not Ozanam despair of obtaining for his age the consolation given to so many other ages which had preceded his own? It was only modesty that kept him from believing he was the chosen man, and that soon, in these same places where he would hear the voices which afflicted

him, his voice — his very own voice — mistress of hearts, intrepid laborer for truth, would extract from an aroused crowd twelve years of applause.

But the rise of those fine days still remained in the shadows. In the meantime, it pleased Divine Providence to accomplish to some degree the wish of its servant. The archbishop of Paris, Msgr. de Quélen, established the conferences of Notre-Dame, destined to introduce youth to the fundamental proofs of Christianity, and to attract the young to the light by the very Church of light. Ozanam was not without influence in this development. He had solicited it from the pious and noble archbishop, in concert with a few of his friends.

His career, however, did not take shape. For a moment, it even seemed on the edge of misleading itself, so difficult was it even for the most keen spirit to find its place, and to learn what Providence expected of it. Just as any student of the law, Ozanam had undergone the ordeals which terminate this study. Nonetheless, wishing to stretch a bit further because of the enthusiasm of his spirit, he had aspired to and was granted the title of *Juris Doctor* [Doctor of Law]. His thesis is dated 30 August 1836. Shifting almost immediately his field of battle, he aspired to a similar honor in the Faculty of Letters. After the appearance of a double thesis, Latin and French — the first “On the descent of heroes into Hades in the poets of antiquity,” the second “On Dante and the Divine Comedy” — the year 1839 crowned his desires. This was more than a success, it was a revelation. Mr. Cousin, one of his evaluators, on hearing Ozanam, could not keep himself from saying: “Ah! Mr. Ozanam, one could not be more eloquent than that.” The somber figure of Dante which he had evoked from the thirteenth century — with his triple crown as poet, professor, and exile — had itself awakened his genius. At age twenty-six, with the

testimony of a master in the art of writing and of speaking, in the even more decisive testimony of public applause, Ozanam was able to tell himself: “This is not a dream; eloquence has paid me a visit!” But this was for naught. Temptation had assailed him at the very gates of the temple, when destiny already held him by the hand.

The city of Lyons had obtained from the government the creation of a chair of Commercial Law and had requested of the Minister that its first holder be its young and brilliant countryman, Frédéric Ozanam. Who could be insensitive at his happiness in seeing his native land again, there to find family, friends, and memories, bringing to all of them, after a few years of absence, a fame already recognized and rewarded? Ozanam was not resolute enough against this sudden appearance of an honorable and guaranteed happiness. He was afraid of dangers; like a horse, which obeys the first sign to stop, hastens to turn its head so as not to see and not to hear the other signal which had also been given!

Fortunately, God is aware of our faults. He does not accept our first timidity or our refusals. After having practiced commercial law in Lyons for one year, with the hardiness of a seasoned professor and the warmth of a young scholar, Ozanam felt himself challenged by a competition for the title of Adjunct in the Faculty of Letters. This was a new title which did not correspond with anything in the traditional classification of the literary and scientific ranks, but which conferred some rights and moved its holder closer to the distinguished chairs of learning. For the first time, Ozanam found himself in the presence of rivals, in a scene enlivened by someone else’s talent. During the two weeks of this competition, he displayed a knowledge and a readiness for procedures which created a moving spectacle. Even luck

came to add its distress and its turn of fortune in favor of his actions. It compelled Ozanam to prepare in twenty-four hours an oral lecture on the “Scoliaſtes” [essays of Virgil - Trans.]. What is there to ſay about the ſcoliaſtes? Did we know them? The following day, everyone was ſhaking with emotion: but Ozanam, in dealing with the moſt thankleſs ſubject in the world, ſtill knew how to be competent, eloquent, ingenious, and prolific in unexpected harmonizations. He charmed all the more becauſe there had been ſtrong doubts about his ſucceſs. The firſt place in the competition was awarded to him by the unanimous vote of the judges along with the acclamations of the public.

Nevertheless, Ozanam ſtill had his miſgivings. In vain did Mr. Fauriel, profeſſor of Foreign Literature at the Sorbonne, offer him the ſubſtitute poſition at his chair: Lyons and commercial law had fascinated him like an acquired good, a port into which he had entered. It was Mr. Ampère, ſon of the mathematician, who had the honor of perſuading Ozanam and of getting him to accept his triumph. Worthy ſon of an illuſtrious father, Mr. Ampère had maintained for the young gueſt at his home a kind of guardianship, tempered by frienſhip. With no trace of jealouſy, Ampère had opened for Ozanam the road to erudition. At the deciſive moment, removing ſome of the latter’s doubts which were only ſelf-deſtructive, Ampère, with the ſagacity of a ſeer and the authority of a maſter, designated for him his place.

This was at the end of 1840: Ozanam was twenty-seven years old.

That day was very lovely when, having reached the halfway point in life, all miſts diſpelled, all uncertainties ſcattered, the forehead ſerene and

the heart at ease, man had the secret of God within himself and pitched his tent where he would live out his life. Until that day comes, the most beautiful dreams are troubled, discouragement follows upon exaltation; the more we receive from God, the more His gifts, by offering some new prospects, add to the melancholic torment of the future. Ozanam had suffered from this situation; his temperament was restless and a bit excitable. Moreover, he must have enjoyed considerable contentment when he finally learned the will of God and accepted it. Born of a respectable but modest family, having come to Paris as a simple student, Ozanam, in nine years of effort, had achieved a distinguished rank in a two-fold career, the law and letters, occupied a chair of law, and had become worthy of being the stand-in professor for a famous course at the Sorbonne. Mr. Ampère had provided him hospitality; Mr. de Montalembert received him cordially. All the eminent Christians, or those on the way to becoming eminent, predicted in him a successor or a companion in arms. The premature possession of such a charmed life did not puff up his heart. He remained genuine, open, cordial, and hard-working — natural endowments that reason illuminated with all its light and that faith had purified from the leaven of pride. This point, a disposition of the mind so envied in the face of success — which is almost always the sign of an egotistical transformation in the heart of man — had left Ozanam just as he had been. When going to his Sorbonne chair, he could still be taken for a simple student. His bearing had not changed; his look was trustworthy and accommodating; he read willingly while on the road, but this occupation did not prevent him from seeing the signs of encouragement directed at him. He always repaid more in honors than those that had been accorded to him. During the twenty years that I knew him, I saw him both troubled and indignant, but I was never able to perceive even the shadow of haughtiness or of affectation; this is a sure sign of a soul that is greater than happenstance,

one which continually gazes on God.

