





To Be Near Unto God

Author(s): Kuyper, Abraham (1837-1920)

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Description: This beloved devotional classic, which has blessed Christians for over one hundred years, contains 110 meditations on just one verse from Psalm 73: "But as for me, it is good to be near unto God." This intimate and contemplative devotional emphasizes that the reality of being near unto God must be the foundation upon which all else lies, the driving force of our very existence. These meditations, written during Kuyper's years as Prime Minister of the Netherlands (1901-1905), embody Kuyper's dedication to the unity of doctrinal loyalty and the spiritual vigor in his writing. As such, these meditations are trusted reflections of Kuyper's continual reflections and readings of Psalm 73:28, and are a true source of wisdom and spiritual encouragement.

Laura de Jong
CCEL Staff Writer

Subjects: Christian Denominations
Protestantism
Post-Reformation
Other Protestant denominations
Reformed or Calvinistic Churches

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To Be Near Unto God

By

Abraham Kuyper, D. D.

[Trans. by J.H. de Vries]

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TO BE NEAR UNTO GOD

1

"IT IS GOOD FOR ME TO BE NEAR UNTO GOD."

When in holy ecstasy the Psalmist sings: "I love the Lord, because He hath heard my voice and my supplication," he pours out his whole soul in his song, but the love can not be analyzed. To have love for God is a different and a much weaker thing than to be able to say: "I love God." There is love for native land, for the beauties of nature and for the creations of art. From tenderness of heart we have love for suffering humanity. We are attracted by things that are pure, true and of good report. And along this line of thought almost every honest soul can say that he has love for God, and that this love exceeds all other loves. Because from him and through him all loveable things are, and He is the highest good.

Love for God may be fine sentiment. It may be sincere and capable of inspiring holy enthusiasm, while the soul is still a stranger to fellowship with the eternal, and ignorant of the secret walk with God. The great God may still not be your God. Your heart may still not be attuned to the passionate outburst of delight: I love the Lord. For love of God in general is so largely love for the idea of God, love for the Fountain of life, the Source of all good, the Watcher of Israel who never slumbers; in brief, love for him who, whatever else changes, abides the same eternally. But when the heart can say: I love the Lord, the idea of the Eternal becomes personified. Then God becomes the Shepherd who leads us, the Father who spiritually begat us, the covenant-God to whom we sustain the covenant relation, the Friend who offers us friendship, the Lord whom we serve, the God of our trust, who is no longer merely God, but our God.

For many years we may have had love for God in general and never have known him. He is only known when love for him takes on a personal character; when we meet him in the pathway way of life; when He becomes a person in contrast with our own; when we enter into conscious, vital and personal relation with him, so that He is our Father and we his children; not merely one of his children, but his child in a special way, in a personal relation different from that of his other children, even the closest relation conceivable in heaven and on earth; He, our Father, our shepherd our bosom-friend and our God.

He who has not entered into this can not understand it. It extends farther than his reach. If, however, he is religiously inclined, he soon realizes on hearing about it, that if he might have this love, it would be sweeter than that of which he is now conscious. It makes him feel that he lacks something and so may arouse in him a desire for it. It may make him crave what would be so beautiful to possess. This craving may prepare him for better things. If there is to be contact with God, it proceeds from both sides. God draws near to us, and we to him. First afar off, then closer by, until distance falls away and we meet each other. The



blessedness of this moment can never be told in words. We then come near unto God, and this comprises all the blessedness of believing.

He who has not learned this secret may say with his lips: It is good for me to hold me fast by God (Ps. 73:27 Prayer-Book version), but he can not grasp it. So he passes it by as though it meant in general a pious frame of mind apart from feeling the burning within of the spark of true personal love. He worships God, he prays for grace, but has no genuine love. But "To Be Near Unto God" means such nearness to God as to see him with the eyes, to be aware of his presence in the heart, to hear him with the ear, and to have every barrier removed that thus far kept him aloof. "To Be Near Unto God" means to be near him in one of two ways: either to feel as though we were caught up into heaven, or as though God had come down to us in our loneliness, sorrow or joy. The very word "near" implies that there is much that separates us from God, and makes us solitary. When God is far away from us and we from him, it makes us desolate. It also implies that we are not contented; that we can not endure it; that our whole heart goes out after him, and will not rest until the last barrier is removed. For only when God is near unto us and we are near unto him is there blessedness again, which nothing can exceed, since it is unspeakably good "To Be Near Unto God." This exceeding blessedness can only be enjoyed at rare moments here, but in the life to come it shall endure. For in the Father's house above, we shall be near unto God forever and forever.

The world ruthlessly crosses our efforts along this line. Though it was not right, and never can be, we understand what went on in the heart of those who sought escape from the world, in cell or hermitage, for the sake of unbroken fellowship with God. It might have been efficacious, if in withdrawing from the world they had been able to leave the world behind. But we carry it in our heart. Wherever we go it goes with us. There are no monastic walls so thick, or places in forests so distant, but Satan has means to reach them. To shut oneself out from the world moreover, for the sake of a closer walk with God, is to seek on earth what can only be our portion in heaven. We may escape many things in doing it. The eye may no more see much vanity. But existence becomes abnormal. Life becomes narrow. Human nature is reduced to small dimensions. There is no imperative task on hand, no calling in life, no exertion of all one's powers. Conflict is avoided. Victory tarries.

But "To Be Near Unto God" in the midst of busy avocations yields its sweetest blessedness when it is cultivated in the face of sin and the world, as an oasis in the desert of life. And they whom the world has tried in most cruel ways to draw away from God have achieved highest honors and blessings. In spite of obstacles and worldly opposition they continued to have trysts with God, Jacob at Peniel, Moses in Horeb, David when Shimei cursed him, Paul when the people rose in uproar against him. In the heat of conflict "To Be Near Unto God" is blessed.



And apart from conflict with the world, the flesh and the devil, when clouds of adversity gather overhead, when the heart bleeds with wound upon wound, when the fig tree does not blossom, and the vine will yield no fruit, then with Habakkuk to rejoice in the Lord, because His blessed presence is more enjoyed in adversity than in seasons of material prosperity,--this is the lesson of history in all ages.



But the ways of the world are cruel. Its cruelties have assumed finer forms, but this refinement has made them more intolerable. In former days there was much that reminded people of the sanctities of life, that made them think of higher things, and kept eternity before their eyes. All this is mostly gone. In the busy life of the world today there is little to keep in memory the things that are holy and eternal. In public life all thought of God is ignored. In some places church-bells are no more rung. Few days of prayer are appointed. God's name is no more spoken. No memento mori any more reminds us of death. Cemeteries are turned into parks. Sacred things are scorned. That which in private conversation and in the public press gives tone to theories is the delusion that heaven reaches no higher than the stars, that death ends all, that life without God is more apt to bring prosperity than life in the fear of the Lord. The habit of doing without God in public life puts itself as a stream between God and the God-fearing soul. To hold fast by God, against the current of this stream, takes strong faith.

This modern cruelty of the world offers special dangers to our young people and children. But let us have courage. All things are known to God. In tender compassion He will draw near to us, and to our dear ones, that we and they may be near unto him. But in that case, satisfaction with half measures must not be tolerated. If we do, vague love for a far-away God will more than ever fail us. The free and untrammelled life, that joyfully proclaims: I love the Lord, alone can save. For it does not remain standing afar off, but seeks access to the immediate presence of God, in personal contact of soul with the Eternal.



"THE SOULS WHICH I HAVE MADE."

There is a peculiar charm about the thing which we have made. Not because of any intrinsic value it may have, but just because we have made it. The new beginner at the art of portrait-painting, who practices his art by copying celebrated originals, will think more of his own copy than of the more excellent original. Flowers which the young lad plucks from his own little garden are much more interesting to him than the bouquet from the florist. The country gentleman prefers vegetables from his own grounds or hothouse, even if less fine, to the produce imported from abroad. He who writes for the press deems his own article, published in some monthly or quarterly, the best of the edition. This holds good in every department of life. Produce raised ourselves interests us greatly. Cattle bred on our own stock farm is preferred to any other. We are more happy in the house which we have built.

Of course, this implies some self-complacency, which especially in youth is apt to breed conceit. We grant that preference for our own work can go too far, as when from sheer egotism it makes us undervalue better works from other hands. This is evident in mother-joy, which revels in play with its own child, such as is impossible in play with a neighbor's child. Self-delusion and selfishness may at times be too evident in this joy of the mother heart, but history and folklore in all lands and times bear witness that there vibrates another string in mother love than that of selfishness, the sound of which can only be understood when it is recalled that she bore the child. The mother is conscious of a part of her own life in that of her child. The two do not stand side by side as Nos. 1 and 2, but the mother-life extends itself in that of her child.

This trait is evident in every product of our own, whether of our thought, of our manual labor, or of our perseverance. And whether it is an article which we contributed, or a house which we built, a piece of embroidery which we worked, or a flower which we planted, a hound or a racehorse which we raised, there is something in it of our own, something that we put upon it, a something of our very selves, of our talent, of our invention, which makes us feel toward it as we never can feel toward things which are not of our own making.

And by this human trait God comforts the hearts of sinners. This trait is in us, because it is in God. Regarding this trait God declares that it operates in the Divine Fatherheart in our behalf. For where there is a soul at stake, God never forgets that He has made it. "For I will not contend forever, neither will I be always wroth; for the spirit should fail before me,



and the souls which I have made (Is. 57:16). As little as a mother can allow her just anger with the child of her own bosom to work itself out to the end, just so little can God's wrath with a soul fully exhaust itself, because He has made it. As a Father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him (Ps. 103). "Though a mother may forget her sucking child, yet will I not forget thee" (Is. 49:15).



The Fathername of God expresses this same comforting thought. It implies not merely that human fathers love, and that God loves, too, but that both the love of human parents and the love of God spring from the same source, to-wit: that God has created and made the soul that is in us. That we are created after God's image implies that God is conscious of the relation which He sustains to us. The High and Holy One finds something of himself in us, because we are his own products. As his own creatures, we are objects of his Divine interest. There is something of God in the soul, because He has made it. It bears the Divine stamp. There is something of God's power in it, of his thought and creative genius, as there is in nothing else. We are God's handiworks, no two of which are ever exactly alike. Imagine that we were gone, and the vast collection of the Lord would no more be complete. From this the tie between God and the soul is born, which makes each of us a star in his firmament which the Father of Spirits can not afford to lose. And therefore the Lord seeks what is lost.

An artist who has paintings on exhibition in a gallery and finds one of them gone, can not rest until it has been traced and restored to its place on the wall. In like manner God misses the soul that has gone astray, because He has made it. The beautiful parables of the lost penny, the lost sheep and the lost son sprang in the mind of Christ from the thought that God can not let go the works of his hands. Therefore He does not leave the souls of sinners indifferently as prey to corruption. They are his handiwork. And this constitutes the bitterness of sin.



If on entering the gallery one day the aforementioned artist saw that an angry intruder had wantonly, under cover of night, cut his paintings with a knife, his bitterness of soul would know no bounds, not merely because these paintings had been destroyed as treasures of art, but as works of his own hands. This insult has been inflicted upon God. The soul which He has made has been inwardly torn asunder by sin and has become almost irrecognizable. And as often as we yield to sin, the soul is spoiled still further. It is every time the continuance with uplifted hand of the work of ruining the soul, which belongs to God, because He made it.

The destruction of one's own soul, or of the soul of his children or of others by example or wilful temptation, is always the spoiling of a Divine work of art, a creation of God, which wounds him in his own handiwork, corrupting the traces of himself in it. It is as though a child is wounded and slain before his mother's eyes. It is defiance of the maker's love for his handiwork. It is wilfully giving offense, and grieving the maker in his most sensitive point.

To him, therefore, whose heart is right, this saying of the Lord, "The souls which I have made," has a two-fold meaning. First, the comforting thought that, if we believe, God's anger with the soul which He has made will not continue to the end. And, on the other hand, it implies the helpful warning that we should not poison the soul by continuance in sin, but that we should favor it, and spare it, and shield it from corrupting influences, because it belongs to God on the ground that He has made it. The confession that God created man after his own image does not exhaust the fulness of the thought in hand. The plummet goes far deeper. The saving and uplifting power of this confession is only felt when each morning is begun anew with the vivid realization of the inspiring thought that the soul in us is a work of art, made by the High and Holy One, on which his Honor hangs, over which therefore He watches with holy jealousy; and that we can not ruin it by sin except as we commit crime against that, to which God sustains the peculiar relation of being its Author and Maker.

Thus "The souls which I have made" does not say anything more, save that we should realize that we are the children of God; but it states it in a more gripping way. It declares that he who by sin denies his heavenly Father, violates God's honor and grieves the Father-heart.



"RICH IN GOD."

Jesus has appreciated the grave character of the struggle in life between God and money. It may be said that this struggle is even more violent in Western lands than in the East, where he preached and went about doing good, because there the common necessities of life are more easily procured than here. The large part which money plays in life is too generally ignored. Aside from wealth and love of simplicity, life unfolds differently when there is a free hand financially than when hard work for sheer sustenance of self and family must fill the hours of day. The concentration of every effort upon making money may soon degenerate into sinful passion, whereby the money-slave ignores all sense of honor; although by itself it is natural and free from blame that utmost pains are taken to improve financial conditions. Only think of how much there is at stake in this matter, as regards the education of the young, our own moral and spiritual development, and the cause of God's kingdom in the earth.



Money is a great power, and in times of pressing needs the lack of it renders one painfully helpless. Wherefore the influence of money upon an unconverted heart can not be estimated. When even godly people are caught at times in the snares of money, what must be its banal force with those who, though they know of more ideal aims, have never made a definite choice of God and of his Christ. Money and Satan mingle freely in such minds, and this opens the way for mammon. And though at first it may be tried to keep money and mammon apart, the endeavor soon proves futile. Money is a power in hand. But before we know it, it soon becomes a power over us; a power that rules over us and draws us away ever farther and farther from high and noble interests and makes slaves of us in the service of mammon. Jesus foresaw all this. He fathomed the disgrace and the shame of it. And moved with compassion for this gilded slavery he called the people that flocked to hear him, from money back to God.



This sharp antithesis alone should inspire us to resist the tyranny of money. When we are truly servants of God, money will be a servant to us. When, on the other hand, we seek protection in our own strength from the baneful influence of money, and from its strong temptation, we meet with dismal failure. Deeming that we are our own master, we find that the power of money lords it over us. Jesus therefore puts the two kinds of riches in contrast with each other: riches in money and riches in God. Not that one excludes the other. If we are rich in God, it is nothing against us to be rich in worldly goods. For then we will be well aware of the fact that we are but stewards of the Almighty, and money will serve both us and God. If we are rich in God and poor in earthly possessions, we will be satisfied and happy with the higher riches of the soul. But if a man is poor in God, worldly wealth is but

vain and hollow mockery. Material riches and sensual pleasures do not ennoble and refine the soul. Moreover at death they fall away, if not before, and leave the soul empty and shorn. It is harder still to be both poor in God and in worldly goods. This provides nothing for the enlargement of life; nothing to sustain and hold one up. It brings bitter discontent alone, which feeds upon the vitals and robs existence, heavily freighted with carping care, of its latest possible charm.