There was, however, one trap which Ozanam did not avoid. As soon as he was happy, he wanted to give away his happiness and increase it by sharing it. Dare I say that, even though God had absolved him by blessing his marriage, Ozanam was still quite young for a happiness diametrically opposed to creative endeavor? Like the priest, the man of letters is set apart, and, if the ministry to souls requires an affection for one's self, the ministry of thought, when one is worthy of it, also requires steadfastness. It is difficult, in the midst of domestic joys, to keep up the diligence of work and the full play of intelligence, and even more difficult to rethink one's needs, given the modesty of one's resources. Poverty is the inevitable companion of the man of letters who has resolved not to sell his pen either to gold or to power. Moreover, poverty is sweet only to the solitary man who lives in the immortality of his conscience and has only one misfortune to foresee or to bear. Now Ozanam belonged to a century when everyone was impatient, and he allowed himself to embrace the certainty of making happy along with himself a Christianity redeemed with the same blood as he had been. He was not mistaken. He had amassed in his heart a treasure which was the sign of an abundance of tenderness; he could open himself without fear to the flow of years which carries away all love except that which is produced and protected by virtue. Ozanam's marriage took place in the summer of 1841. He married Miss Soulacroix, daughter of Mr. Soulacroix, rector of the Lyons Academy. Almost immediately, he led his wife to Italy, a country which he had already visited on vacation with his mother in 1832, and which attracted him with the remembrance of the emotions and the insights he had received there. It was in Rome, before the fresco of the 'Blessed Sacrament' of Raphael, and in Florence, before the tombs of the Church of the Holy Cross, that the figure of

Dante, the Homer of Christianity, had appeared to him, completely luminous, set apart from the darkness of his century, and placed by Providence between Virgil [Publius Virgilius Maro, Latin poet, 70-19 BC - Trans.] and Tasso, [Torquato Tasso, Italian epic poet, 1544-1595] as the titan of poetry. He saw again those marvelous sites populated with eminent men and grandiose monuments, which are our ancestors. Despite the ruins of the past and those to come, these monuments will remain as part of the everlasting pilgrimage of cultured spirits. Ozanam saw them again, holding the hand of his enraptured companion, pointing out to her with the other hand the expanse dear to his memory: the temples, the palaces, the aqueducts, the tombs of the Romans, the relics of the martyrs, the reclining marbles and the living bronzes, all this ancient abundance which the inexhaustible resourcefulness of Italy guards, enlarges, and fosters. Sicily, tossed to the extreme edge of so many beauties, like a sentinel or a lighthouse, also opened to him its cities, where the breath of children from the north had stirred the ashes of Mt. Etna and recovered from the inspirations of Christianity the debris of Greek genius.

After the return from this rapid trip, which was an interlude between his completed youth and his emerging maturity, Ozanam appeared in his pulpit which knew only the half of him.

VI

Only those who have poured out their soul before an audience know the torments of public speaking, torments which wrested from Cicero this plaintive cry: "Who is the orator, who at the moment of speaking, did not feel his hair stiffen and his limbs become ice cold?" More than any other, Ozanam was subject to this ailment of eloquence because his too feeble organs responded only imperfectly to the movements of his inspiration, and because a natural timidity also restrained on his lips and in all his being the brilliance of his faculties. Mistrustful of himself, and as if bearing a religious burden, he prepared himself for each of his lectures, amassing abundant material around his thoughts, enriching it by a prolonged activity of the mind so as to give it order, and finally, giving it life in that mysterious communication of the speaker who tells himself what he will say tomorrow, tonight, later on, to the audience which awaits him. Thus fortified, very pale, however, and worn out, Ozanam climbed to his pulpit. There was nothing clearly emphasized at first; his sentences were labored, his gestures uncertain, his appearance troubled and fearful of meeting the eyes of others. But, little by little, by the practice which the word communicates to itself, by the victory of this strong conviction of the spirit, which makes it its mouthpiece, from moment to moment the sufferer was becoming transformed. Then, once the audience itself had emerged from that early mournful silence so oppressive for the man who has to break it, then the dam broke its walls and eloquence flowed in torrents over a tilled and fertilized land. Sincere applause responded to the speaker, who, completely overwhelmed by a satisfaction paid for by eight days of work and one hour of energy, returned home to find worry, which is the condition of all service and the instrument of all glory.

It is not common for a learned man to be an eloquent speaker. The patience needed to investigate books and antiquities correlates poorly with the fire which bursts out of creative thought. When one is able to toss worlds into space by a breath of one's own life, one has no desire to seek painfully for a route through forgotten stars, all too often darkened. By a unique gift, Ozanam possessed at the same time both eloquence and erudition. For him, one was as natural as the other. He could spend an entire night in the abstruse regions of an extinct language or an unknown work, and the following day write poetic verses, prepare a talk, become emotional in solitude while directly contemplating truth and beauty. Not only were these two faculties [i.e., eloquence and erudition] his from birth, but both were prominent in his life. He was outstanding in law, with the pick of a miner, and in enlightenment with the simple plain look of the spirit. This is what gave him his countenance, a mixture of strength and enthusiasm, both youthful and lively.

The task with which he was charged — at the ancient sanctuary of Parisian letters — precisely required from him the incomparable flexibility of his nature. He had to introduce his audience not only to the letters of Greece and Rome, but also to foreign literature, that is to say, to the famous works of the spirit in the contemporary idiom. This field is limitless, so to speak. Indeed, while antiquity produced only three languages worthy of survival because of the perfection of their documents and because of their relevance to the eternal life of Christianity, the new times have distributed the power and the creativity of literature to all peoples issued from Jesus Christ. What St. Paul said, that there are no more *barbarians*, came about in the arts of the spirit as well as in the order of morals. The torches of David and Homer have spread their light on all Christian nations: all of them have their poets, their historians, their orators. Far from having to undertake an excursion to

distant shores, whoever wishes to initiate himself in foreign literature actually finds himself thrust into the center of universal genius, in some roads and wonders which no longer have limits. As if he had received the express order of Providence, Ozanam had readied himself all his life for this untiring exploration. Since he knew thoroughly the principal modern languages, he found it easy when need arose to penetrate into their riches, which, when discovered, he was bound to share with his hearers. But what would have been for another person — less Christian and less profound — only an eloquent exposition of the beauty of human thought clothed in these diverse garments, for Ozanam, it could be nothing other than a preaching of the truth. To touch languages and new works was to meet at each step what gives them their genius and their newness, that is to say, Christianity. For Ozanam, to meet Christianity was to defend it and to praise it.

Perhaps if he had approached the faith with more prudence than enthusiasm, he would have hesitated to transform his teaching into an evangelical demonstration. The times were stirred and would fester. A fiery controversy, backed up in the newspapers and at the rostrum against the monopoly of instruction by the State, prepared for the Church some approaching bloody reprisals. It was natural to fear that repercussions would occur in an audience assembled to hear a professor, perhaps too energetically Christian. But this consideration did not stop Ozanam. Even on the worst of days when a pulpit adjoining his, and enlivened with a similar spirit, toppled from the effort of passions, it did not diminish the courage of his lips or the simplicity of his heart. God favored them both. For twelve years, all was forgiven him, and he died as popular as he had lived.

Popularity is indeed an extraordinary enigma. I mean true popularity, that which is not bought by cowardly concessions to the errors of a century, but popularity which surrounds with a premature halo the honest man, still alive. As much as it can be discovered in history, the first condition of this solid popularity is to be found in firm convictions and steadfast regulations. The man who changes his mind, if his lack of bias is recognized, will perhaps retain fame, but he will retain neither confidence nor authority. Only firm convictions hold sway over souls, when they are in the service of a cause which inspires generations, and when talent enhances in them stability of conduct and brightness of devotion. And again, with all these conditions fulfilled, it is not impossible for a man to miss out on popularity unless something generous tempers the assertiveness of his character and reduces the stature of his genius. It is His goodness that makes God popular; and the man who is lacking in goodness will never attain love, without which fame can indeed be present, but not glory. It is love which makes glory such an attractive trait, and which, for the Christian, inspires this canticle that heaven and earth never tire of: "Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever."

Yet, in looking at Ozanam as we have known him for twenty years, I seem to recognize in his person the totality of the traits which explain and justify his popularity. Even in his early youth, we could see in him the breakthrough of a profound conviction of Christianity with a precocious desire to dedicate to it all the works of his spirit. His earliest correspondence presents countless traces of this strong and generous disposition, which, before long, would gain him the respect of the Christians of his age, and later on, their grateful admiration, when success had justified the hopes which they had placed in the first flashes of his talent. No man of faith, at least of a

striking faith, had yet appeared in the pulpits which reverberated every day with the applause given to other beliefs in other speakers. Forty years of the absence of literature at those lecterns called contemptuous attention to the worn-out genius of Christians of France. Ozanam steps up there, and he steps up at the age of only twenty-seven! From that mouth which, for a long time already, had awakened the charity asleep in the bosom of youth and created the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, he drops a word wherein art vies with erudition. Nothing is cloaked, nothing is watered down that could offend some minds, poorly accustomed to the presence and the courage of truth. The speaker is young, he is sincere, energetic, educated: Athens listens to him, just as it would have listened to Gregory [of Nazianzen (328-390) - Trans.] or Basil [the Great (329-379) - Trans.] if, instead of returning to the seclusion of their homeland, these (Fathers of the Greek Church) had opened, at the foot of the Areopagus [hillside location of the supreme tribunal of Athens - Trans.], where St. Paul preached, this treasure of taste and knowledge which was to honor their names. Ozanam still had charm, a charm without which he certainly could have faded away, but which, when added to his other gifts, achieved in his person the laborer with a predestined appeal; he was gentle with everyone and just towards error.

Anyone who reads Bossuet's *History of Variations* notes that the startling point about this vital genius is his goodness. He holds under his rod — and it was the most terrible one wielded in a man's hand since that of Moses — he holds there the creators of a detestable schism which had torn away from the Church one half of the world and created calamities which Bossuet's frightened gaze enfolded in all their extent. Nowhere, however, will you be confronted with the injury, but only with a powerful and serene discussion, a serious outpouring of truth. When individuals must inevitably

appear with their weaknesses and their crimes, we feel that the historian's outlook is much too peaceful for him to insult them. He indicates those major culprits such as they were, without refusing them anything of what could still rouse interest. As if to take a break from a sight which was painful to him, he dedicated an entire chapter to mourn the soul and the memory of Melancton [Philippe Schwarzord, aka Melancton, friend of Luther (1497-1560) - Trans.]. Indeed, this is because Bossuet belonged to the race of those for whom the Gospel was not diminished either by erroneous insights or by the passions and the severity of the heart: he had his right hand on the "Lion of Judah," and the left on the "lamb" sacrificed before all centuries. No man can build himself up in this way; man is made by God, and when God chooses to touch the world, He unites tenderness with wisdom in the same creature.

Ozanam was among those privileged creatures. On the day of his private baptism, he had received the oil with the wine, and these two sources, born in him on the same day, had made him grow in grace before God and before men. Try as we might to read the pages he has left us, try as we might to remember his actions and his lectures, we discover in them neither the anger which takes revenge nor the bitterness which increases as it spreads, nor the contempt which defies, nor the irony which mocks under the pretext of teaching or correcting. Without ever denigrating the Church before the world, he held in his generous hand — because it was charity that guided it — the all-powerful scepter of truth. He pities more than he accuses, he forgives more than he condemns, and, always invincible behind his shield, he tempers in his sword the strength that he feels there, lest he bring about death in some soul which can still revive.

Ah! in the midst of the harsh controversies of our times, how comforted were we to hear close to us words so innocent and so welcoming! Weary of the noisy curses, how much rest did we find in that other peaceful and eloquent noise! We hear it now only in memory, in that echo which remains in the soul after it has once rejoiced over a word befitting God. Again, this echo, this remembrance, increases our regret as it reminds us of everything we have lost.

I cannot conceal it: a doubt came to light on the behavior of Ozanam during the perilous times of his tenure as professor. This was the moment when the Catholics of France, for the second time, forcefully reclaimed one of the most outstanding freedoms of the soul, the freedom of teaching. From the height of the rostrum of peers who had condemned him in this very cause, Count de Montalembert presided in this second campaign as a general after having engaged in the first as a soldier. Everyone under his direction or at his own post was fired up with the issue; and if all the voices were not equally worthy of the battle, if injury and injustice too often called for reprisals which it would have been better to ignore, at least, treachery was nowhere to be found. Words could be regretted; there was no point in regretting silence. By virtue of the very position wherein God had placed him, Ozanam found himself, more than all of us, in a most painful situation. Ardent Catholic, devoted friend of social liberties, of those of the soul in particular, because they are the basis for all the others, he could not, however, be unaware that he belonged to the legal depository which held the monopoly of instruction [i.e., the University - Trans.]. Was it required of him that he break off from this body which had received him so young and abounding in honors? Was it required of him that while remaining in its bosom, he take an active part, and consequently call attention to himself, in the war that he was facing? In the

first case, Ozanam would be abdicating his chair: would we have recommended that he do that? In the second case, he would be leading to the same outcome by taking upon himself the damage of waiting for it: again, would we have recommended him to do that? And yet, could the Christian professor, the liberal Christian, Ozanam, be able to separate himself from us?

It is rare in the most delicate of situations, in which everything seems impossible, that a certain point cannot be found which reconciles everything — just as, in God, the attributes that appear to be the most dissimilar meet up somewhere in the harmony of perfect unity. Ozanam retained his chair; this was his post to ward off the danger to truth. He did not openly attack the body to which he belonged; such was his duty as colleague and as grateful man. Nonetheless, he remained in the most complete and most confirmed solidarity with all of us; I mean to say — since I do not have the right to count myself in the group — with all those who wholeheartedly defended the sacred cause of the freedom of instruction. None of the links which bound him to the chiefs and soldiers suffered any attack. He was and had been a participant in all the assemblies, all the works, all the inspirations of that time; and what he did not proclaim from the rostrum or in his writings came to light from his influence, with a clarity which was more than a confession. Indeed, not a single moment of defiance or aloofness diminished the elevated position he held among us: he retained wholly the affection of Catholics, the esteem of the body of which he was a member, and, outside of these two camps, the sympathy of that wandering amorphous crowd which is the public, and which, sooner or later, decides everything.