To understand what constitutes riches in God, imagine for a moment that all your earthly riches had taken wings, and that bereft of all you had, you are forgotten by those who once knew you. In this utter forsakenness of soul ask yourself: What have I left? What do I now possess? This will be our state in the hour of death. We will go into eternity alone. What will we take with us? We must leave money and houses behind. We must part even from our body. There will be nothing to us but the soul, our spiritual self. Shall we be rich then? If so, it can only be in spiritual goods. When we die we are either rich in God or poor in God. It will not do, therefore, to defer searching self-examination. When I am alone with my soul, what have I; what is there of me? Does my money impart to me my worth as a man, or am I something myself? Are there treasures stored up in my heart? Apart from all material interests has my personal self any significance worthy of mark in God's sight, or am I actually nothing?

Let us not deceive ourselves. Apart from covetousness it is quite possible to enlarge one's intellectual equipment, to cultivate the aesthetic nature, and to excel in cleverness and in achievement. All this has worth of its own, and is not acquired apart from God. But it belongs to the life of this world, and loses its significance the moment life on earth fails us. There remains of it only so much as has imparted a higher and nobler bent to our person, and has established and broadened our character and our spiritual powers, and thereby has become our property, which can not be taken from us by either catastrophe or death.

And without more, even this will not do. Personality that is well developed, character that is firmly established, inner strength of spirit and of will-power can be of use to us only when we can apply them to good and noble ends. Satan is the most strongly developed personality conceivable. Any one can train himself in sin. Hence the question remains: Have we developed the traits of character, and powers of personality, which are in harmony with the life of eternal blessedness? If not, at death, they will be of no use to us. Hell is full of strongly developed characters and cultivated talents. But they afford no pleasure, but rather add pain to pain, because it all goes without God, and increases no riches in him. Like sets of fine sharp tools by themselves, they are utterly useless. Thus the heart can only speak of possessions, when such powers and capacities have been so trained that they will permit admittance into heaven, will make us feel at home there, and will enable us to exert heavenly influences there.

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These heavenly properties are never acquired save through fellowship with God. From God as the Source, the powers of the Kingdom must operate in us that will entitle us to heavenly citizenship. In Christ we must be reconciled to God. The Father must come and dwell with us. For then the new life will be quickened in us, which draws its nourishment from heaven and imparts higher powers, and fills the soul with all the fullness of God. Thus to be rich in God is to own God himself; to be a temple of the Holy Ghost; to carry Him, the Holy and Glorious One, in the heart wherever we go; and every evening and every morning to be refreshed in the inner man at the fountain of the Water of Life.

Many obstacles prevent the full enjoyment of these blessings here. But this is the privilege of being rich in God, that the more we become detached from the world, the richer we become in God. And when at last the world shall fade from sight, the far more exceeding and eternal weight of these riches will unfold itself to our eyes. For this heavenly wealth will not waste, but ever increase in glory. It will be interest upon interest always in the very holiest sense. It will evermore be the Fountain and never again the cistern. It will be treasures that shall always exceed our boldest expectations, because they are centered in the Infinite.

In addition to all this, according to the Scripture, there is the inheritance of the saints in light. The difference between these two is determined by the difference between the inner and the outward life. The riches in God have to do with the inner life of the soul--already here in part, and presently to be revealed in full. To this inner life belongs an outward state. We do not have this here. It only comes with the division of the inheritance which is stored for us in heaven; even the inheritance of glory, the companionship of the saints made perfect, and of all the holy angels. The life in the palace of God's everlasting Light. The fruition in glory such as here has never entered the heart. No more sin. No more sorrow. Eternally in Christ with God in fullest, largest satisfaction of what in its noblest flush of anticipation the heart can expect or desire.

Rich in God, and therefore rich through God. O, how deeply have we fallen that these riches in God attract so few hearts; and that they who have won these heavenly possessions still hunger at times for the things that wean the soul from God and must needs impoverish it.



"IN THE COVERT OF THY WINGS."

The profoundest question that governs true piety relates to personal fellowship with God. In the Psalms, which are the most beautiful utterances of a devout mind, this Divine fellowship is ever longed for and sought after. The tie is there mentioned that binds us to God as the Creator and Supporter of all things. The relation is there stated, which he who fears the Lord sustains by faith to the Holy One. But these are not fellowship with the Eternal. He who fears the Lord does not rest until he has entered into such conscious fellowship with Him that there is mutual knowledge between the two--even the clear sense that God knows him and that he knows God.

What we call friendly intercourse among men, intimate fellowship, sympathy of heart with heart in faithfulness and love, is the meaning of [Ps. 25:14](#): "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant." As close friends on earth go through life together and reveal themselves to each other, and in this intimate walk become the confidants of each other's secrets, so it is told of the Old Testament heroes of the faith that "they walked with God." And although these are but figures and terms that are borrowed from human experiences, and although we ought not to use them ourselves when we would speak of our fellowship with God except with greatest reverence, it is equally sure that God has pointed them out to us for this end.

To picture this Divine fellowship the Scripture even borrows figures from animal life. Jesus illustrated his tender love for Jerusalem by the figure of the hen that gathers her chickens under her wings. David boldly declared before God that he would not only dwell in the house of the Lord forever, but that he would even make his refuge "in the covert of God's wings." ([Ps. 61:4](#).) And why not? Did not God put this tender expression of fellowship in the world of winged creatures as an intimation of what moves his own Divine heart? And is not every suggestive and touching instance of loving fellowship in the life of nature a Divinely given help to make clear to us the things which we observe and feel or only dimly sense in the mystic depths of our heart?

But even the broad creation fell short of material along this line. Wherefore the Lord has put still another figure before us by which to illustrate this intimate fellowship with himself; even that of dwelling together in one house. For the house, or with nomadic tribes the tent, is not original in the creation, but is mechanically constructed by human hands. With Jabal mankind first came upon this find, whereby the social life of man took an incredible step forward. The home was foreshadowed in the creation. Jesus pointed to the fact that foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests. And was it not a deep feeling of want that expressed itself in the words that He, the Son of Man, had no home * * * indeed, no place



at all of his own where to lay his head? Life can only be fully developed by our dwelling together under one roof tree. The family home is the nursery of love. It is the outward encircling with the tie of the closer fellowship of life. Thus we see that in Scripture the house or tent is given us as an aid, by which fellowship with God assumes a form and an outline that makes it plain to us. God also has a house. And the idea of dwelling in God's house beautifully indicates the most intimate and tenderest fellowship with God. Purposely, therefore, the tabernacle was constructed in the wilderness. Presently it was perpetuated in the Temple on Mount Zion. It is expressly stated that in Horeb God showed Moses the pattern of the same. Hence the Tabernacle and the Temple were a pattern of what actually exists in the heavens.



And in connection with this, the deep longing is constantly expressed to be privileged to dwell in the Tabernacle of the Lord. Rather be a doorkeeper in the house of God than dwell in the palaces of the ungodly. "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life; to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple." (Ps. 27:4.)

Tabernacle and Temple, however, were not permanent. They only served for a time. In the broad development of the life of faith they were transitory. When Jesus had come, it was said: "Woman, the hour cometh, and now is, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father, but when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth (John 4:21). This means worship without symbols, without outward forms, directly spiritually, from heart to heart. If then we are in sympathy with David's ardent longing to dwell in the house of the Lord, we must no longer apply this to an earthly house or visible church. For this only brings us back to the dispensation of shadows. The temple of God is no more an allegorical house of wood and stone, but the great palace of our God in the heavens. For heaven is God's dwelling place. There is the palace of his glory, the Tabernacle of his Majesty. When Jesus teaches us to pray: "Our Father, who art in heaven," he detaches the soul from every material thing, and lifts the heart on high, in order that we should no more think of the Majesty of God in terms of earth.



To dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our life means to be so vividly conscious of our fellowship with the living God that every morning, noon and night our thoughts go out to Him, that we hear his voice in the soul, that we are aware of his holy Presence within, experience his workings in our heart and in our conscience, and that we carefully avoid the things which we would not dare to do if God stood before us and spoke to us.

The Psalmist goes still one step further, whereby he clearly shows that through the shadows, the faithful under the Old Covenant grasped the higher reality. For he adds: "I will make my refuge under the covert of Thy wings." It is not enough to think of God's glory in

the heavens, to dwell in his holy temple, to walk among the angels and the saints, who stand before the Lord. God's house will afford the opportunity for fellowship with him, but in it we will look for God himself. One must live with a person in his house in order to enjoy his company to the full. But the house without him is nothing. He himself is the first interest there. Such is the case in our search after fellowship with God. *Sursum Corda*. Lift up your hearts. I will lift up my heart to the trysting-place of thy holiness.

Even this is not enough, nor ever can be. To find God we must dwell in his house. But there "To Be Near Unto God" is the sole end and aim of all godly desire and endeavor. To give vent to this passionate longing David boldly exclaims: "I will make my refuge in the covert of Thy wings." This is communion of spirit with Spirit. It involves the sacred touch. To perceive and to feel, to discover and to experience that nothing separates us any more from the Lord; that his arms are around us, and that as it were we cleave unto God.

This is holy ground. It is not free from dangers. Misapprehension can interpret this figurative language literally, and in an unholy sense materialize our Spiritual God. False mysticism has shown what errors it may entail. Provided, therefore, that we are on our guard, this figure is aboundingly rich and supremely glorious. To possess God, and to have made fellowship with him a reality in life is beautiful, provided that it always is in Christ. We, impure and unholy, are brought by our Savior alone, into this tender communion with God.



HE WILL REGARD PRAYER.



Does the Lord regard prayer only after long delay? Is He not omnipresent? Is not the whispered prayer known to Him before there is yet a word in the tongue? Can the All-Knowing One first stand apart, indifferently as it were, and only gradually perceive that we pray, before he regards what at first he ignores?

Such is the meaning of verses 16 and 17 of [Psalm 102](#). The Psalmist stands outside a closed door. Out of the depth his prayer ascends. But the thorn in the flesh is not removed. The Lord does not hear his prayer. And the Arch-enemy, who does not pray, and who does not know God, is encouraged by Jehovah. God's covenant people are repulsed. God hides his face. And the Psalmist cries: "Hear my prayer, Lord, and from me. In the day when I call answer me speedily.

This brings relief to his troubled mind. With prophetic insight he anticipates the day when the Lord will hear the prayer of his people, and inspired by this thought he exclaims: "When the Lord will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer, then shall all the kings of the earth fear him."

Thus the Psalmist was still in that period in which the Lord held himself deaf to his people, and in which the moment tarried when he would regard their prayer. And do you think that the Psalmist did not feel and know the objections that are suggested by the nature of the Divine Being against this human representation? And are we so far his superior that the thoughts which arise in us were foreign to him? Who has ever outlined God's omnipresence and omniscience in terms of finer poetic imagery than he? Are not the expressions in which we clothe our prayers for the most part borrowed from his writing? Did not he propound the question: "Shall he who planted the ear, not hear?" And did not he confess in [Ps. 139](#): "There is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, Lord, Thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I can not attain unto it."



The Psalmist has described the Divine virtues in behalf of the saints of all ages, and the mysteries of the Divine Being are nowhere more clearly set forth than in the language of his songs. And when this eminently-saintly man frequently speaks of God--also with reference to this matter of prayer--in this simple, human way, what can it mean, save that the confidential terms of intimate human fellowship have the same significance in the secret walk with God. And that there are moments when God disregards our prayers, but which, praise his name, are succeeded by other moments in which He does regard them?

You believe in Christ. You believe that his saying is true: "He that hath seen Me, has seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us

the Father?" On bended knee you confess him as your Lord and your God. But what is the incarnation of the word except that God became man?

And what profit can this be to you, unless you realize that in Christ God has come close to you in a human way?

Before the days of the Bethlehem birth God spoke to us in the human word, but in Christ God is manifest in human nature. He reveals himself to us as the son of Man. A human heart speaks here in human language and in human ways. As the Apostle John asserts: In Jesus they have not only seen and heard what is God's, but have touched, that is they have handled with their hands, and have actually seen before their eyes the eternal--Godlike in human manifestation and in human form. Hence the whole Christian faith and Christian confession rests upon the clear and firm conviction that God has not willed himself to be lost to us in endless abstractions, but that in our human nature, in human form and in human language he comes to us ever more closely, in order through the medium of our human heart to establish affectionate and full fellowship with us.

Our Lord Jesus makes no high-sounding, abstract statements of the infinite in the Eternal, but shows us God as our Father, and calls us to be his children, and with childlike confidence, in a childlike way, and with childlike intimacy to have fellowship with him. Let it be distinctly understood that this rests on sober reality. That this is not mere semblance but actual fact, since God created us after his image. That thus, in the face of a broad difference, Divine reality is expressed in the human. And that, when the Word became flesh, the fact that the Son of God became Man, is directly connected with our creation after God's image.

Would we undo all this, and create a distance between us and God which would exclude all personal fellowship, by putting a whole system of abstract ideas about the immensities of God in the place of this heart-to-heart intimacy which can not be cultivated with God except in a human way? Let us leave this to philosophers who do not pray, and to theologians dry-as-dust who are not children of their Father in heaven. But as for us, let us love God with a devotion which can only express itself in childlike fellowship with him.

Moreover, in the practice of prayer we frequently observe that experience confirms the word of the Psalmist. At one time the heavens are open to us, and as we pray, angels descend and ascend to bring our petitions to the throne of grace. While at other times our prayers are faint, our words bound back as it were upon ourselves and every door of approach to God is closed up against us. At one time there will be an immediate hearing and a direct answering, and at another time we feel ourselves immured and thrown back upon ourselves, and it seems that there is no living God to hear us. And when the turn of the tide sets in, and we perceive that the gate of heaven reopens, and we feel that our prayer obtains free access to the throne of the Almighty, then we understand from our own experience what



the Psalmist wrote about the blessedness of the moment in which the Lord regarded again the prayer of the soul that was destitute.

Is now the solution of this apparent contradiction as impossible as it seems? By no means; provided we have eyes to observe the part which God plays in our prayer-life. When we deem that prayer is original with ourselves; when we do not believe that the spirit of prayer goes out in us from God, and we imagine that God's part in our prayer only begins when he hears and answers it, then indeed we face an insoluble riddle.

But if we take it in the other, truer way, and make it clear to our mind that God has quickened our prayer-life and that he directs and carries it, the matter gleams with light. The farmer sows the seed in the newly-ploughed furrows and leaves it alone to do its work, and only returns to the field when the dew of heaven and sunshine have caused the seed to sprout and to send the blade upward, and the corn to ripen in the ear, that he might gather the harvest.

And such is the case in our prayer-life. Our Father who is in heaven begins it by sowing the seed of prayer in our hearts. And then follows a slow process. The prayer-life must develop in us. Prayer must ripen in the soul. And only when this result has been obtained, and our prayer has unfolded itself in that higher form, does the heavenly Husbandman regard the prayer-life in us and enrich it with abounding answers.