Ozanam had set the core of his teaching in the Middle Ages. Had he chosen an earlier era, it would have been antiquity; if later, it would have been a literature too close in time, wherein science would not have had enough shadows to uncover. The Middle Ages marked the beginning of the Christian nations; they had altogether the charm and the difficulties of their roots — a twofold allure which aroused equally either the poetic imagination of the professor, or the laborious discernment of his faculties. During the two years in which he occupied his chair, Ozanam followed up in turn the first developments of the Christian genius in Germany, England, and Italy. All that is left to us of this vast study are only twenty-one lectures concerning civilization in the fifth century. Nonetheless, this unfinished monument suffices to give us an idea of the eloquence and the learning of its author, and how both were untiringly used to broaden Christianity in the mind of whoever opened himself to its influence.

I will not provide an analysis of these admirable lectures. They will remain among the most remarkable works of Christian apologetics of the nineteenth century. In vain would I attempt to replace or add to them for readers.

Ozanam had four years of success before the death of Mr. Fauriel in 1844. In winning the succession unanimously, Ozanam found himself, at age thirty-two, titular of a faculty chair in the Paris Academy. This unanticipated elevation had no precedent: before him, Mr. Guizot, the youngest to achieve a similar post, had not been promoted until age thirty-six.

VII

But, it is not in vain that one hopes to move time ahead; time exacts its revenge on those who ignore it.

As early as the summer of 1846, Ozanam became aware that his strength was diminishing under the constant excitement of his achievements. Not satisfied with the preparation of his courses, he responded warmly to all the calls directed to him in the name of truth or charity. He spoke at “The Catholic Center” and at the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul. He wrote for the *Correspondant*, an honorable review which alone for a quarter of a century had preserved the Christian and liberal flag of his first years. All these collaborations left Ozanam with no rest. He spent lengthy portions of his nights in compensating by work for the brevity of his days. All too often, he stirred up the weight of gloom by means which awakened the spirit only to exhaust it. His hands began to display that feverish trembling which we were to see in the last phases of his life. In short, he was making his way to the end with the rashness and speed of a soul which believes so strongly in eternity as to have little consideration for time.

Moreover, perhaps the first signs of pain were themselves only a ruse from Providence, to lead one of its greatly beloved sons to a stunning spectacle which it wished to give to the world. On 22 April 1847, Ozanam found himself standing at the foot of the Quirinal, lost in a huge crowd holding torches and waiting under a starry sky, to the sound of music and cheers, for someone whom it honored and wished to see. A perfect silence reigned. Some lights were moving behind the windows of the palace; one of

its windows opened, and a figure appeared on the balcony, leaning toward the crowd and greeting it. A respectful shudder ran through the huddled and attentive ranks of the assembly. On a signal from its shepherd, the people bowed, knelt down, arms outstretched to express the faith of all by the sacred sign of redemption. The voice of Christ was heard speaking through His vicar, and Rome shed tears of hope and love. Long after the multitude had dispersed, Ozanam continued to look and listen. It seemed to him that all the dreams of his youth had just been realized on this memorable night, and that, by means of a hastiness and a shortening of destinies, the most desirable and the most difficult of reconciliations had been effected in his lifetime. Unfortunately, the same was to be said of his life: time gave out for both, and both would soon be no more, like the fleeting rainbow of a storm.

From that trip which a benevolent mission had authorized, Ozanam gained some impressions which validated all the thoughts he had entertained up to that point. He returned comforted about his pain, more reassured still on the future of the world. It was not that he had discovered on his route, in Rome itself, alarming symptoms, but that everything had been explained and placed under control in his soul by the image of the Pope whose countenance he had seen. A superhuman faith was aroused in him on contact with the man and the priest. He had loved, he had almost adored, he could not believe it possible that such a being had come unexpectedly on the throne of St. Peter, and that so much pure goodness, so many noble intentions, would hide from the world only a likely victim of ingratitude and perversity.

On his return, he expressed his fears and his hopes in an article which the *Correspondant* published on 10 February 1848.

Fourteen days later, the veil which hides from the eyes of men the secrets and the operations of Providence was rent. Pius IX, who would have needed only the gratitude of his people and the backing of time to show mercy, was carried away in a destruction more powerful than his heart.

I will say nothing about these events which are too fresh in our minds. Ozanam, who was well aware of all the dangers the Church faced, was, along with Mr. Maret — one his dearest and most distinguished friends — the promoter of a newspaper whose aim was to reassure Catholics and help them to accept the new regime, which he saw as a punishment for major past errors; a means of obtaining for the Church some indispensable freedoms which had been obstinately refused to it for fifty years; at long last, an advance to a better distribution of social amenities, by wresting from a too preponderant class the exclusive domination of interests, ideas, and morals.

I do not know why none of Ozanam's friends, in the reviews which they published about him and from which I collected so many uplifting memories, did not mention the part he had played at the glorious martyrdom of the Archbishop of Paris [Denis-Auguste Affre (1793-1848) - Trans.]. During those June days when the civil war was no longer a rallying cry — so vague were the hopes and so deep the emotions — Ozanam was pondering with distress about what steps religion could take in favor of the country and for its own honor. The thought came to him to approach the Archbishop of Paris and enlist him in effort at conciliation with the insurgents. Two vigilant companions, Christians like him, joined in his idea, and all three went to the Archbishop. After having listened to them, Msgr. Affre told them calmly: "I have been feeling the pressure of this thought since yesterday; but how to follow through, how to reach the insurgents? And would General Cavaignac allow

this action?" Upon their reply, he vested, placed his gold cross on his chest, and headed for General Cavaignac's quarters; besides the few clerics from his residence, he was accompanied by Ozanam and his two friends, all three in their National Guard uniforms. On their return, he dismissed the three, despite their entreaties, on the pretext that he did not at all wish to appear with an apparently military escort. The world knows the rest of the story, and posterity has no need for me to repeat it.

Ozanam had resumed his lectures and continued up to the summer of 1852, intermingling even more numerous activities than in the past. It was during this period of five years that he published his *Études germaniques* [Germanic Studies], a work twice crowned by the *Académie Française* with a grand prize of ten thousand francs, as well as a charming study about the Franciscan poets of Italy in the thirteenth century. As he approached the end of the school term, his activity doubled in volume.

On Good Friday of the year 1851, he took up the pen and wrote this preface to a work in which, for the glory of God and of Christ, he sought to draw together all the works of his life.

I intend to write the literary history of the Middle Ages from the fifth century to the end of the thirteenth, and up to Dante, at whom I will stop for he is the most worthy person to represent this outstanding era. But in the history of literature, I especially study the civilization of which they are the blossoms. In that civilization, I notice chiefly the accomplishments of Christianity. The overall purpose of my book, then, is to point out how Christianity was able to draw from Roman ruins and from the

tribes camped on those ruins, a new society capable of possessing the truth, of doing good, and of finding beauty.