Such is the case with our prayer-life taken as a whole. Through foolish petitions we arrive at purified prayers. Through earthly prayers we come to those holier petitions which have been watered with the dew of heaven, and which scintillate with light from higher spheres than ours.

But such is the case also with our individual prayers. These, too, are not unfolded and ripened at once. They also undergo a process in the soul. They also spring from a root and only by degrees develop themselves into prayers such as the Father in heaven expects from his children. Prayers which are not merely sounds in the lips but which rise from the depths of the heart. Prayers which fully harmonize with our own desires and inclinations. Prayers in which not merely a passing thought, but the whole person expresses himself. Prayers in which the soul truly pours itself out before the Holy One.

God allows us time for this. It can not be at once. If he interfered at once no prayer-life could be developed in us, and no single prayer could be sanctified in us. Weeds that grow between our prayers must first be rooted out. Every infectuous insect that crept in must be destroyed. Prayer must refine itself and sanctify itself and in a heavenly sense through faith must be able to mature. And therefore he leaves us to ourselves for a time that through the fiery trial gold may proceed from the ore.



And when at length our prayers are sufficiently purified to be laid upon the Altar of the Almighty, then he will regard them again. And we will thank our Father in heaven that he has brought us to the holy school of prayer.

6

"HEARKEN UNTO ME, MY PEOPLE." "GIVE HEED TO ME, O LORD."

At one time it was thought that sound came from the throat, that its power was limited, and that it could only make our word intelligible at short distances. No one could hear us, nor we him, from a greater distance than our voice could carry. When there was anything to say, messengers were sent to carry it. When writing was invented, communications were carried by letters.

All this, however, is changed. By this time it is understood that the throat has no sound of its own, but merely enables us to occasion vibrations in the air. And that these vibrations find an artistic instrument in the listening ear to receive them. When we speak we transmit our thoughts in these vibrations. They glide along air-waves to the ear of him who listens. And through the ear they wake the self-same thoughts in him.

Such is our speech. But this was not enough. It was discovered that apart from voice and ear, communication could be established at far greater distances through electricity. This was first done by means of visible signs, and thus the telegraph originated. But later it was found that a similar contact of throat upon the ear could be obtained by means of an extended metal thread. This discovery gave us the telephone. And at length we have advanced still further and intelligible communication is achieved independently by itself through the air, and at distances of two or three thousand miles without telegraph or telephone wires, thoughts have been exchanged.

In this wise things have become realities which at one time were entirely unthinkable. And he who considers how quickly these ever-more wonderful inventions have succeeded one another conjectures that still more can be expected and that playing with and listening to each other at incredible distances will sooner or later be the common good.

This is an aid to faith. That the Lord is simultaneously "a God at hand" and "a God afar off" ([Jer. 23:23](#)) expresses in the language of prophecy that there are no distances with God; and that he can speak to us and can listen to our voice, even though heaven is his throne and we kneel here on earth. Yea, even when we whisper our prayer under breath, so that he who stands by our side can not hear it. And faith had no other explanation for this than the question: "Shall he who planted the ear not hear? Shall he who formed the voice not speak?" The confession was accepted that God is everywhere present. And this consisted in the fact that he is the All-Knowing One. But there was nothing in this to support and to carry the imagination.

All this has changed. Now that it is possible for us with all our human limitations to extend our voice from city to city and to make ourselves intelligible to one another; now



that we can exchange thought at a distance of many thousands of miles without wires or any such thing; now that the impression is general that this is but the beginning of an inter-communication which shall be developed still more, we can imagine how communication can extend itself at length without limit, and how the Lord our God who is the creator of all these means, and has them at his disposal, can from the Throne of his glory look down upon us and can whisper to us in the soul. And how, on the other hand also, when our voice, however weak, goes out to him in supplication, it can be heard by him. As regards the life of glory among the saints in light it is ever more clear that communion shall not only be possible from time to time with a few, but that when once the limitations of this life shall fall away and glory shall begin, intimate communion shall be possible at one and the same time among and with all the redeemed of the Lord.

But even then it will all be the expression and the working out of the fact of our creation after the Divine image. It will not be just in the same way in which God communes with us, but it will be communion in a *similar* way.

That we ourselves can speak with our fellow men at such incredible distances, brings us nearer to God in our prayer, and brings God nearer to us when he speaks to us. And the "Hearken unto me, my people," followed by the prayer: "Give heed to me, O Lord," is more real to us than before.

There is still another phase in our secret walk with God, which we may call the phase of holy rapture. It springs from the indwelling of the Holy Ghost in us. As often as this indwelling operates there is no distance. Then the Lord speaks to us in the inner-chamber of the heart. Then we perceive his sacred presence not afar off but at hand. And our speaking to God is the confidential whisper as in the ear. Such is the case at the cool of the day when the peace "which passeth human knowing" takes possession of the heart and the sweet joy of being God's child transports us into holy ecstasy.

But we can not deal with this now. We have in mind the man who believes, but who through sin and trial has lost in part the sense of being a child of God, and finds himself distant from God. Such spiritual conditions occur frequently with those who are most saintly. Then it seems that at first God does not hear us, and as though we must entreat the Lord to listen again to the voice of our supplications.

"Give heed, to me, O Lord," is the cry of him who feels that God has paid no attention to his prayer. In the same way when by Isaiah God says: "Hearken unto me, my people," it implies that at first the people gave no heed to the speaking of the Lord. Hence both belong to the phase of temporary estrangement, when communion between the soul and God has been broken by sorrow or by sin. Then the means of communication must be connected again. Then in the parlance of the telephone God rings us up, and we ring up God, and thus the broken connection is restored. Union with God, fellowship with the Eternal, is the great sanctifying and protecting power which holds us up in the midst of all sorrow and trials.



6. HEARKEN UNTO ME, MY PEOPLE. GIVE HEED TO ME, O LORD.

Not that we are apart here on earth below and that in our thoughts God is confined to heaven above, so that we can remember him on our knees but a few moments every day, but constant, unbroken fellowship with Our Father who is in heaven is the secret of the power of childlike faith.

This was easier in earlier times when life was less hurried and less busy. At present life is a great strain on the nerves. It continually overwhelms us with new impressions and sensations, so that the quiet collecting of the soul before God is ever less frequent. And it is chiefly because of this that in these, our days, the secret walk with God suffers loss.

But for this very reason the new inventions of communication and interchange of thought provide a counterpoise. For they come to the help of our imagination and impart more reality than before to our effort to restore the broken connection. And thus the finds of science become supports to our piety. They help us to hearken unto God, and our prayer, "O Lord, give heed to me and hear the voice of my supplication," borrows strength from them in our approach to the throne of grace.



"THAT WHICH I SEE NOT, TEACH THOU ME."

The knowledge that we have of ourselves differs according to its source. We have acquired a part of it ourselves, another part we have received from God. When it is asked in what particular these two parts of self-knowledge differ, call to mind that as a rule we faithfully record the good there is in us, while for the most part we must have the evil that is in us pointed out to us and brought to our remembrance by God.

A child can understand this. When praise is offered, it is readily accepted. But a child resists blame. He is not conscious of wrong and lightly passes it by. And he continues in this course until the conscience is awakened and God teaches him to become humble.

In later life this goes on more covertly. In reality, however, conditions remain the same. The heart is not carried on the sleeve as in childhood years. Some people succeed in hiding their inner life from the eyes of others. No sooner, however, is the personal life disclosed to the ear of a friend but the same result follows. A part of our self-knowledge we have acquired ourselves. The other part we have ignored, until through bitter experience it has been taught us by God. This difference is at times strikingly evident. For, as a rule, we do not only fail of seeking instruction in matters of conscience, but resist the same when it is offered, and only consent to it when in the providence of God it is forced upon us. In many instances God is obliged--we say it reverently--to force this self-knowledge upon people all their lives. They simply will not learn it and in every way they seek to forget what God shows them of themselves.

But there are men and women who in all honesty seek a clear knowledge of themselves and who desire nothing more earnestly than to know the truth regarding themselves--Nathaniels, who do not invite but shun flattery; who despise the false image which they see of themselves in the glass, and who can not rest until they know themselves as they truly are. When God speaks to them in the conscience they lend him a willing ear. They realize that God's lesson in the conscience is a warning, and they do not fail to profit by it. Now let higher, spiritual grace be added to this, and the gains will still be greater. Not only will they lend willing ears to listen when God speaks, but they will also study the lessons which God tries to impart to the conscience and attain the high, spiritual level of the pregnant prayer: "That which I do not see and discover in myself, teach Thou me, O my God" ([Job 34:32](#)).

These two parts of human knowledge are abroad everywhere. All through life there is a part of knowledge which we acquire ourselves and a part which God brings us. To see is



to observe, and ordinarily we call the first part of our knowledge that which is acquired by observation. By the side of this there is another part of knowledge which man would never have acquired of himself, and which God has taught him. This characterizes human knowledge in general. Everywhere and in all ages man observes, gains experience, investigates and enlarges the scope of his finds, and in this way, among all nations, arrives at certain knowledge of nature and of life, and turns it into profit. In this process one nation excels another in keener sight and finer hearing, in greater powers of invention and perseverance, and consequently makes greater strides in development. But in the main all knowledge is alike. It is founded upon that what man sees. It is acquired by observation. It is developed by studious thought. Such is the case with the great inventions, in which there is always something mysterious; inventions which, though no one surmises it at first, disclose to us almost entirely new domains of knowledge, which unbelief attributes to chance, but which he who believes gratefully interprets from the Divine appointment. Thus aside from the knowledge that is obtained through what we see, another knowledge comes to us because God imparts it to us.

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High ideals, moreover, whether in individuals or nations, form the strongest possible motives that inspire the search after knowledge and truth. He who has no sense of ideals may seek material knowledge, but the knowledge of higher things in human life leaves him cold and indifferent. A money-wolf is an adept in the knowledge that promises gain, but what does he care for the higher knowledge of the nobler elements of human life? Just as little as a deaf man cares for a Bach, or a blind man for the works of art by a Raphael or Rembrandt. And what applies to individuals applies to nations. When nations fail of ideals, they degenerate into materialism and sensualism, and shut themselves off from the higher life. They make no progress themselves and can not influence other nations for the better. Indeed, they retrograde and drag other nations down with themselves. This can differ in one age from another with the same people. In the sixteenth century the Netherlands fostered high ideals, and exerted noble and inspiring influences upon all of Western Europe. In the eighteenth century they degenerated and carried no blessing to other nations in any sense.

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And whether a nation is swayed by high ideals, depends on God. When he sends forth the breath of nobler aims and purposes upon a people, desires are quickened after the higher ends of life, and people are lifted up by the knowledge of nobler human existence. When he takes that breath away, the understanding is dulled, and all nobler knowledge fails. In an ideal sense God can draw a people to himself and impart something of his own Divine life to it. And He can withdraw and leave a people alone to its own hurt. In the latter case the loss of higher and nobler knowledge is inexorable. And so we arrive at the same result. By seeing and observing, a part of our knowledge is in our own power. But the part of higher and nobler knowledge God alone can impart.

As we apply this to ourselves we see at once that this Divinely-imparted knowledge comes by no means exclusively through the conscience. Upon a far broader scale some of it comes from the Divine counsel, and some from the relation which he establishes between himself and us. We are born of our parents and we find many things in ourselves that remind us of them. But the formation of our person, disposition, temper and leading inclination are his work. When we discover in ourselves a thirst after higher knowledge, and a susceptibility to nobler ends, the impulse born from this is a work of the Holy Ghost in the soul. The results of the knowledge which we have thus acquired are not obtained by observation, but by virtue of the higher impulse which he quickens and maintains in us.



Circumstances play a part in this. We may have a friend whose nobleness of character becomes an inspiration. We may go through certain experiences, and meet cultivated and interesting people who stimulate us to court higher lines of thought. We may have important duties laid upon us, high responsibilities, or bitter griefs, which advance us to more than ordinary heights. And again, it is God alone who disposes all these things in our behalf. But above everything else we can feel the beginnings of a strong drawing of God in our hearts when he leaves us no rest and weans us from earthly vanities, and mystically inspires us with a sense of necessity which compels us to take deeper interests in the higher things of life and makes us grow and expand in them with continual refreshings. And if this is so, it is not we who have raised ourselves up to God, but it is God who has raised us up to heavenly places with himself. This mercy may have been shown to us and not to some others. And why? This is a mystery which we can not grasp. But the fact remains. We have two kinds of knowledge. Aside from that which is acquired by sight and observation, there is that other and higher knowledge which comes to us from God.



This knowledge unfolds most beautifully in the soul that is subject to grace. Not every regenerate child of God advances to great heights of learning. Some devout souls lack almost every power of entering into the mysteries of the higher life. Some cultivate mysticism along emotional lines, but continue devoid of knowledge. Others learn a great deal of the way of salvation, but cultivate little interest in the higher and nobler knowledge of human life. There are still others, and this is most glorious, who are warm of heart and of a deep mystical nature, and of clear insight into the way of Salvation, who, in addition to all this, reach the inner unfoldings, by which their knowledge is extended to those nobler parts of human understanding, which make them not merely deeply religious, but men of high ideals.

Such people stand on the top of the mountain of God's holiness. A light above the light of the sun dawns on their horizon. Their knowledge becomes that of the saints made perfect. They are most deeply conscious of their entire dependence upon God and of their longing for ever larger knowledge of him and of themselves. And this, their thirst, can only express itself in the prayer: O my God, aside from what I see and discover myself, teach Thou me. Instruct me ever more in holy fellowship with Thee.

"SONGS IN THE NIGHT."

Night is a mystery. For most people sleep is a going out from life, in order, in the course of seven or eight hours, to come back to it. When they fall asleep, they are gone. And when the hour-hand on the dial points, say some seven or more hours further on, they arise and resume their part in life. There is at most an occasional remembrance of a dream, but for the rest it is all a blank. A third part of life is spent in sleep. At thirty years of age a man has practically lived but twenty. The remaining ten years have passed away in unconsciousness.

But sleep serves a purpose. We retire weary in body and mind and with new strength we arise. As far as we know, we were inactive in sleep. We did not think, nor observe, nor will, nor work. This entire cessation of activity is the real ordinance of night. As long as we are in health and in full possession of our powers, and not overburdened with cares, we sleep, undisturbed by outward things, in this way and in no other.

Why this has been so ordained, we do not know. For though we say that we become weary through work, that our strength is exhausted and demands rest to recuperate, it means nothing. For at once we ask: Why this exhaustion of strength? He, after whose Image we are created, never wearies. The heavenly hosts of angels do not sleep. Of the new Jerusalem we read: "There shall be no more night." We can imagine a being, who does not exhaust his strength and therefore needs no sleep. Why God appointed life for us with the continual exhaustion of its powers and their restoration by sleep remains a secret. But though no one understands it, this Divine ordinance has not gone forth without a purpose and a wise disposal. Does not the Scripture say that in the night our reins instruct us, and does not this impart an higher significance to sleep? Undoubtedly such was the case with David. But this is by no means an ordinary experience. And even if this were the case, yet for the sake of spiritual instruction in the soul, this regularly returning period of seven long hours would be out of all proportion. Only think how large a part of the day it is from nine o'clock in the morning until four in the afternoon. And yet it comprises but seven hours, and these we sleep away out of every twenty-four.