In the consideration of so vast an enterprise, I do not at all hide my inadequacy: when the materials are numerous, the questions difficult, life short, and time full of storms, it takes a lot of arrogance to begin a book intended to draw the acclaim of men. But I am not at all looking for glory, which is awarded only to the genius; I am merely fulfilling a duty of conscience. In the middle of a century of scepticism, God did me the favor of being born in the faith. He placed me as a child on the knees of a Christian father and a saintly mother; he gave as my first teacher an intelligent sister, as pious as the angels whom she has gone to join. Later on, the chatter of unbelieving people finally reached my ears. I experienced the full horror of those doubts which gnaw at the heart during the day and which are found again at night on a pillow wet with tears. The uncertainty of my eternal destination did not leave me any rest. In despair, I grasped the sacred dogmas, and imagined them breaking under my hand. It was then that the teaching of a priest-philosopher rescued me. He put order and light in my thoughts; thereafter, I believed with a recovered faith, and, touched by a kindness so rare, I promised God that I would dedicate my days to the service of that truth which gave me peace.

Since then, twenty years have rolled by. The longer I have lived, the more faith has become dear to me. I experienced better what it could accomplish through great sufferings and in the

general hazards of life; but I pitied even more those people who did not know faith at all. At the same time, Providence by unforeseen means and whose administration I now admire, had prepared everything to tear me away from business and to connect me with works of the spirit. The convergence of circumstances led me to study especially religion, the law, and letters: the three elements most needed for my purpose. I visited the places which could instruct me, from the catacombs of Rome, where I saw the totally bloodied crib of Christian civilization, to those superb basilicas by which it took possession of Normandy, Flanders, and the banks of the Rhine. The happiness of my time allowed me to reflect on noted Christians, some men illustrious by the alliance of the sciences with faith, as well as others who, without the faith, serve it unknowingly by the integrity and soundness of their science. Life, however, goes on; the little that remains of the rays of youth must be held on to. It is high time for me to write and to fulfill to God the promises made eighteen years ago.

As a layman, I do not have a mission to discourse on points of theology. Besides, God, Who loves being served by eloquent men, finds enough of them nowadays to justify His dogmas. But, while Catholics were engaged in the defense of doctrine, the unbelievers took possession of history. They seized upon the Middle Ages, they judged the Church with aversion, sometimes with the respect due to a vast ruin, frequently with a levity which they would not have brought to bear on secular subjects. This domain, which is ours, must be reconquered, since

we find it confiscated from our monks, our Benedictines, our Bollandists [*i.e.*, Jesuits - Trans.]. These pious men had not considered their life ill-used and weakened by poring over charts and legends. Later on, some other writers also came to take up one by one the profaned images of famous popes, of some doctors, and of some saints, and restore them to honor. I want to attempt a more profound but more extensive study; I want to show the kindness of Christianity in those very centuries to which its errors are attributed. . .

I am not at all turning a blind eye to the storms of the present times; I know that they can cause me to fail and, along with me, the work whose end I cannot foresee. I write, however, because, since God did not give me the strength to handle a plow, I must nevertheless obey the law of labor and complete my day. I write just as those laborers of the first centuries who transformed clay or glass into vessels for the daily needs of the Church, and who, from a rudimentary pattern, portrayed on them the Good Shepherd, or the Virgin with some saints. Those humble people were not thinking about the future; nonetheless, a few of their potsherds, found in cemeteries, have appeared fifteen hundred years later to testify to the truth and to prove the antiquity of a contested dogma.

All of us are useless servants; but we serve a Master, a steward exceedingly parsimonious, Who lets nothing be lost, not a drop of our sweat any more than a drop of dew. I have no idea what fate awaits this book, or whether it will ever be completed,

or if I will reach the end of this page which fills up under my pen. But I know enough to include there whatever may be left of my fervor and of my days. In this way, I continue to accomplish the duties of public instruction; I attract and I promise, as much as it is within me, an audience which I have always found benevolent, but oftentimes ever-changing. I go to look for those who had listened to me for a moment, and who, on leaving school, had preserved some remembrance of me. This work will provide a summary, will re-fashion my lectures, and the little else that I have written.

I begin it at a solemn moment and under sacred auspices. At the great jubilee of the year 1500, and on Good Friday, Dante had arrived, as he said, in the middle of the span of life; freed from his passions and his errors, he began his pilgrimage to hell, to purgatory, and to paradise. At one point, on the threshold of his career, he lacked courage. But three blessed women watched over him in the court of heaven: the Virgin Mary, St. Lucy, and Beatrix. Virgil directed his steps, and, trusting in this guide, the poet plunged courageously onto the mysterious road. Ah! Although I lack his exalted soul, I do share his faith. Like him, in the maturity of my life, I saw the holy year, the year which shares in this stormy and fertile century; the year which renews Catholic consciences. I, too, wish to make the pilgrimage to the three worlds and to concentrate first of all on this period of invasions, somber and bloody as hell. I will leave it to visit the periods from Charlemagne to the Crusades, like a purgatory in which the rays of hope already penetrate. I will find my paradise

in the religious splendors of the thirteenth century. Nonetheless, while Virgil abandons his disciple before the end of the course — because he was not allowed to cross the gate of heaven — Dante, on the contrary, will accompany me up to the utmost heights of the Middle Ages where he has left his mark. Three blessed women also will assist me: the Virgin Mary, my mother, and my sister. But the one who is my Beatrix has been left on earth to support me with a smile and a look, to tear me away from my discouragements, and to show me, with her most wifely presence, this strength of Christian love whose works I will relate.

God did not want this major work, prepared by twenty years of research, eloquence, and charity, to receive from the hand of its author the seal of perfection. Death would autograph it long before its completion. But what is left suffices for the renown of Ozanam, and what has been lost will be found in that book where are collected the sacrifices of the children of God.

The Easter of 1852 had just passed. Ozanam was restricted to his bed with a fever. He learned that his audience awaited him at the Sorbonne; there, with no concern for the cause which deprived them of their professor, the impetuous youth called for him with cries and disturbances. Immediately, despite his friends, despite the tears of his wife and the orders of the physician, Ozanam got up and hurried to his chair: “I want,” said he, “to honor my profession.” When he entered the lecture hall of the Sorbonne, pale, weak, more like a corpse than a living person, both regret and admiration seized the crowd which bestowed on him frenzied applause. These transports were

frequently repeated in the course of his lecture, reanimating the unfortunate convalescing patient and uplifting him one last time. One could have thought that the cheering held the secret of God, so impassioned did it become when the professor ended in this fashion:

Gentlemen, our century is reproached for being a century of egoism; furthermore, it is said that even professors are affected by the general epidemic. However, it is here that we alter our health: it is here that we make use of our strengths. I am not complaining about it; our life belongs to you; we owe it to you up to our last breath, and you will have it. As for me, Gentlemen, if I die, it will be at your service!

Such were the farewells of Ozanam to an audience who had loved and applauded him for twelve years. Short years for orators, involved in ephemeral gatherings which come together from the four winds of the sky around the words of one man only to scatter and never more come together! Ozanam had received the gift of moving them, this great gift of eloquence. Even now, the source has not been exhausted, but the external and terrestrial instrument was broken; there remained to inspiration only a weak breath which is sufficient in the domestic household, for the confidences of friendship, for the swan song which poetry celebrates, but which the world has never heard because it is sung very softly to one or two beloved souls.

Between life and death, Ozanam would gain some satisfaction from this woeful and unspotted wreckage of himself. Every so often, we still meet him

in those attractive walkways of the Luxembourg Gardens where his friends and his disciples served so many times as retinue when he wound his way to his triumphs at the Sorbonne. He continued to form on his lips that irresistible smile which won him hearts. But it seems as if his entire person were covered with a veil; the bearing, the gesture, the voice, the appearance, indicated to passers-by whom he knew that now, he was but a shadow of himself. He left for the *Eaux-Bonnes* [Good Waters] of the Atlantic Pyrenees with his wife and daughter. In a delicate move, Providence also brought to him the comfort of one of his youngest disciples, whom he found quite congenial. Both of them sick, both not well, together they believed in the same ups and downs of life; they rambled in the shade of tall mountains, their discussions ranging from the nature of God and memories of lost years to the soothing ideas of eternity. Youth, faith, the renown of the one, the uncertainty of the other, the sad portents and the joyful dawns — everything gave these concluding dialogues the pleasant and unearthly character of death welcomed.

When the sky was clear, relates in some unpublished pages the one who survived, we left very early, wending our way toward one of those cheerful paths which surround Good Waters and whose remembrance is still cherished by one of his dear company. This was often ‘the horizontal walk.’ In it, we went in search of the calm of night; we ended it when the sun, giving up the purpled summits of the *Gers* peak, allowed the fresh vapors of the *Laruns* valley to rise towards us. When at the last curve of the walk we noticed the roofs of Good Waters, night had fallen. The mountains stood out in sharp and gloomy ridges in a still clear sky. The moon, extricating itself from the pines in the tall

rocks, rose up noiselessly, and a regular breeze, like the respiration of a child who is falling asleep, softly inclined the trees. At that hour, in this attractive spot, our souls rose naturally toward God: we were still chatting, but lengthy intervals of silence informed us that it was, rather, time to pray — deep prayer, not articulated in words, and which consisted only in remaining silent before God! O Lord! O my Master! I thank you for having given me these hours!

In this way, two months went by, first of all at Good Waters, then in Biarritz, in the Gulf of Gascony. There, they had to separate. The young and friendly disciple was summoned back to Paris; once again I give up the pen so he can relate the parting:

Mr. Ozanam wanted to accompany me up to Bayonne. From Biarritz to Bayonne takes only one hour of travel time: that hour was the last one I passed with him on earth. God had allowed him to have this premonition. He kept my attention during the trip with very serious matters relating either to himself, to me, to business in general, to the state of the Church, to the behavior to maintain in the present circumstances, or to the hopes which the future promised. He was speaking to me as if he ought not to do so, and I listened to him with religious consideration.

When we had entered the main route to Spain and all the

towers of the cathedral of Bayonne began to appear, he changed his tone of language, told me that he felt stricken with death, and that undoubtedly we would not see one another again. I shared all his fears, but with much more hope, that is to say, with more fantasies; and so, I tried to counter in good faith his sad thoughts. But he held on to them, and spoke to me about his forthcoming death with a certitude which defeated all my reasons for hope. When the carriage stopped in front of the stagecoach which was to bring me back to Paris, he shook my hand for a long time. We alighted. I had time only to have my small luggage placed and to settle the cost of the trip. The moment came for me to separate myself from him. He hugged me tightly and said to me: 'Henri, say farewell to me.' My heart was torn to pieces, but not one tear did I shed. I followed him with my eyes, as much as that solace was possible. A bend in the road abruptly broke the last thread and I never saw him again.

It was toward evening when we arrived at the summit of the hill which towers over Bayonne; the sun was setting in the sparkling waves of the sea. A multicolored cloak covered everything. The sands of Biarritz shone in the distance through a glowing mist. A man-made flame revealed the lighthouse, and our eyes became fixed on that point, lost in an ocean of light. Instead of dispelling my sadness, this spectacle propelled it in some way into infinity. Through this brilliant revelation of life, of love, and of beauty, I reminisced at the same time on all those happy days of which that night was the fading away, and, regret brought back to mind the one to whom I owed this appeal. I

recognized him again as a friend lost forever. I took it to heart for not having dared to show him more warmth; I talked to him, I greeted him from afar, I promised him undying fidelity. But the future offered no answer with which to console me. I kept hearing that voice saying farewell to me. As a result, my soul was engulfed by a profound melancholy.

Time, that unsurpassed master, had transformed my regrets without destroying them. Soon, it added new agitation to those regrets, then hopeless anguish, and finally this terrible certitude that, however much it is expected, always surprises us.

The bonds of friendship barely broken, Ozanam hastened to Spain, which he had never visited. He planned on going on to St. James [*Santiago*] of Campostella but the cold weather did not allow him to travel beyond Burgos. It was almost the end of November. He retraced his steps, but, as always, with the jottings of an intellectual and his memories of the young man, he lost no opportunity, despite his growing weakness, to combine them into some pages which, far from displaying a lessening of his literary vigor, bore the imprint of a more varied, more flexible, more ingenious style than ever. He gave those pages the name, *Pèlerinage au pays du Cid* [Pilgrimage to the country of El Cid], as if to console himself for not having been able to make the pilgrimage to *Santiago*.

Following this, a trip of paramount importance remained for him to take. Italy received him for the fourth time. Pisa had been suggested as the most favorable sojourn, given his state of health. But the winter of 1853

trumped all the illusions of his friends. Cold and rainy, it brought to the sick man only an extended boredom and a worsening of his sufferings, rarely relieved by the warmth of well-being. He consoled himself by engaging in a heroic activity in favor of the first work of his life, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. It was known in Tuscany, but was stifled at its outset by the government of the Grand Duke, who could not believe in its reliability. Fortunately, Ozanam was esteemed, or, to be more exact, celebrated in the area. His works on Dante had been well received there, and had been translated into Italian several times.

It so happened that the Grand Duchess dowager heard talk about this Frenchman and of the efforts he expended to introduce in Tuscany a questionable charity. One day, when she was in Pisa, she sent him a messenger with the request that he come to see her that very night. Although handicapped by a fever, Ozanam accepted the invitation. The Grand Duchess received him cordially. She was a distinguished person, favoring good works, but entirely filled with prejudices against the St. Vincent de Paul Society, wherein she detected a lair of liberalism. Furthermore, she affirmed that never would the Grand Duke authorize its establishment unless first of all certain men, whom she pointed out to him, were expelled. Ozanam spoke at length as he always spoke, namely, with much enthusiasm. He strove to justify the acceptance of persons whom the ducal court saw with a jaundiced eye in society. Harking back to the very origin of the conferences, he related how, following the Revolution of 1830, a few young men had resolved to engage in charity, to the exclusion of all politics; this policy was one of the fundamental points of their association and the motive which demanded the admission in their midst of whoever presented himself to them, as long as he was an honest man, and a Christian.

A few days later, the Grand Duke granted to the Conference the authorization so long refused, and extended it almost immediately to the Conferences of Livorno and Pisa.