This is modified by sickness, by pressing cares or old age, three causes which either shorten, disturb or delay sleep, so that a part of the night is sleepless. By either of these causes night obtains a different significance, but only because sleep can not be courted, or is too much interrupted or too early ended. Hence dreams are not without some significance. Dreams can discover us to ourselves. They can suggest helpful thoughts of life. They can afford us moments of fellowship with our dead, which gives us melancholy delight. God can reveal something to us in dreams. In spite of all this, most dreams are forgotten on waking. And when at rare times they leave a memory, nothing but vague, vanishing and

mixed images float before the mind. Even the petition from the old evening song, "In sleeping let me wait on Thee; in dreams be Thou my joy," does not determine, save in rarest instances, the content of our dreams.

This does not deny, however, that without our knowing it, and even while we sleep the Spirit of God ministers to our spirit and builds up our inner life. Also, in connection with this, the mystery of our existence by night includes certain effective ministries of God. But we can not deal with them, because they go on in our unconsciousness. At times, on awaking, we may be able to solve certain difficulties which troubled us the night before, and he who fears the Lord will thank him for this. But even then it is always a work of God, which we do not understand, and of which we can only say with the Psalmist (118:23), "This is the Lord's doing. It is marvelous in our eyes."

Our existence by night only obtains a conscious significance when, through sickness, care or old age our sleep is broken. With respect to this the Scripture declares: "In the night our reins instruct us." Says the Psalmist (77:6), "In the night I commune with mine own heart." Isaiah adds (26:9), "With my soul have I desired Thee in the night." And Job declares (35:10), "God is my Maker, who giveth songs in the night." This provides a school of learning which we should take more seriously into account. Sleeplessness is a trying experience, which affects all of the next day. But it is a discipline which leads either to sin or to glory. It all depends upon the manner in which these sleepless hours are spent. If wakefulness leads to nothing but gloomy and peevish complaint by day and to a rebellious turning over of self on the bed by night, it works sin. But when such sleepless hours are spent in the endeavor to confirm and make more real the fellowship with God, the inner life of the soul is strengthened and upbuilt. Moreover, such godly motions are medicine against sleeplessness itself, while rebellious restlessness fosters and prolongs it. To fight God in such an hour makes restlessness; it gives rise to feelings of oppression and renders sleep more and more impossible while fellowship with God at such a time brings rest and calm to troubled minds and sleep to weary eyelids.

But this is only a by-product. The main point is that a sleepless night is the time in which to seek the Lord, and to test the word of the Psalmist: "It is good for me to hold me fast by God." The strenuous activities of life, the constant noise on every side, and the absorbing occupations of the mind by day, hold us off and estrange us from God. But in the quiet hours of night nothing at all diverts us. The darkness is restful to the eyes. The stillness of night puts the ear on the retired list. No work of any sort engages us. Hurry has given place to calm. Nothing, indeed, diverts. There is no one near to trouble us or to detain us. All the conditions are there for undisturbed fellowship with God. Such hours of night invite us, more than any other, to enter into the sanctuary of the Most High. The midnight watch has something of Sabbath stillness about it, which is inaugurated by the evening reading of God's Word, and by the evening prayer, when on bended knees the soul was poured out before



God. At length we are at rest. And now the cares and anxieties of the day must either be resolutely put aside or we must enter upon such close fellowship with God that he carries them for us.

All this, however, is not entirely in our own hands. It is not enough that we think of God and make our approach to him. Communion proceeds from both sides. Unless God draws near to us, we can have no close fellowship with him. To think: God is ever ready to wait on me, it merely depends upon me whether or not I will meet him, does not indicate sufficient humility or sense of dependence. Thinking of God is not fellowship with God. True fellowship is far more devout and far more intimately personal. And as often as we have true fellowship with God, it is a grace and a benefit for which we owe him thanks. It is not that we are so good and so devout as to lift up our heart unto God. But it is rather Divine Compassion that condescends to us to bless us and to make us rich with the experience of his presence.

If before sleep the latest feeling is one of delight in the tenderness of the Lord, and if the first conscious thought on awaking in the morning of itself goes out after God, the gain is very great. This makes us to be accustomed to God, and prepares us for the night of the grave, when there shall be no more interruption in our fellowship with him.

At night, on our beds, when we can not sleep, we feel our helplessness. Much more so, indeed, than when by day garments adorn our person, when our word makes our influence a power and when we labor to make or maintain our position in life. We lie prostrate on our bed and stand no longer upright. We are well nigh motionless. And this very insignificance of our appearance there renders us but the more fit to meet our Lord.

And then God becomes great to us. We realize his saying that he is Our Maker. His faithfulnesses present themselves to us. The arms of everlasting compassion support and encircle us. Sadness of heart gives place to joy. Anxious thoughts become calm and glad. The soul becomes attuned to the worship of the eternal love of God. And when his Holy Spirit thus ministers to our spiritual needs and imparts his quickening touch, the hymn of praise rises from the heart and with us it is literal fact that God, our Maker, giveth us songs in the night.



"I CRY, BUT THOU HEAREST NOT."

To get no hearing, as one stands at the closed door, and it is not opened, makes one anxious. He then knocks harder, and when this brings no reply, he calls, and calls louder and louder. And when still no sound is heard, and there comes no answering voice, fear strikes the heart lest some accident has befallen child or brother whom he knows is near.

To get no hearing, when in distress one has called for help, and has waited and waited for a response and it did not come, how often has it turned courage into dismay.

To get no hearing! What restlessness it brings when fear is harbored whether it is well with child, or brother far off, and one writes and writes again, and no reply follows, and a telegram is sent with prepayment for an answer and no answer comes.

To get no hearing! It makes the heart faint when a beloved member of the household is seriously ill and we approach the bedside and call the beloved by name, in a whisper first, and then louder, till we find that the patient does not hear us.

To get no hearing! It is overwhelming in cases of accident in mines or with a landslide in digging trenches, when victims are, as it were, buried alive, and one calls and calls again, and listens with bated breath for some sound or answering sign of life, and silence continues unbroken.

To get no hearing! It caused such anxious forebodings when, not many years ago, Martinique was overturned by an earthquake and telegrams were sent to the place of disaster to enquire after conditions of things there and no telegraphic signal was returned.

The prophets of Baal experienced this tense anxiety on Mount Carmel when, "from morning even until noon" they cried: O, Baal, hear us. And they leaped upon the Altar * * * and cut themselves * * * with knives and lancets * * * but lo! there was no voice, nor any that answered." (I. Ki. 18:26). And greater anxiety still filled the hearts of the prophets of Baal when Elijah, from his side, cried out: "Hear me, Lord, hear me," and obtained the coveted answer, and "the fire of the Lord consumed the sacrifice."

But the saints of God in the earth have not always been similarly favored. Read the complaint of Asaph in [Psalm 83](#): "O, God, keep not thou silence; hold not thy peace--as one deaf--and be not still, God." Or consider David's distress which he voices in [Psalm 28](#): "Unto thee will I cry, Lord my rock; be not silent--or as one deaf--to me; lest if thou make as though thou hearest not, I become like them that go down into the pit." And what is stronger still, call to mind the Lama Sabachtani of Golgotha, echo of the prophetic complaint of [Psalm 22](#): "O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season also I take no rest."



And this is the difference between the religious man of the world and the devout believer on God. We have nothing to say of the man of the world pure and simple. He does not pray at all. He never cries to God, and never expects an answer. But the people of the world are not all like this. Many are not wholly irreligious. They still observe religious forms. They have not wholly abandoned prayer. It is mostly, it is true, a mere matter of habit--to say grace at the table before one eats, a so-called "blessing," which consists mainly of a "whisper," and upon retiring at night a short prayer of thanksgiving and supplication. This kind of prayer is revived in days of trouble, and in moments of anxiety, when a loved one at home is sick unto death, or reverses in business bring a man low. Then the religious man or woman of the world prays and calls. And when prayer brings no help, and danger is not averted, and no answer is granted, the seemingly futile prayer falls heavily back upon the heart embittered by disappointment.

The case is altogether different with the devout believer on God. The saintly man of prayer seeks his Father. From experience he knows that it is possible here on earth to hold communion with the Father who is in heaven. He has confident assurance of the hidden fellowship with God.

Along the pathway of life, which is sometimes rough and thorny, he knows what it is to "Walk with God." Blessed experience has taught him that in this secret fellowship communion is mutual, so that he seeks his Father, but also that the Father gives himself to be found of his child. In such moments he can not say: God is here or there, for he feels and perceives that God is with him. He can not prove that God talks to him, and yet he hears the voice of the Lord. This is not seemingly, but actually true. It is no self-deception, but rich reality. And he follows after the good shepherd, comforted by the staff and the rod whithersoever they lead. With the religious man of the world it is mere form, devoid of heart. With the devout believer on God it is sacred, blessed mysticism.

There is discipline in this holy mysticism. Fellowship with God is not only broken once in a while, but frequently. Once there was no representation of invisible communication. But now there is, since we are in touch with people thousands of miles away from us. Now we can speak with others whose faces we can not see, but whose voice we receive in return. So far have we advanced that telegraphy permits communication without wire or any visible, tangible guidance. And now we understand how this communication can be disturbed, interrupted and sometimes altogether broken.

God's saints on earth have such mystical communication with their Father who is in heaven. They have a mystical telegraph, a mystical telephone, a mystical means of communication without wire or any material appliance. And as little as a primitive man can understand our telegraphic communication, so little can the man of the world understand the mystical fellowship of the earnest believer on God with the Heavenly Father, who is both far off and close by. And the believer on God understands how this fellowship can be inter-



rupted, and even entirely broken off. For there are times when the soul calls and seeks God, and nothing comes back; when no sign from above is vouchsafed; when it seems that God is lost; when everything remains silent; when no voice comes and no answer.

Why God withdraws himself at such times can be surmised, but can never be fathomed. The cry from the cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" holds us face to face with an impenetrable mystery. But even here surmisals may serve an end. We awake in the morning and our first thought is of God. This gives us the blessed sense of God's nearness, and as at the hand of God, we begin the day. But some other morning this is different. We perceive nothing of God. Our heart is not joined to the Eternal. Pray as we may, there is no fellowship. God! hold not thyself as one deaf; why dost thou not hear me? But religion operates. The loss of Divine fellowship makes us very unhappy. Some sinful inclination of the heart has caused it. Some secret sin has prevented it. The heart has been troubled about many things that have excluded the Lord from the inner life. And the loss of fellowship is good. It makes us examine ourselves. It makes us unite the heart again to fear his name.

Bodily conditions, too, may interrupt Divine communion. A headache may depress us and prevent the mind from free utterance, or lessen our sensitiveness. This also may act as a spur to give the body rest and calm in behalf of fellowship with God.

At times, however, the failure of obtaining a Divine hearing can not be explained from one cause or from another. We find nothing that accuses us. And yet God withdraws himself from us. But even then conjectures regarding the cause do not fail us. The believer on God sometimes overestimates his piety. He enters upon terms of familiarity with the love of God. He loses sight of the distance that extends between him and God. He takes it as a matter of course, as a something that ought to be, that fellowship with God is his portion. He even counts it at times as a mark of special holiness that he seeks Divine fellowship.

This can not be permitted. It makes common what is, and always will be, holy grace. Experience teaches at such times that nothing strengthens and deepens the appreciation of fellowship with God as the temporary want of it. When for long times the soul has had no hearing, and when at length an answer comes from God, there enters into this secret communion a still deeper blessedness, and the soul bathes itself in the fulness of the love of God.



"SEEK YE MY FACE."

It was common at one time for Christian people to speak of their conversion with joyous pride. It was said: "At such and such a time I came to know the Lord." Afterward this was changed. Then it was said: "In such and such a way I came to know myself," or, "I was converted then and there;" or, "Then and there I gave myself to Christ;" "In this way or in that I found my Savior." And in whatever way it was expressed, it always meant the narrative of personal religious experience.

Every form of expression has its own value. It can scarcely be denied, however, that the older way of saying, "I have come to know the Lord," is in nowise less accurate, profound and fervent than the later ones. Jesus himself declared: "And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee" ([John 17:3](#)), and in saying this he confirmed the complaint of Hosea (4:1) that "there is no knowledge of God in the land."

It must be granted, however, that with the lapse of time the saying, "I have learned to know the Lord," has not proved satisfactory, because it has come to mean intellectual and doctrinal knowledge of God, apart from its mystical background. For this knowledge of God has more than one significance. He who knows nothing of the Divine Being, attributes and works, can not be said to know the Lord. But neither can he be said to know him, who has not learned to worship him in his Holy Trinity. In connection with this, moreover, the saying of our Redeemer should never be lost from sight: "No man knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him" ([Matth. 11:27](#)). This revelation must include, without doubt, the light that shines forth upon us from the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

But as readily as this is granted, it is maintained with equal emphasis, that this does not constitute the whole knowledge of God. True knowledge of

God includes a spiritual reality which far exceeds mere intellectual acumen, and which merely employs the abstractions of dogma and doctrine as means by which to clarify impressions that are received and to explain sensations of soul and inner experiences. And this has gradually been forgotten. Knowledge of God in the abstract has been retained. It has come to consist largely of the studies of formal and doctrinal expositions. And the man who can most cleverly explain some point of dogma is deemed to be best grounded in knowledge of the Lord.

This could not permanently satisfy. And so the experience of grace in the heart has gone over into the other extreme and mysticism has begun to interpret religion altogether, or nearly so, from the work of redemption by Christ, in connection, of course, with personal experience of grace. This was undoubtedly a partial gain. This inward state of soul warmly delights itself in the work of Christ's redemption, and glories in the way of salvation and is



far better than a kind of Christianity that merely weaves webs for itself out of doctrinal intricacies.

But this is not yet the highest. The oldtime worthies were far more correct when they interpreted the knowledge of God to be both doctrinal and mystical. At this viewpoint God himself was always the central object of interest and religion (i. e., the service of God) came to be better understood. As we have been created after God's Image, it is only natural and indeed necessary, that in relation to God, our experiences should be as nearly as possible like those which we have in our relation of man to man. There is language in nature and in the animal world. But human language is altogether different and far richer, even though no word is spoken. The countenance speaks; it speaks through the facial expression, but particularly through and by the eye. Through the eye, as a window of the body, we look into a man's soul. And through the eye he steps forth from his soul to look upon, examine and address us. Compared with the face the rest of the body is dumb and inanimate. Charms, indeed, are also effected by the hand. In Southern lands it is customary to accompany and emphasize every word with gesticulations. In moments of great excitement the whole body forsooth is tense and expressive of emotion. All this, however, does not deny that the farther one advances in culture and self-control, the more calm and composed the rest of the body remains in order that the face may speak. For thereby the expression of the countenance becomes far nobler and much finer. A rough fellow in the street speaks with both hands and feet. A king from his throne speaks with his look and majesty of face.