But as for Siena, where an arm of the University of Pisa had been relocated, taking along with it half of the Tuscan youth, Siena had chosen not to follow the movement. Ozanam grieved a great deal over this. That this young band did not engage in works of charity tormented him as a personal regret. Nor could he rest until he went to Siena itself, there to propose and establish a Conference. Although linked to distinguished persons, and in particular to two religious men, involved with schools, he was pained to return without success. This blow saddened him deeply. “It seems,” said he, “that God no longer wished to bless my efforts.” Yet, despite the noticeable discouragement which came over him for what he believed to be a withholding of help from Providence, he resolved to make another appeal. When he arrived at the small village of Antignano, he wrote a four-page letter to one of his friends in Siena, Father Pendola, to entreat him to attempt one final effort. For fourteen days, no reply came. On the fifteenth day, towards the end of July, Ozanam received a letter which informed him: “My dear friend, yesterday — the feast of St. Vincent de Paul — I founded two Conferences, one in my college, the other in the city.”

Even though Ozanam had previously been moved by other successes, during this stay in Tuscany he had profound reasons to be disappointed about life. He was treated with kindness and with honors rarely awarded to a stranger. He was named member of the *Academy of Crusca* [Academy of linguistics and philology - Trans.] at the same time as Count Caesare Balbo, the author of *Hopes of Italy*. In the end, he sensed all around him the affectionate

admiration which acknowledges glory, and of which it is at the same time the most certain sign and the sweetest fragrance. But death brightens glory itself on a day which makes glory pale. The heart of the Christian, when it senses the approach of eternity, detaches itself from these forgivable weaknesses, which holiness alone does not recognize. Ozanam was mature. He still fought against death, it is true. He still thought about his years, filled all too little; but this was not a regret about life, but rather self-reproach for good unaccomplished. Just as there is in the candid soul united to the world a need to complete the monument which it has conceived and which will bear its name, so too there is in the noble soul united with God the need to bring to a close the work which it had begun for Him and by which it considers hiding His Name under its own. When God refuses, when he wounds the worker before the last stone has been placed, when the Cross descends at thirty years, as for the Son of Man, this is the sacrifice par excellence, the one which wrests a tear from heaven itself, and which makes the martyrdom bloodless. Now, in those days, this was the mystery which our friend was pondering in his heart. He has left us, from his very hand, touching and reverent evidence.

While in Pisa, on 23 April, he wrote the following lines:

“I said: In the noontide of days I must depart; I am consigned to the gates of Sheol for the rest of my years. I said I shall not see the Lord in the land of the living. My dwelling is plucked up and removed from me like a shepherd’s tent; like a weaver I have rolled up my life; he cuts me off from the loom; from day to night you bring me to an end. . . . My eyes are weary with looking upward. O Lord, I am oppressed; be my security!

But what can I say? For he has spoken to me, and he himself has done it! All my sleep has fled because of the bitterness of my soul.¹”

These words are the beginning of the canticle of Isaiah; I do not know if God will allow me to reach the end today. I do know that today I have reached my fortieth year, more than half the ordinary lifetime. I do know that I have a young and beloved wife, a charming female child, outstanding brothers, a second mother, many friends, an honorable career, efforts conducted precisely to the point at which they could serve as the foundation to a work long dreamed of. Alas! Here it is that, nonetheless, I am in the grip of a serious ailment, tenacious, and all the more dangerous in that it probably masks complete exhaustion. So, must I give up all these goods that You yourself, my God, have given me? Can You not, Lord, be pleased with a portion of the sacrifice? Which part must I sacrifice to You for my disordered affections? Would You not accept the holocaust of my literary self-respect, of my academic ambitions, even of my study projects, in which perhaps there was more pride than zeal for truth? If I sold half of my books in order to give the proceeds to the poor, and if, restricting myself to fulfilling the duties of my employment, I dedicated the rest of my life to visiting the needy, to teach apprentices and

¹ *Isaiah* 38:10-15. The Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version. 1989.

soldiers, Lord, would You be satisfied and would You allow me the kindness of growing old close by my wife and of completing the education of my child? Perhaps, my God, this is not at all what You wish. You do not at all accept these concerned offerings, You reject my holocaust and my sacrifice: it is my very being that you require. “I said, here I am. In the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do your will, O my God.¹”

If you call me, I will come; I have no right to complain. You have given forty years of life to a creature who arrived on earth sickly, frail, destined to die ten times, if the tenderness and the intelligence of a father and a mother had not saved him ten times. Let not my relatives be scandalized if today you should not perform a miracle to heal me! My childhood, fortunately spent among so many dangers, was that not a first miracle? At age seven, when typhoid fever brought me to agony, was it not to the intervention of St. Francis Regis [a Jesuit priest - Trans.] that my mother attributed my recovery? Did You not deliver me from the discomforts of adolescence about which my father was troubled? At my entrance into my career when I was suddenly stopped by a grievous illness of the throat, did You not heal me, did You not give me the happiness of publishing what I believed was the truth? Finally, five years ago, did You not bring me back from quite far, and did You not grant me this delay to do penance for my sins and to become better? Ah! All the prayers which then

¹ Ps. 40: 7. The Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version. 1989.

were addressed to You in my favor were heard. Those made to You today and in much greater numbers, why should they be lost? But perhaps, Lord, You will grant them in another guise. You might give me courage, resignation, peace of soul, and those inexpressible consolations which accompany your actual presence. You might make me find in illness a source of merit and blessings — and have these blessings fall on my wife, my child, on all my relatives, for whom my works had perhaps served less than would my sufferings.

These last words inform us that Ozanam's sacrifice had indeed been made. In fact, it was on the same day, 25 April, that he wrote his testament; we can do no more than to follow him to the grave.

On the eve of the month of September, accompanied by his wife, his daughter, his two brothers, he came out of the house which he had occupied in the small village of Antignano, on the edge of the sea. While coming out, he took off his hat and, with hands raised toward the sky, he delivered this prayer: "My God, I thank you for the sufferings and afflictions which you have sent to me in this dwelling; accept them in atonement for my sins." Then, turning toward his wife: "I wish that with me you would bless God for my sufferings." Immediately, throwing herself in his arms, she replied: "I, too, bless Him for the comfort which He has given me."

God granted him for the last time to cross the sea, with calm weather and gentle waves. Lying on the deck of the ship which was carrying him to France, Ozanam could enjoy in peace the air, the sky, the waters, the poetic shores of

Italy, all of which he had loved passionately, and where he had recently received a reception worthy of the land which had nourished so many noteworthy men and which still knew how to recognize them from whatever direction they approached its ruins. When the shores of Provence reached his eyes, he experienced a great joy at seeing the homeland again, and at the certainty of dying there. Without delay, the ship arrived at the port of Marseille where his mother-in-law and his wife's family were waiting. "And now," said he, "that I have returned her into whose hands she must be, God will make of me what He wishes."