From this it necessarily followed that in our speech regarding our relation to God, "the face of God" appeared in the foreground, and that distinctions were made in that face between what proceeded out of his mouth, what was expressed by his eyes, and what breathes in anger from his nose. In the nobler sense we disclose ourselves by meeting each other face to face. Hence of human fellowship with God it could not be said otherwise than that the highest form of it is to meet God face to face.

This can not be taken in a material sense. Temptation leads to this and the Divine Father has been pictured in the form of an old man. Even Moses went astray in this direction when he prayed for a sight of God's face. It was a bold prayer. It brought this answer: "Thou canst not see my face, for there shall no man see Me and live" ([Exod. 33:20](#)). This, then, is impossible. We should never think of our Holy God in an earthly way. The metaphorical language which is our only point of support in this matter, remains enveloped in mystical darkness. A visible face only accompanies what is corporeal. God is Spirit. Hence no physical features can be attributed to Him. In fact, when we look anyone in the face so intently as at length to grasp, as it were, his inner self, the external face is but the means by which we obtain knowledge of his inner existence. It can be imagined in the last instance that all outwardness may fall away and the knowledge of the person still be retained. But it is different with God. Physical means do not come in between him and us. Only as God's Spirit enters



into us can our spirit enter immediately into the spirituality of God. As a result we obtain an equally vivid, and even a better, spiritual knowledge of the Existence, Being and Nature of God. Hence we only use figurative language that we might explain this knowledge.

The main point is that we should no longer be satisfied with an idea of God, and a scientific knowledge of God, but that we should come into touch with God himself, so that there is personal contact with him, as in and by our daily life he discloses himself to us, and personal relationship is established between the Living God and our soul. The Scripture expresses this mystical knowledge of God in various ways. It speaks of the "secret walk with God," of "dwelling in the House of the Lord," of "walking with God." And the Gospel develops this into the rich and glorious thought that "The Father comes and tabernacles with us." But the most commonly used term for this higher knowledge is: "The face of God." The highest tribute that distinguishes Moses from all the prophets is that God "spoke with him face to face as a man speaketh with his friend." The meaning of "face" in this connection shows itself.

Hence when in Scripture the Lord meets us with the exhortation, "Seek ye my face," it is deeply significant. We can see a person afar off, we can hear from him, we can become conscious that he is nearby without having yet gone to him or having yet placed ourselves before him, so that he looks at us and we at him. So there are times in the life of the Christian when he feels impelled to have no rest until he finds God; until, after he has found Him, he has placed himself before Him; and standing before Him, seeks His face, and does not cease until he has met God's eyes, and the consciousness dawns full and clear that God looks him in the soul, and that he looks God in the eye of Grace. When this comes to pass, the mystery of grace discloses itself.



"MY SOLITARY ONE."

When we consider how solitude affects people, it may well be taken as a standard by which to estimate them. This is shown most strikingly in the case of the little child, who, on being left alone, first becomes frightened and then begins to cry. If less striking, with adults as a rule, courting solitude or shunning it is marked with sufficient clearness to suggest something of their character. Some embrace every opportunity to escape from busy surroundings and hide themselves in solitude, while others feel oppressed when they are alone, and only in company with others find themselves again.

This shows itself in three ways. The most striking borrows its character from the choice that was made at the fork of the roads of good and evil. One must needs hide himself to do wrong. The evil One works by night. But when wrong has been done and the conscience has been aroused, solitude is oppressive and diversion is sought in company. In a somewhat less striking way love or dislike of solitude shows itself in the difference between meditative or more active dispositions. One is more inclined to live within himself in order to think and ponder seriously. Another lives in externals. He runs and slaves, and enjoys making a show of his several activities. This difference even shows itself among nations. One people lives within doors, another, when possible at all, lives in the street. In most cases this difference is accentuated by climate and settings of nature. And finally this habit of seeking or shunning solitude explains itself from the conscious possession or lack of strength. Diffident natures are almost afraid of the face of man and draw back with downcast eyes, while he who is clever and full of energy mingles freely among all sorts of people.

Solitude, moreover, is loved by men of study. It lures the aged more than people of midlife. In a run-down state of health, with weakened nerves, people shrink from excitement. But this springs from accidental causes and is no index of character. In connection with it, however, it is significant that the Psalmist twice calls the soul "the solitary One." Once in [Ps. 22](#), the Passion-Psalm, prophetic of Golgotha, v. 20: "Deliver my soul from the sword, my solitary one from the power of the dog;" and again in [Ps. 35:17](#): "Rescue my soul from their destructions, my solitary one from the young lions."

The soul is "the solitary one." This is an index of its greatness. An only child is more precious to its parents than one of seven on which others may pride themselves. When this only child dies, the family passes out of existence, and the line of succession is cut off. The soul exists independently of property and of the body. However much we are attached to our belongings, their loss can be made good. And though the body will go down into the grave, it can be restored in the resurrection. But such is not the case with the soul. The soul is the only possession which can not be replaced. If lost, it is lost forever. For this reason



Jesus solemnly warns us not to fear him who can kill the body, but rather to fear Him who can destroy the soul. All loss can be made good, but not the loss of the soul. And here your self-consciousness separates itself from your soul. Thou child of man, who viewest thyself and thinkest about thyself, in the midst of this busy world you find yourself clothed upon with a visible body which prospers with bounding health or wastes away with disease. But there is something more in you, something that is hidden in your inner being; and that hidden something is your soul, which you must love. For in death you must return it in all honor and holiness to God who gave it.



From this the sense is developed that the soul is solitary. There is mutual approach between the soul and the world. We have been endowed with the capacities of sense, which like so many windows, afford us outlooks upon the world, and place us in communication with it. God imparted unto us the capacity to feel and to sympathize, so that even when we are alone we can share the feelings of others, and at long distances of separation rejoice with those who do rejoice, and weep with those who weep. We have received the gift of speech whereby the soul can express itself and the soul of another can speak in our ear. Speech has been committed to writing and thanks to this wonderful invention, which likewise has been given us of God, the soul can commune with preceding generations and with contemporaries whom we have never met. Moreover, we have a sense and a knowledge of a higher world above, which makes it seem at times as though angels of God descended upon us, and from us ascended again. And the highest of all is the gate of the heart through which God can draw near to the soul and the soul can go forth to God.

But in spite of all this the soul itself is solitary. It remains apart from the world, from nature, from angels and from God. And thus by itself it is something, it has something, which remains its own, pure and simple, and with respect to which the inner solitariness can never be broken. And one of two things is bound to happen: Either the soul may be left too solitary or its solitariness may not be sufficiently appreciated.



The soul is too solitary when we are bereft of our means of support and of the sweet companionship of life. This is the solitariness of grief and of forsakenness, which as burdens, weigh us down and make us afraid. For the soul is disposed to sympathy, to friendly intercourse with the world, to give and to win confidence, to live as man among men, and to spread its wings in spheres of happiness and peace. When these are withheld, when hatred repels, and slander persecutes, instead of love that attracts and sympathy that refreshes, shy and shivering the soul draws back within itself. It can not unburden itself. It can not tell what it feels. And shut up within itself it pines away in loneliness and grief. Again, when the joys of life take flight, and cares make heavy hearts, when sorrow overtakes sorrow, and the horizon narrows itself and the outlook becomes darker and darker, and the star of hope sets behind ever-thickening clouds--then, in distressing loneliness, the soul is thrown back

upon itself and the solitary one pants for breath, and then is the time for Satan to come in with the thought of suicide.

As the soul can be troubled and distressed in this way by too much solitude, it can also suffer loss, when as the result of superficiality, thoughtlessness and want of seriousness, its solitude is not properly estimated. At such times the soul is not known, neither is it honored in its individual, solitary and independent existence. Then the only resort is endless rounds of diversion and recreation but never a turning in upon oneself--never a collecting of the soul together for the sake of quiet thought--never a search after the soul for its own sake. On the contrary the soul is kept in a state of constant excitement. It is held captive to serve its environments. It is never permitted to rest for self-examination and for finding inward peace.

The world at large is divided into these two great companies: on one hand they who are wretched and distressed of soul and who pine away in inner solitariness; on the other hand the merry-making multitudes who are always hurried, who are continually engaged with the art of externalizing themselves and never have a thought about their own solitary soul.

The only medicine at hand for both these conditions of soul is fellowship with God. For the soul has its holy of holies as well as its holy place and its outer court. The world does not come nearer to the soul than this outer court. There it remains, and has neither vision nor understanding of the several elements that constitute the soul.

Intimate, spiritual friendship makes closer approaches to the soul. There are some congenial spirits that understand us and see more clearly through us, and who are therefore better able, with tenderness, to sustain and to comfort us. But even they do not enter into the holy of holies. There is always a deep background into which they can not come, and where the soul remains in its solitariness.

He who alone can enter into this holiest and most hidden recess of the soul is God by his Holy Spirit. He alone can fully break this solitariness of the soul. He alone can comfort him who is caught in the snares of death. He alone can save the soul of him who has long sought diversion in the vain pleasures of the world.



"GOD CREATED MAN AFTER HIS IMAGE."

All true religion and godliness springs from the fact that we have been created after the Image of God. Some of us have passed from the period in the Christian life of "milk for babes" to that of "strong meat for adults." We understand therefore that calling upon God and walking in the ways of his laws do not by themselves constitute true religion and godliness, and that the secret of salvation is unveiled in all its fullness only when we have fellowship with the Eternal and abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

Outward forms of worship are not without value. Provisionally they are the only thinkable ones. Although they do not make sure of heaven, they exert binding influences upon many thousands of people which prevent the dissolution of society. But the plant of spirituality outgrows at length the outward form and goes on, in the words of the Apostle, unto perfection. It comes to blossom in the very gleam of God's majesty. It is fostered by the outshining of his glory and watered by the dews from above. Thus it comes to a personal knowledge of the Lord, as a man knoweth his brother; to a dwelling of the soul in the tabernacle of the Lord, and to the indwelling of the Holy One in the temple of the heart.

This requires a new emphasis. Religious forms change and pass away, but that which remains the same under all skies, and which does not lose but gain in strength to the end of life, is the blessed communion of soul with the Father of spirits, so that by night we retire with God, and at the dawn of day we awaken with him, and that all the way of our earthly pilgrimage we follow our good Shepherd.

Moreover, the more intimate communion of saints consists in this alone. It surely binds heart to heart when we learn that others hold the same faith as ourselves, that we belong to One church, and that together we break One bread and drink One cup. But in the great journey through life to the courts of everlasting light companionship is sweetest with those who, under whatever outward form, have given us intimations that they have in communion with God.

This relates back to our creation. That is to say, true religion and our capacity for genuine godliness spring solely from our creation after God's Image and after the Likeness of the Almighty. This is not altered by the fact that we have been conceived and born in sin. Without regeneration there is no true religion. In this re-birth the fundamental trait of creation after God's Image is revived again. The fact that we have been born in sin can therefore be passed by. The subject in hand is conscious, actual fellowship with Our Father who is in heaven. And this depends upon the necessary harmony which of itself prevails



between the Original and what the image shows of it. The sodality of the Original and the image is felt and understood at once. One can not be an image, or image-bearer and an exhibitor of the same apart from the relation that binds him to the Original. If a picture is a good likeness, it is this because the original is what the likeness shows that he is. This is more striking with a photograph than with a painted portrait or with a face that is cut from marble. For with these the artist painter or sculptor comes in as the third factor between the original and the picture. But not so with a photograph. By the operation of light upon the sensitive plate the original here creates his own image and forms the features after those of his own face. And what a person makes in a photograph is an exceedingly weak imitation, which only resembles from afar what God did when he said: "Let us make man after our likeness," and then created him so.



Intimate fellowship is only possible between people of like mind. There is fellowship of a less intimate sort. An impressionable mind communes with nature when she is arrayed in her beautiful garments of spring. This fellowship with plants and flowers is more intimate than with the starry skies. It is closer still with the horse we ride, with the dog that greets us joyfully at the gate, and the lark whose morning song charms wood and dale. With stream and mountain, moon and star, with flower and domestic animal, however, fellowship is always from a distance. An animal may look us in the face with marked expression, but we do not understand it. Animal life is different from our own. True fellowship only comes when we get in touch with man. Even as St. Paul put the question to the Corinthians, "What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?" (1-2:11). Man alone can understand man. The more human we are ourselves, the more fully will we understand the truly human in others. Of course, always with this difference, that the more nearly we are alike, the closer will be our communion. A compatriot comes closer to us than a foreigner. A member of the family, a professional colleague, a peer in society, one whose lot and experience in life are similar with ours comes nearer to us than he whose settings of life are in every way different from our own. Like alone understands like.



The Divine saying, "Let us make man after our image and likeness," implied of itself therefore the Divine intention of creating beings who would be capable of Divine fellowship and who would be susceptible to this glorious communion. If, then, all true religion consists of this mutual fellowship, it follows that when God created a being after his likeness He thereby simultaneously created religion.

God magnified his omnipotence in the works of nature, and the more fully its early chaotic estates refined and unfolded themselves, until the murmur of waters bore fruition in the note of the nightingale, the more majestic became the revelation of the splendor of Divine Almightyness. The whole earth is full of God's glory. But there is no self-conscious and responsive fellowship between all this and God. God stands above nature. Nature is subject to His majesty, but it has no knowledge or understanding of God and therefore no

single note of thanksgiving, worship or communion goes forth from Nature to God. There is power in it everywhere, but there is no fellowship of love in it.

And this is the Divine desire. God must needs address his creation and obtain a response from it in return. He must needs establish close, personal fellowship and mutual communion with his creation. The eternal, knowing, loving, seeking Father desires to be known, to be loved and to be sought. The flame of religion must inwardly gleam through the works of creation, even as in the outward sphere the sun gleams throughout the earth. But this is impossible and can not be thinkable, except as God creates a being after His own image and likeness--a being of his own generation, and who therefore is a child, who will cleave to him as Father; a being whose distance and distinction from his infinite majesty will be unfathomably deep, but who, nevertheless, feeling and knowing the Divine life in his own life, will associate with God as brother with brother, and who will thus be brought into secret and sacred communion with him.

Religion, therefore, is not founded upon our creation after the Divine Image for our sake, but for the sake of God. Only our earnest endeavor to cultivate this hidden communion with God will fulfill the purpose for which he created us after his likeness. For though it is true that this glorious distinction of our creation in the likeness of God renders us unspeakably rich and happy, that it baptizes us into the Divine family, so that we are children of the Most Highest, and are thereby elevated to princely holdings in the heavenly sanctuary, he who counts this the all and all of this matter will utterly and dismally fail. In this respect also that which is first in rank and order is not what makes us happy and blessed, but that which tends to realize God's purpose. It is his purpose to be known and to be loved; to be sought after and to be worshipped ; and to have the offerings of conscious, worshipful communion with himself brought to his altars by his Creation. His purpose is not merely to be great, but to be known, to be praised and to be loved as such. And, therefore, God created man after his Image and after his Likeness.



"NONE OF ME."

The new paganism, which is broadly on the increase, differs from that against which prophets and Apostles protested, in that it has no idols. Speaking metaphorically it has. It is properly said that a mother makes an idol of her child, a wife of her husband. One worships his idol in art and another in Mammon. However common, though, this manner of speech may be, the thing indicated is not idolatry proper, for this exhibits visible idols. It builds temples and pagodas in their behalf. It appoints priests, burns sacrifices and orders public festivals in their honor. Ancient paganism, with its visible idolatry, was personal. Modern paganism soars in vague enchantments.

In Paris and in London, and as report has it, in New York, societies have been formed that assemble in pagan-like chapels and kneel and mutter prayers before idols. But these do not lead the new pagan movement. For the most part these people have lived for some years in pagan Asiatic countries, and upon their return imitate in Europe or America what they have seen in Asia, and in which they took part while there. This is but a little flaw on the surface of things and has no significance in the great movement of spirits.

The modern pagan movement, on the other hand, is driven by an entirely impersonal object. It has no thought of setting up idolatrous images. It scorns idolatry proper which is still perpetuated in India, China and Japan. But it is negatively impelled by the denial of a living, personal God and positively by doting on vague ideals, or else on pleasure and money. This makes warfare against modern paganism far more difficult than that which Bible prophets and apostles waged against the idolatry of antiquity. Then name was contrasted with name, person with person, image with image. Not Baal, but Jehovah. Not Jupiter, but the Lord of hosts. Not the image of the great Diana, but Christ, the image of the Invisible God. The personal character which paganism derived from visible idolatry made it imperative to set up by the side of it an equally personal object of worship. Thus Sion was contrasted with Basan, Jerusalem with Gerizim--priest with priest. And the living, eternal and adorable Jehovah was contrasted with Moloch and Baal. Hence the scornful description of idols. Ears have they, but they hear not. Eyes have they, but they see not. Mouths have they, but they speak not. They who made them are like unto them. , Israel, trust thou in the Lord ([Ps. 115:6](#)).

There is nothing of this now. In our times a man dotes on humanity. Another man has a zeal for art. The higher forms of life are loved and appreciated. Multitudes engage in the chase after pleasure and wealth, and obey the dictates of passion. By way of reaction this has resulted in the fact that they who in other respects are faithful Christians have abandoned far too greatly the personal element in the living God, and in turn dote on the beautiful ideas



of mercy and love, of peace and the higher good. But personal communion with the personal God is no longer cultivated with that warmth of devotion and consecration which was the secret of the heroic faith of the fathers.

It is granted that the immortal ideal of love and mercy indicates the essential nature of God. But the trouble is that instead of saying, "God is love" or "love is God," one forms an idea of love for himself, transforms this idea into an ideal, which eclipses God from sight. And estranged from the living God, one dotes on creations of his own thought. Applying this to Christ, we reach the same result. In contrast with an image of an idol, God has set up his Image in his Only-begotten Son, as Christ is revealed in the flesh. This relegates ideas and ideals to the background. And in the foreground, in clear and transparent light, stands the Christ, the incarnated Word. All the enthusiasm with which Christianity was carried into the world sprang from this heaven-wide difference. The philosophers of Greece and Rome doted on beautiful ideals. The Apostles were enthused with love for the living Christ, the tangible Image of the living God. The secret of their power lay in this personal attachment of faith to the living Christ in every person. It was a heart-to-heart love that conquered the world in that early age. Love, and attachment to the Mediator between God and man, worked the downfall of ancient paganism. When St. Thomas puts his hand on the wound print in Jesus' side, sinks to his knees and exclaims: "My Lord and my God," all the power of personal worship of God in Christ reveals itself. And by this alone the church of Christ has become what it is.

This is also lost to us. First, this power was weakened by a sentimental holding fast to Christ as man. Thereby God, if not forgotten, was obscured in his majesty. And now even Christians put back the person of Christ, and pay homage to an ideal in Christ in order soon to own a relation to this ideal which is stronger than to the person of Christ himself. By admiration of the ideal the faith is demolished.

This is the Lord's complaint in Asaph's Song, [Psalm 81:11](#): "And Israel would none of me." It could not have been expressed more personally than this. They love my creation. They enjoy the world which I called into being. They admire the wisdom which I have made to shine as light in darkness. They dote on love and mercy, the feeling and appreciation of which I implanted in their breast. But me they leave alone. Me they overlook. Of me they have no thought. To me they consecrate no personal love of their heart. With me they seek no communion. Me they do not know. Personal fellowship with me has no charm for them. They have everything that is mine, but they would none of me.

This complaint is often overheard among us. People will enjoy our belongings and take pleasure with our goods. They will honor our ideas and adorn themselves with flowers from our garden. They will praise our deeds without stint, but they hold themselves aloof from every personal touch. No trace of affection for us can be discovered in their heart. No sympathy for us can be observed in anything they do. They show no desire to have personal



knowledge of us. The reason for this, no doubt, in many cases, is to be found with the person himself. We can admire a man, honor him, praise his works and his life, and yet say, "He is no man to invite personal affection."

This, however, can not be the case with God. He alone is adorable. He is the highest Good. He is Love. In everything He is loveable and eternally to be desired. And when in spite of all this God complains, "They would have none of Me," it is directed against our heart and against our faith. In words of deepest feeling it expresses God's grief over our disregard of him. I alone am He whom they should desire, and lo! they would have none of Me. They do not love Me. With heart and soul they do not cleave to Me. To their personal affection I, their God, am not the strong and all-else expelling center of attraction.

This is a complaint against everything that is superficial, vague and unreal in our Christian life; against weakened conceptions of religion; against faithlessness of heart. Religious weakening shows itself in lack of holy ardour, in the quenched fires of nobler enthusiasm, and in the congealed state of the waters of holy mysticism. This is partly a personal wrong which springs from an overestimate of self, from too much self-sufficiency, from lack of dependence and fidelity. It is also an evil of the times, a general, contagious disease where by one poisons another. It is apostasy on the part of the world of spirits which diverts the heart from the living God.

But this must be resisted. The struggle must be begun against our own heart first, that it may be restored to personal communion with the living God. This struggle must be extended across the entire range of our environments to repress the false religions of vague and empty ideals, and in their room establish personal affection for the living God. This struggle must be continued with unfailing faithfulness in public preaching, in devotional literature and in ardent supplications to call God back into our personal life. And finally this struggle must be carried into the world at large to call it back from idle fancies to sober reality; from empty ideals to essentials; from religion to the only object of worship, and from doting on barren abstractions to the love of the faith that directs itself solely and alone to Him who has revealed himself in Christ as the personal, living God.



14

A SUN.

A little child, especially when it is a girl, is often said to be the sunshine of the house. But however glad we may be, in dark hours of life, to own such a little sun to brighten the home, the joy of the Psalmist was far greater when he sang, "The Lord is the sun of my life."

We people of Western lands should be more familiar with the tender and passionate language of the poetry of Scripture. The music of the Psalter is uplifting: For the Lord God is a sun and a shield. The Lord will give grace and glory. No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly (Ps. 84:11). It raises grateful echoes in the heart. But, alas, they are not original with us. Among rich and poor we speak of a sunshine in the house. But who volunteers to confess from long experience: The Lord has been a Sun unto me all my days, and will be till I die. The figure is still used, but mostly in a doctrinal way, and almost exclusively in the limited sense of "Sun of Righteousness." And righteousness has the emphasis at the expense of the rich imagery of the Sun. But this beautiful imagery of the Sun contains a world of thought. It is more than sheer comparison. For when we realize that God is the Sun of our life, the joy of it brings us nearer to him. It illumines all of life and liberates us from abstract thoughts of him.

The sun is not to us what he was to the Psalmist in the East. The Western mind can but faintly surmise the sparkling radiancy of Eastern heavens. The firmament that overarches the lands from which Abraham emigrated and those which God gave him for an inheritance glistens with a sheen of heavenly brightness which makes our heavens at noon seem wrapped in twilight. The midnight sky which the shepherd's saw bending over Bethlehem was prepared, as it were, for the coming of the angelic hosts. And in a country where stars enchant the eye by their dazzling splendor and the moon puts the mind, as it were, in a state of ecstasy, what must the sun be of which the Psalmist sang: "His going forth is from the end of the heaven * * * and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof" (19:6). If any idolatry ever was intelligible, it was not the worship of images or of spirits, but the calm and reverent adoration of the wandering Bedouin, as beneath such wondrous skies he beheld the stars by night and the glory of the sun by day until at length, swayed by ecstasy, he imagined that this dazzling, majestic, all-pervading and governing sun was not merely a heavenly body, but even God himself.

This error was corrected in Israel. The sun is not God. But God is the sun of the inner life. He has appointed the sun to benefit us in a thousand ways, and chiefly to furnish us with a glorious imagery, by which, amid the vanity and emptiness of life on earth, to set forth in glowing terms what God is to us. Comparing God with the sun is not original with man. We have not selected the sun as a likeness of God. But the sun forecasts in nature what



God is to all higher human life. In the sunlight and in its effects God illustrates what He is to moral and spiritual human nature. And when in weary processes of analytical studies of the Divine attributes and Providence we reach at length some well-defined but cold abstractions, and we are past all feeling, it seems as if the glow of the higher life suddenly takes hold of us, when all we know of God, recapitulates itself in the single phrase of delight: "The Lord is the Sun of my life." This sacred imagery is peculiarly effective. It puts the pervading power of God in our life clearly before our eyes. The sun is high above us in the heavens, and close at hand as well, and around us on every side. We feel his presence and seek protection from it in the shade. We exclude him from our chambers by closing blinds. He is a power far off and close by. He imparts power to the soil, where hidden from human eyes, it makes the seed germinate and sprout.

And such is the case with God, both as to operations and antithesis. His throne is high above us in the heavens. By His omnipresence God is close by and all around us. He has access to the heart. He searches its most hidden parts and there operates with secret power. Whenever a holy seed germinates within, or a virtue blossoms on the stem of the soul, it is God, our Sun, whose mighty power performs it.

Think for a moment that the sun were blotted out from the skies and the whole earth would soon resemble conditions of the North Pole. Every plant and herb would die. Every color would pale. Snow and ice would cover the ground as with a shroud. That such is not the case now, that everything pulsates with bounding life and exhibits color and sheen, that food springs from the ground, and lilies adorn the field, and all nature exhales the sweet breath of life is because the sun radiates light and heat and as by magic brings life out of death and turns barren wildernesses into fruitful fields.

And what the sun is to mother earth God is to the human heart. If the soul were abandoned of God and deprived of his gracious inshining and inworking, life would soon perish from the heart, the affections would lose all warmth and deathly cold would chill the inner existence. No more flowers would bloom in the garden of the heart. No more sacred motion would stir the hidden waters of the soul. Everything within would wither and die. The heart would cease to be human, and whether it is said, "With Thee, O Lord, is the fountain of life," or "In Thy light shall we see light," or "The Lord is the Sun of my soul," it all means: With God the soul has life; without God it is dead. The source of all life and of all power is God. Everything, in brief, that makes the sun unspeakably precious in the world of nature God is to the heart and to all human life. With Him we are abundantly rich and radiantly happy. Without Him we are poor and naked and cold.

The sun, moreover, not only nourishes the ground by his warmth, but by his radiant light exhibits and colors life. When the evening shadows lengthen everything assumes a dull and nebulous aspect. But dawn brings friendly light, by which all things assume proportions, distances are measured, forms and colors are recognized. And as it takes on brightness all



nature speaks to the heart. And God does all this for the inner life. Where He is hidden from blinded eyes, life is a somber grey, without point of departure, direction or aim. All knowledge and insight fails. Courage to go on grows faint. Inspiration to finish the course gives way. And nothing rests save groping for the wall as one blind; withdrawing within oneself in cheerless, helpless solitude; the loss of knowledge; the loss of self consciousness; the privation of color and outline. A life as in the graveyard, where weeds thrive, snakes lurk about, and the shriek of the nightbird startles. Until God rolls the clouds away, and the sun rises again in the soul, and when as by the touch of a magic wand everything becomes new, and light dispels inner darkness, and peace with a friendly hand opens wide the door of the troubled mind, so that by the light of God's countenance the onward way is seen with heavenly clearness, and the journey is resumed with fresh courage, the whiles the sun from on high cheers and sanctifies the heart.

The image of the sun is also significant with respect to the fact that the shining of God's face upon the heart is not an unbroken brightness. As day is succeeded by night, and summer by winter, it has ever been the same in the lives of the saints. There were times of clear, conscious fellowship with the Invisible, when life from hour to hour was as a walking with God. And these were followed by times of overwhelming activities which exhausted the mind, business interests that absorbed the soul, and cares that burdened the heart. This is a change in the spiritual life as of day and night. It is well with him who can say that his estrangement from God in every twenty-four hours is no longer than the hours of sleep. And aside from this almost daily rise and fall in the intimacy of the fellowship with God, this Sun withdraws himself and again makes His approach whereby summer and winter follow one another in the life of the soul. Undisturbed and unbroken fellowship with God is not of this earth. It awaits us in all its fullness only in the realms of everlasting light. There always have been and always will be changes here in our spiritual conditions whereby some years harvests will be far greater than others. Struggles whereby the soul climbs upward from lower to higher view points--trials that bring the soul into depths of darkness whereby for weeks and months the higher life is buried, as it were, underneath heavy layers of ice. The sun is not gone, but is covered with heavy clouds. And this goes on until God's time of help arrives. Then clouds scatter and are driven away. Spring returns in the soul, the prelude to glorious sunshine. And in the end we thank God for the cold impoverishment of spiritual winter, which makes spring and summer all the more appreciated and enjoyed.

Another point of comparison should not be ignored. Natural sunshine operates in two ways. It fosters and warms the ground, causing germination and fruition. But it hardens the clod, it singes leaves and withers blossoms. This touches the conscience. When we glory in the Lord as the Sun of the Soul, it implies that God's love and grace can not be abused with impunity. Hardening is an awful thing, but it came upon Israel and is not infrequent now. When the warmth of Divine affection is resisted, it does not soften the heart nor make it



tender, but attacks spirituality in its outward expression and sears it. This does not mean mortal hardening from which there is no repentance. He whose spiritual estate has come to this pass will not read these meditations. But temporary hardening retards the progress of spiritual life. This temporary hardening by grace and Divine love is frequently observed. It is then a sin which is cherished; it is a sacrifice which is not willingly brought; it is a step that will not be taken; it is an exertion from which we shrink, or it is sin in some material direction, or in the home, in public or in church life which we seek to harmonize with the privileges of Divine grace. But it will not do. In God's mind it is unthinkable. And as long as we persist in sin the sun will shine and sometimes his heat will be so fierce that no fruit of the spirit can ripen and the very intensity of the grace of God will harden us. "Thou Lord art the sun of my soul," is the language of faith with which to enter eternity. Let us see to it that it may not some day testify against us. "The fall and rising again" has an application also in this matter.



UNDER THE SHADOW OF THE ALMIGHTY.