He would have liked to see Paris again — Paris, to which so many memories bound him, where his friends and his glory had so reverently greeted him. But this wish of the servant was not to be granted. God alone had spared him the discomforts of the long trip; as soon as he touched the land of his forefathers and of his labors, suffering left him. A peacefulness which was neither that of life nor that of death enveloped his person. In that frame of mind, he received the last sacraments of the Church in which he had been both believer and defender. When the priest told him to have confidence in God, Ozanam replied: "Look! Why should I fear him? I love Him so much!"

This ceremony fulfilled, a fateful sleep took hold of his worn-out limbs. He awakened occasionally to thank, to bless, to hold out his hand, to wipe a tear, to smile once more. The morning of his death — the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin — he opened his eyes, raised his arms, and said in a loud voice: "My God, my God, have mercy on me!" These were the final words on earth of this soul which had pronounced so many eloquent ones.

Ozanam's friends received his casket with veneration. Lyons wanted to keep it; Paris obtained it. He rests under the feet of those young people whom he evangelized by his life and to whom he still speaks from the bottom of his grave.

Should I now bring up some facts or virtues forgotten in the course of my tale? Would I gather a few ears of corn, scattered after the harvest? Indeed, piety allows me, although it does not demand it.

Ozanam had an intense tenderness of heart, a deep faith in matters domestic. Even though he was very moderate and frequently did not even notice what he had been served, he insisted strongly that on Sundays and feast days there were to be on the table a few dishes somewhat more elaborate than usual. He was usually the one to make the demand and sometimes bring home the specialty. A stranger to all ideas of luxury, careless in his dress, pleased with the most plain furniture, he did find value in a bouquet of flowers. He loved having some near him, on his desk. Beautiful books, attractive engravings also tempted him, and he did not resist acquiring some small paintings whose qualities had captivated his eyes. Trips to outstanding places of the world were also one of his weaknesses. He would run to a lake, to a valley, and when the shadows of history fell with those of nature on a field or a ruin, he felt himself attracted by a powerful connection. To tell the truth, his was not an austere soul: poetry had marked him even in his childhood, and there was no muse that did not dwell in him.

On the 23rd of each month — a date dear to his memory because it was that of his marriage — he never missed offering to his wife a few flowering plants. Indeed, on the very eve of his death, he did not forget to do so. On the

previous 23 August, still present in the village of Antignano, he sent someone to look for a branch of myrtle which he had noticed on the seashore to offer it to the one who for twelve years had captivated and heartened his life.

For his living mother, he had developed a devotion which he always kept. Moreover, I noticed in his letters that he spoke endlessly of her with tender admiration. When he lost her, his pain was intense. But once the first heartbreak had passed, he experienced a phenomenon which somewhere he called *a conviction of the genuine presence of his mother*. It seemed to him that she was still interested in his activities, that she continued to inspire him, that she was rewarding him with palpable caresses, as she did in his infancy.

For Ozanam, friendship was not the fleeting emotion of a lively youth. Neither the years, nor the marriage, nor renown exhausted in him the need to hold in affection some equals. He sought them out, though they were younger, with a humility which was rewarded. And I myself having cherished a few of those whom he loved, I obtained touching proofs of the affection which he was able to inspire.

His piety was cheerful and gentle. Very early, it took on the character of an active concern for this populous society of souls which God has founded on earth by the blood of His Son. Ozanam even believed himself called to leave the world to learn how to bless it. Something held him back, either a bit of weakness in the face of sacrifice, either the fear of losing part of his freedom, or rather that God wanted him to have the heart of a priest in the life of a contemporary man. This word, *priest*, described him fully. No Christian in France, and of our time, loved the Church more, more accurately realized its needs, cried more bitterly over the faults of those who served it, and, in the end,

had in a lay existence a more genuine and deep apostolate. Prayer and meditation on divine matters uplifted him to this supernatural height, despite his ceaseless preoccupation with works of the mind. Every morning he read in a Greek Bible a few verses of Holy Scripture or even a few pages, depending on the reaction God provided to his reading. That occupied the first half-hour of his day. In the Bible, he had drawn practical knowledge of the word of God. He never went to his lectures without having prayed on his knees that he never say anything contrary to the truth, or speak only with the goal of attracting applause. In his discussions, one could detect the utmost care he took so as not to offend those who were arguing with him, whatever their errors. It seemed to him that as soon as a mind dealt with God, it was already on track to finding Him, and that a proud or too vigorous a word would wound it irreparably. But this gentleness never went so far as to conceal his thought. He professed his faith with the courageous humility of the Christian who knows how insignificant the world is; and, if the respect of souls moved him to a rare moderation, the respect of his own soul lay beyond all human concerns.

One day in London, when he visited Westminster Abbey, mingled in a crowd of strangers and unknowns, he arrived behind the chancel, facing the tomb of St. Edward [the Confessor, 1003-1066 - Trans.]. The sight of this monument, defaced by Protestantism struck him with pain, and, falling on his knees in front of similar relics of St. Louis of England [*sic*], he prayed alone in atonement for all this nation which no longer knows its saints — in spite of the onlookers who no doubt took him for an idolater, if not for a fool.

On another occasion, of a different character, he revealed the same courage. Those who saw him at the side of Mr. Lenormant¹, in the days when this regretted professor succumbed to an unprovoked aggression, would never doubt that Ozanam was capable of making any statement, no matter the peril.

The friends of Ozanam had wanted to erect a mausoleum in his memory. They chose neither marble nor bronze but his own writings. Their faithful and respectful hands brought together the scattered pages and, despite their author's death, gave them a unity which they hold less from their posthumous disposition than from the breath which gave them life from beginning to end. The scholar, the pious man, the orator reveal themselves in a fabric which never wears out. The reading of these pages will always inspire both regret and admiration; regret for a life so rare and so soon extinguished, admiration for talents so diverse in the same mind.

Dear Mr. Ozanam! Not one of us will leave a void similar to the one which you have left; not one of us will take from the heart of men what you have taken from ours. You have gone before us in death because you have preceded us in virtue; the poor have prayed for you and have deprived us of your being. Kindly receive these pages in which I sought to recount some reflection of what you had been for us. I have written them for you — for you, who were for us, during twenty years, if not the strongest at least the most untarnished subject of our attention, and whose weaknesses, if you had any that were hidden because you were a man, served only to increase our appreciation

¹ Charles Lenormant [1802-1859), archeologist; in 1846, he was forced to abandon his professorship at the Sorbonne. - Trans.]

for your unshaken loyalty to the causes you cherished and defended. You were the teacher of many, the consoler of all. After your many years of humiliations, you were chosen by God to recall to glory the abodes of truth. This mission of honor and peace you accomplished faithfully, up to your final day. The indigent saw you at the head of his bed, the literary rostrum before a generation of students; the press, that other instrument of good and evil, had in your person an honest and spiritually minded craftsman. You left no one with a wound, save that wound which heals with death, because it was charity that inflicted it. Remaining after you, we no longer have the joy of seeing or hearing you. And yet, we still have the joy of praising you.

Whatever be the destiny that awaits us at the last threshold of our career, we have, even now, the more outstanding joy of imitating you from afar, God-willing.