Every creature is a thought of God. All created things therefore are symbols of the Divine. To hail winged creatures as symbolic expressions of the life of God is not original with us. The Scripture sets us the example. The devout believer is accustomed to its figurative language and he readily admits that it greatly cheers and blesses him. What Jesus said in these figurative terms regarding Jerusalem fell within the scope of common understanding. The hen with her chickens is a symbol of divine compassion, which moves even an outsider by its beauty and tenderness. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings and ye would not" ([Matt. 23:37](#)). But this word of Jesus has a deeper meaning than even an outsider, who admires it, thinks. It speaks of protection and compassion for the sake of which the little ones are gathered together. It implies that the chickens belong with the mother hen. And except they return to her they can not be shielded against cold and other dangers. The striking figure indicates that the natural place of refuge for the chickens is close by the mother hen. And that they can only be safe and warm in her immediate presence under the cover of her outspread wings.

This striking word of our Lord was borrowed from the figurative language of the Old Testament, which also in turn explains it. The first verse of [Psalm 91](#): "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty," is an instance of this metaphorical representation. It is the epitome of what the Psalmist describes elsewhere (61:4): "I will trust in the covert of Thy wings." The same thought was expressed by the wings of the cherubim covering the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant. It is ever the same thought. God has created the fowl that lovingly gathers her brood under her wings that she might shield and shelter them. And this beautiful figure is held before us that we might seek refuge under the shadow of the Almighty, and trust in the covert of his wings.

This imagery is not borrowed from that which moves in the waters, nor from that which glides along the ground. It is almost never borrowed from four-footed beasts, but mainly from winged creatures that lift themselves above the earth, and live, as it were, between us and heaven.

The angels before God's throne are pictured with wings as seraphs. The Holy Ghost came upon the Son of Man descending like a dove. The secret prayer of the troubled soul is that it might have wings to fly away. That winged creatures should be used as symbols to express what is most tender and affectionate in saintly character, and that boldest imagery should serve to portray what it is "to be near unto God," to make it, as it were, visible to our eyes and perceptible to our feelings, is entirely in keeping with the order of creation. It cor-



responds to the divinely appointed state of things. It appeals to us as altogether natural. But this symbolism must not be taken too literally. We must be on our guard lest sickly mysticism interprets holy mysteries to us in a material way. God is Spirit. Every effort to be in touch with him, except in a purely spiritual way, avenges itself. For it leads either to idolatry which makes an image of God from stone or precious metal, or it loses itself in pantheistic mud, which intermingles spirit and matter, and ends in sensual excesses, first defiling and then killing what spiritually began.

But however necessary it is to maintain the spirituality of our fellowship with God, it will not do to take spirituality to mean unreality. This, alas, is a common mistake and accounts for much spiritual barrenness. For then we only see what is before our eyes; nature round about us; the blue heavens above us; our body with its several parts; all which we consider real, because they have form, consist of matter, are tangible and have actual existence. Apart and distinguished from this is what we think, what we picture to ourselves, what we study out in our minds, what we take as the abstract world of thought. We interpret all this to be an unreal world, the center of which is God. An infinite Being who exists merely in our thought, in our mind, in our idea, with whom there is no fellowship except along the avenue of thought. But this provides no mysticism for the heart; no uniting of heart to fear the name of God; no experience of secret fellowship with God. If God does not exist outside of our thought, the self-sufficient soul can not come near to God, nor can it dwell in his tent.

Every deeply spiritual life in Holy writ protests against this danger. Such was not what Psalmists and prophets experienced of God. They found Him as the real living One who came near unto them, and bare them on the arms of his everlasting compassions. He was a God unto them whose love they felt as a fire burn in the marrow of their bones, with whom they found peace, comfort and rest for their weary soul as they realized that He sheltered them in the covert of his wings and allowed them to abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

This thrice blessed state of mind and heart can not be analyzed. It must be experienced. It must be tasted. And having it, it must be guarded lest it is lost again or interrupted. But it can not be analyzed, interpreted or explained. That would give place to the wedge of criticism and chill the warmth that fosters it. The way to obtain it is to learn that self-sufficiency deceives. High-minded self-sufficiency is the canker which gnaws at the root of all religion. It is the futile dream of a little, insignificant world, of which self is the great center, whose mind understands everything, whose will controls everything, whose money can buy everything, and whose power carries everything before it. This makes self a miniature god in a little temple. In this sinful isolation one is, of necessity, icy cold, frozen away from the living God and unfit to dwell under the shadow of his wings.

If in all honesty we can say: Such is not my case, because I feel my dependence, my lack of strength and my utter helplessness, then that we might have fellowship with God, we



must unlearn our sinful leaning on people. We need not necessarily cut ourselves loose from every one. Far from it. The faith of another strengthens ours. The courage of another shames us out of cowardice. The example set by another can double our strength. We are disposed to society both in matters of life and belief. But we must give up all sinful dependence upon others. Dependence that takes a man for more than an instrument appointed of God for our help, as long as he allows it, is sinful. We must not build on man, in order when human help fails to turn to the Divine. Our help must always be from God, whether power to save springs from ourselves or comes to us from without. Even in this way, that when at length all human help fails, nothing is lost. For the unchangeable God always remains the same.

This assured confidence is maintained, as long as we faithfully endeavor to eradicate, root and branch, the doubt which wearily makes us ask whether salvation is for us. To entertain this doubt, even for a moment, unnerves and breaks us down. Then we are like the little chicken that anxiously looks around for the mother hen, and not finding her anywhere, helplessly flies hither and thither until snatched away by the hawk. Then all confidence is gone; and gone the perception of one's calling in life; and gone the faith that God has led us hitherto and shall lead us to the end. Then all strength fails. And prophecy is dumb in the heart. Until at length, in despair, fellowship with Satan becomes more natural than the secret walk with God.

The Psalmist not only glories that he rests in the shadow of God, but also that he hides in the shadow of the Almighty. This must needs be added. Compared with the defenceless chicken, the mother hen, which to save her young flies the hawk in the face and chases him away, is the symbol of a power that reminds us of Divine Omnipotence. For else resting on the Fatherheart of God avails nothing. He who rests under the shadow of God's wings, but does not trust, puts God to shame. It but fosters the fear that one who is stronger than God can snatch us away from under the Divine protection. When we are far away from God, unbelief can be forgiven, in so far as we fly to him for refuge. But when we have once taken refuge with him, unbelief in the heart is a fatal wrong. It profanes the love which God looks for from us. The blessed peace, the hallowed rest, the childlike confidence which God's elect have always enjoyed, even in seasons of bitterest trial, is not the result of reasoning. It is not the effect of deliverance. It is solely and alone the sweet outcome of taking refuge in the secret place of the most High, of abiding under the shadow of the Almighty, of knowing what it means, "To Be Near Unto God," and of enjoying it.

If then we have thus far been strangers to God, let us not imagine, that in time of danger, when thunder-clouds have gathered thickly overhead, and all human help has failed, we can at once find refuge in the shadow of the Almighty. This has been tried in the hour of calamity by those of a transient faith, but the effort has proved futile. It is here the other way. The secret walk with God is not found as a means of deliverance in the hour of need. They who had found it in times of prosperity and ease knew the wings under which deliver-



ance would be sure. And when they came to be afflicted and grieved they found rest and safe shelter under the wings of God. It is not the case of a hen without chickens, which spreads her wings for whatever would hide under them. But it is her own brood, which she has hatched, and for which she will risk her life, that finds shelter and protection with her. This states the case of the shadow under the wings of the Almighty. They whom he will cover with his eternal love are his own children. These are they whom he calls and awaits. These are they that are known of Him. They who are at home under the wings of God shall in the hour of danger dwell under the shadow of the Almighty.

IN THE WIND OF THE DAY.

There was no violence in the displays of nature in Paradise. No other wind blew in the Garden of Eden than the soft suction of air, which in warmer climates, occasions the morning and evening breeze. Hence there is no mention in the narrative of Paradise of a sudden rise of wind, but of a fixed, periodical one, which is called "A Wind of Day." And to Adam and Eve this wind of day announced the approach of God.

This symbolism is still understood. Amidst the luxuriant stillness of Paradise, where everything breathes calm and peace, suddenly a soft rustle is heard sounding through the foliage. Just such a sound as we hear when, as we are seated nearby a woodland, someone approaches us through the thickets, pushing aside the light twigs and making the leaves tremble. At the same moment when in Paradise that rustle is heard through the foliage, a soft breeze plays on the forehead and it seems that Adam and Eve feel themselves gently touched. And with that quiet rustling and this refreshing breeze there comes a word of the Lord to their soul. And thus the representation arose that the voice of the Lord came to them walking in the garden in the wind of the day.

Thus the wind, as symbol and bearer of what is holy, has gone forth from Paradise into all of revelation. Of God it is said, [Ps. 104:3](#), that he "Walketh upon the wings of the wind;" that he "Did fly upon the wings of the wind" ([Ps. 18:10](#)). At Pentecost when the Holy Ghost came to the church a sound was heard "from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind" ([Acts 2:2](#)). And when Nicodemus received instruction regarding regeneration, the Savior purposely applied the symbol of the wind to God the Holy Ghost. "Thou hearest the sound thereof but canst not tell whence it cometh, and wither it goeth," and such it is with the Holy Ghost.

In Northern lands like ours, where the wind is an ordinary phenomenon, this impression is no longer felt so strongly. But in the countries where Revelation had its rise and weather conditions were more constant, which makes the rise of wind more noticeable, the sound of the wind has always as of itself spoken of higher things.

Natural philosophy had not yet made a study of atmospheric currents. As the gale arose with dark clouds in the sky, and by its rumblings made the forests to tremble, it was interpreted as coming from above. It came from on high. It came as a mysterious, inexplicable force. It was felt, but it could not be handled. It was heard, but it could not be seen. It was an enigmatic, intangible power, pushing and driving everything before it. And that power was conceived as operating directly from God upon man, without any middle link, as though in the gale God with his majesty bent himself over him. "The Lord," said Nahum (1:3), hath his way in the whirlwind, and the clouds are the dust of his feet."



The symbol of the wind indicates the opposite of that of the temple. For this speaks to us of a God who dwells in us, as in a sanctuary; who is not far off but nearby; who has taken up his abode in the heart, and who from its depths rebukes, directs or comforts us. And so the temple represents the indwelling of the Holy Ghost in the Covert of the heart. It represents the candor, tenderness and intimacy of fellowship. And though the temple may have a veil in it, and though at times fellowship with the indwelling spirit may be interrupted, the renewal of love never comes from without, but always from the depth of the soul. It is always Immanuel, God with us; in Christ with all his people; in the Holy Ghost with his child.

And by the side of this is the symbol of the wind. Softly the wind of day enters Paradise. At first it is not. It arises unobserved, but always from without. It comes to man who does not at once perceive it. At first there is separation and duality. The symbol of the wind represents man as apart from God, and God as apart from man. And the approach does not go out from man in prayer, but from God in the wind of the day, by which He betakes himself to man, presses himself upon him, and at length entirely fills him. Both of these have their right of being. Christian piety must reckon with both. He alone who allows both of these simultaneously their full right lives in vital communion with the Eternal.

The difference between God and us is so great in every way that of ourselves we can never think of God otherwise than as a Being who is highly exalted above us. He has established his throne in heaven and we in adoration kneel on the earth as his footstool. This relation is expressed in the symbol of the wind. From the clouds above the wind strikes down upon us and at times we feel the cutting effects of it in the very marrow of our bones.

There is also a free communion between God and his child which annihilates all distance; which abrogates every separation, which presses after intimate union, and that relation is expressed in the symbol of the temple. Our heart is a temple of the Spirit. God himself dwells in the innermost recess of the soul. The temple stands for the overwhelming wealth of all-embracing love; the gale remains the symbol of the Majesty of God. And only when both of these operate purely, each within its own domain, there is the most exalted worship of God's majesty, together with the most blessed enjoyment of his eternal Love.

Thus the pendulum of the inner life of the soul moves ever to and fro. When we have given ourselves for a time too lightly and too easily to the sweetness of mysticism, and in meditative communion with God are in danger of losing our deep reverence for his majesty, we must needs tear ourselves away from this hazy mood in order that we may the better recognize again the holy supremacy of the Lord Jehovah in comparison with the littleness and insignificance of our own finite self. And when on the other hand we have been for a time greatly affected by the Majesty of God, so that we know full well that the High and Holy One is enthroned in glory, but feel ourselves deserted of God at heart, so that the soul is menaced with the loss of a closer touch upon God, then likewise with an effort of the will

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the frozen heart must be brought under the softening influences of the eternal compassions, so that communion with the eternal may be renewed and enjoyed again.

But great is the gain when this motion to and fro is not too forcible, and when the intimacy of the "Our Father" and the reverence of the "Which art in Heaven" follow each other rhythmically in the daily experiences of the inner life. A purely meditative life with too much tenderness in it will not do. He who gives himself to this weakens and enervates his spiritual nature, becomes unfit for his Divine calling in the world, and loses even the exhilarating freshness of his piety. With a healthful state of heart this change is steady and regular. There is the constant and earnest application to our work, with God above us, from whom comes our strength, and in whom stands our help. And then there is the search after God in prayer, the meditation on his Word, and the inner tenderness which is produced by the motions of holy love. Our God is a God both far off and near at hand.

Thus the wind of the day has more than a natural significance. Every day of life forms a whole by itself. And in all the daily happenings there is a plan and guidance of God. And so there goes a wind of day through every day of life. First there are hours when nothing speaks to the heart. When everything loses itself in ordinary occupations and it seems that this day has no message for us. And then in the simplest event sometimes there is something striking that rouses the attention, that makes one think and one's thoughts to multiply; something that a child calls out to us, or a friend whispers in the ear; some thing that suggests itself from within or something that we hear, something that was reported to us or that happened at home or in the office; in brief, anything that brought color and outline into the dullness of existence and proved itself for that particular day, "the wind of the day" in which God's voice was heard.

So the Lord goes out every day seeking after us. So the voice of God follows us after through all of life, to woo us, to interest us, and to win us for Himself. Lost, therefore, is each day in which the voice of God passes by us in the wind of the day, but leaves us unmoved and indifferent. While blessed in turn is each day in which in "the wind of the day" God comes so near to the soul that the approach turns into communion, in the intimacy and tenderness of which with fresh draughts we enjoy again the unfailing love of God.



"THOU SETTEST A PRINT UPON THE ROOTS OF MY FEET."

We are always repelled in [Psalm 39](#) by the hard words which David there addresses to God: Look away from me, that I may brighten up. For can we imagine a more unnatural prayer than this?

Man and God constitute the greatest antithesis. And all true religion, springing from our creation after the image of God, aims solely and alone to put man into closest communion with God, or where this communion is broken, to restore it. And here the Psalmist, who still counts as the Singer who has interpreted piety most profoundly, prays and cries, not for the approach of God, but that God will look away from his soul, that He will leave him alone, give him rest, and so refresh the last hours of his life before dying: "Hear my prayer, Lord, hold not thy peace at my tears, look away from me, that I may brighten up, before I go hence, and be no more." (R. V. Marg. read.)

In [Psalm 42](#) he said: "As the heart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God," And here it is the direct opposite: "Turn thee away from me, that my soul may refresh itself." On the one hand intense longing for the joy of the presence of God, and on the other hand the cry of agony for deliverance from God's presence. Does it not seem, at first, that the one is a malediction against the other?

This bitter wail of David does not stand alone. In the book of Job we find an even still more painful expression for this crushing consciousness of the presence of the Lord, when, as if to pour out his consuming anguish in fullest measure, he despairingly exclaims: "Thou puttest my feet in the stocks and thou settest a print upon the roots of my feet" (13:27 Marg. read).

By itself there is nothing strange in this feeling. Even godless people are familiar with this agonizing dread. When mortal danger suddenly overtakes them, they handle, as it were, with their hands the power of God which presses upon them. In case of shipwreck in the open sea it is seen again and again that godless sailors who but a few moments before over their wine-cups were making light of everything that is holy, suddenly terror-stricken, spring from their seats with the cry: "O God, God," and pale with fear, struggle for their lives.

And aside from these, with ordinary people who do not mock at religion but live without God in the world, when serious sickness comes upon them, or some other disaster overtakes them, we see the same effect. They also suddenly become aware at such a time that they have to do with the terrible unknown power of that God whom they have long ignored, and they tremble in their hearts.

In ordinary life we are sufficient unto ourselves. We extricate ourselves from our little difficulties. We have the means at command to provide against special needs. We know

how to rise above simple adversities. And when they are overcome, the triumph deepens the sense of our self-sufficiency.

In the midst of all this we feel free, unconstrained and unencumbered. In the face of it all we are our own lord and master. We feel ourselves measureably opposed, but we push it aside and bravely we continue the tenor of our way.

All this, however, changes when anxieties, dangers and disasters overtake us, which overwhelm us, which we have no strength to face, which nothing can prevent, and in the midst of which we become suddenly aware of our utter helplessness. Then we feel that we are attacked by a superior force that overpowers us, that casts us down, that forces itself upon us and makes all resistance ludicrous and futile. This superior force then presents itself to us as an unseen and unknown opponent, who mysteriously cuts the tendon of our strength, binds us as with bands of death, distresses and perplexes us with mortal agonies, and leaves us nothing but a cry of terror. And however much the world has been estranged from God, even in the hearts of the most hardened sinners, there is, in such moments, still some trembling in the presence of the Divine majesty. There are many who have no faith in God, but anxious forebodings fill their minds, that they are yet to have dealings with him. And their self-reproach, that they have so long ignored him, adds to the terror of their fears.

But this apprehension of dread affects the godly man most strongly when faith fails him, and God momentarily lets him go. Then it seems that God loosens his hold on the soul and at the same time tightens his hold more firmly on the body. A man like Job could not think of anything that did not come to him from God. He had long enjoyed the peace of God which passeth all understanding. And when the evil day came and loss followed loss, he could only consider them as so many arrows from the bow of divine displeasure to grieve and mortally to wound him. And because Job was inwardly pious, it could not end with this. At first he thought that God in anger stood far off, and with arrow upon arrow wounded him from the distance. But he perceives that God comes to him, and at length personally attacks him. And when he feels that God has come upon him, as man against man, that He attacks him and is ready to throw him, his fear becomes more striking. A tyrant attacking Job and overcoming him in order to render him helpless, might at most put his feet in stocks. Now that God attacks him, this can not be the end. He perceives that God not only faces him and attacks him from without, but that by his Almighty power God enters into his inmost soul, goes through him altogether, until at length he feels himself penetrated to his feet, even to the roots of his feet by the Almighty One, and crushed beneath the weight of His anger.

Only they who are truly pious can suffer this mortal agony. Divine anger can only be felt in this way by those who all their life have been deeply impressed by God's power. For there is a two-fold sense of God's presence. Now in blessed fellowship with God. And again in the awful consciousness of God's terrible presence in the fears that assail us. And if we were dealt with after our sins and according to our deserts,

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this latter fellowship would be our only portion, even fellowship with God in his holy anger. This it will forever be in hell. This is hell.

Here on earth diversion and all sorts of means are at our command to put the thought of God away from us. The ungodly enjoy this awful privilege in life that they can sin, without being troubled in their conscience for more than a few moments at a time by the presence of Almighty God. They can put a screen between themselves and God and thus be far distant from him. But not so in eternity. There they stand continually in the presence of God. This awful consciousness of God's presence will be the worm that dieth not and the fire that is not quenched.

It is different with those who here on earth have known what it is to be at peace with God. They have experienced divine grace. God withdraws himself in their behalf in such a way that He hides his anger from them and veils his terrible majesty. Notwithstanding their sins. He with himself, and without mortal fear, to have fellowship with him. The screen of the vanities of this world does not stand between God and those who fear him, but Christ the Reconciler, the Goel, the Mediator. And thus already here on earth sweet and blessed communion with God in Christ can be enjoyed.

But if momentarily faith fails us, and the shield of Christ is taken away from before us, and in the midst of afflictions we feel ourselves suddenly face to face again with the naked majesty of God in his anger, the agony of soul in God's otherwise devoted children is more terrible than the children of the world have ever experienced on earth. The child of God is then caught, as it were, in the snares of hell. Such was the case with Job. This made him say: ", My God, thou settest a print in the roots of my feet." This made David pray: " my God, look away from me, that I may recover strength before I die." And this is grace: that in such moments the Comforter comes to the soul, that the shield of Christ is placed again before us, and that God who made his anger burn against us, reveals himself again to his tempest tossed child as Abba Father.



"MY SHIELD."

In the Dutch national hymn the words are still sung by patriotic assemblages and in the streets, "My Shield and Confidence, Art Thou, O Lord, My God." And they but echo the Psalmist's song (84:11): "The Lord is a sun and shield: The Lord will give grace and glory: No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

As a means of defense the shield has passed out makes it possible for them to become acquainted of use. In our times battles are fought at great distances, with cannons and rapid firing guns. And safety is sought in lying on the ground or in hiding behind breastworks. But even when David wrote the Psalms archers were few and fighting was done by man against man at the close range of eye to eye, of foot touching foot, and clashing of swords. And such combats could not end until one of the two assailants was bathed in his own blood. In such times the shield was one's life. Without a shield no man could meet another in battle who carried one. Among the nations of antiquity a shield therefore was the main thing. Even as to this day it covers the African savage when he makes an assault with his assagai. For the shield catches the arrow, breaks the blow of the lans and parries the stroke of the sword. When many thousands in Jerusalem, whom their day had used the shield and had saved their lives thereby, joined in the songs of Zion and gloried in Jehovah as the shield of their confidence, they felt in singing, as we can never fully appreciate: What it is, and what it means, to glory in God as a shield.

A shield was a cover for the body. It was not carried by another in front of the combatant, but was carried by the combatant himself. It was held with the left hand. It rested on the arm and was really nothing else than a broadening of the same. He who attacked with a gun involuntarily raises his arm, with which, at the risk of having it wounded, he covers his face and his heart. And not to expose the arm in such encounters, and to protect the larger part of the body, desire to save life invented the shield. First the long shield which covered the entire length of the body, and then the short shield, or buckler, with which to parry the stroke of the sword. But always in such a way that the soldier carried the shield himself, that he moved it now this way, then that, and held it out against the attack.

"The Lord is my shield" does not say therefore that God protects us from a distance and that he covers us without effort on our part. "The Lord is my shield," is the language of faith. It springs from the consciousness that God is near at hand, that faith lays hold on him, that we use our faith in God, that therewith we resist our assailant, and that in this way, being one with God through faith, we realize that we are covered with his Almighty power.

In case of extremity a mother can stand before her child and cover her darling with her own body. And then we can say that the mother is a shield to her child. And God is the



shield of our little ones, who do not yet know him, and who can not yet put faith in him. But this sacred imagery was not borrowed from this. It was suggested by the soldier who in many a hard and bitter fight had used the shield himself to the saving of his life. Indeed, the shield is to a man what wings are to an eagle. With the trained warrior the shield is, as it were, a part of his body. It is one with his arm. And his fate hangs by his dexterity to use it. And so the Lord is a shield to those who trust in him, to those who believe, to those who in times of distress and want know the use of the faith which never fails, and who by faith understand that God directs their arm.

The shield points to battle and to the struggle against everything that threatens to destroy us. God is our shield against contagious disease, against the forces of nature, and against death by accident. But this does not mean that we are to sit down passively that God may cover us. The imagery of the shield allows no such interpretation. On the contrary, that God is a shield against disease and pestilence, against flood and fire, means that with the utmost of our powers we must apply every means of resistance which God has placed at our command; that in prayer we steel our powers to act, and that by faith we have God for our shield, which we must turn against our assailants.

This applies equally to the interests of the soul. Weak interpretation does not cover the case. It will not do to say that we must avoid sin. No, we must strive against it. We must understand that in sin a hostile power attacks us; that the thinking, planning spirit of Satan lurks behind that power; that unbeknown to us it forces itself upon us and aims to kill the soul; and that, unless we have a shield to cover us, and skill to use it dexteriously, it will surely overpower us. God is surely more our shield in the struggle for the salvation of the soul than of the body. But it means that we ourselves must do battle in behalf of the soul; that we ourselves must catch the eye of the assailant; that we must raise the sword against him, and lift up the shield to cover the soul. That God is our shield in this spiritual battle means that we reach out our hand after God, that we employ every spiritual means of resistance at our command, and that in doing so we discover that God is the shield which by faith we hold up against Satan.

We speak of an escutcheon, by which we mean a shield on which the man who owns it has graven his blazon. This is a sign of personal recognition for those who know him, and it announces who hides behind it. Thus the shield expresses the person and becomes something by itself. It becomes a personification. Great or small powers of resistance are recognized by the shield. And in this way God is the shield of those who put their trust in Him. No human pride has imaged on this shield a lion--or a bull's head. But in deep humility, in trustful meekness, in looking away from self and in confidence in his heavenly Father the man of faith puts on this shield nothing but the name of Jehovah. The Lord is my shield: this is holding the name of the Lord before the forces of nature and the powers of Satan. It is showing the world, in characters of flame, that we belong to the armies of the living God.



That we do not fight alone by ourselves, but that the Hero, who leads us, is the anointed of the Lord. And thereby we proclaim that the highest power of every human soul is ours, even the invincible power of faith.

Thus we see that this Scriptural imagery is deeply significant. We already saw it in the confession, that the Lord is the Sun of our life. But here we see that God is our shield and our buckler in the fight for the saving of our life. We also learn that it does not mean anything to say: God is my shield. But that the great thing is that in every time of need and in every hour of battle this holy shield is not left hanging on the wall, but that it is put to use by a living, zealous and an heroic faith.

"IMMANUEL.

Nothing is quite so much of an obstacle in the way of communion with God as the saying of Jesus to the Samaritan woman at Sychar: "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" ([John 4:24](#)). Our representations and thoughts begin with what we see and hear, smell and taste, but we have no hold on things that can not be seen and handled. If in spite of this we want to talk of them and imagine what they are like, we can but compare things unseen with things seen. We know that we have a soul, but no one has ever seen it. The question where in our person the soul dwells can only approximately be answered. Such is the case with the spirit-world and the souls of the departed. Good angels and bad alike are without a body. They have neither form nor appearance by which they can be observed. Whether an angel needs space, no one knows. Whether in illness our sick-chamber can hold a thousand angels or not, no one can tell. The difficulty only lifts itself when they receive forms in which to appear to us. As pure spirits, angels are not discerned. The same applies to those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. The dead whose bodies are in the grave continue in a purely spiritual state, until the coming of the Lord. Meanwhile we can form no idea regarding them. The same difficulty presents itself when we try to lift up our heart to God. God does not reveal himself to us in a visible form. He is invisible because He is Spirit and the Father of spirits. Along the way of ordinary knowledge and discovery we can not find God. Contact of soul with God takes place in a spiritual manner. It takes place of itself in Immanuel.

When in foreign parts we unexpectedly hear our own language spoken we feel at home at once. This is because we feel that this language is common property between us and our fellow country-men. In it we live. By it they come closer to us than others who only speak a foreign tongue. This is still more strongly felt with regard to animals. Highly-organized animals come very close to man. There often is a remarkable understanding between a shepherd or hunter and his dog, or between a rider and his horse. But close as this approach may be, an altogether different and far richer world opens itself to us when we meet a fellow man. He is flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone, with a soul like our own. And this creates fellowship which is far more intimate and tender, especially when the people we meet are of like tastes and aims of life with ours. There are classes, social distinctions and other divisions in the world of man. And if anyone would become more closely acquainted with us and invite mutual confidence, he should be one of our class and be embarked, as it were, on the sea of life in the same boat with us. And this is the meaning of Immanuel.

In the Babe of Bethlehem God draws near to us in our nature, in order presently in our language, through the medium of our world of thought and with the aid of our representa-



tions to make his presence felt in the heart, in accordance with the perceptions of which it is capable. He draws near to us in our nature, so that in order to find God we do not need to go out from our nature and enter upon a purely spiritual existence. Desirous to bless us, God from his side makes the transition which he spares us. We do not go to him, but he comes to us. We need not raise ourselves up to him, but he comes down to us that afterwards he may draw us up to himself. He enters into our nature. He assumes it and cradles in the Bethlehem manger with an existence which human nature brings with it. Here the distance between God and us is removed. The tension and effort to understand it purely spiritually is spared us. What we perceive is human nature. What presently we hear is human speech. What we observe are utterances of human life. An unknown brightness plays and glistens through it all and behind it all, a mysterious higher something, a something altogether holy. But now it does not repel, but it attracts and charms because it approaches us in our own human nature. The human nature of Immanuel is not merely a screen to temper dazzling glories, but the means and instrument to bring Divine life unaffectedly and intimately near to the heart. It is as though human nature in us unites itself with human nature in Jesus in order to bring God into immediate contact with the soul.

We do not say that this was necessary by itself. The fact of our creation after the Divine Image seemed to give us every requisite for fellowship with God. But we must ever remember that sin ruined this Image. In this weakened and ruined estate nothing short of holy grace could fill the gap. This was done in Immanuel, in the coming of God to us in the garb of human nature. Idolatry proclaimed the need of this when it imaged the Lord of heaven and earth after the likeness of a man. Hence Christianity alone can undo idolatry and paganism, since in Immanuel it presents the true Image of God anew. The result itself has sealed this. In Christ alone pure fellowship with the living God has been realized and gloriously celebrated in Psalm and hymnody. Apart from Immanuel we have philosophy about God, denial of God, or at most idolatry and cold Deism. In and through Immanuel alone there is life in God and with God, full of warmth, elevation and inspiration. In Immanuel God draws near to us in our own nature and through Immanuel the soul mounts from this nature spiritually up to the Father of spirits.

In Immanuel we have the way, but not the goal. It begins with Jesus, but in the end the Father himself makes tabernacle with us and the day breaks of which Jesus said: "In that day I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father himself loveth you." Then also the abundant activity of the Holy Ghost will unfold itself, even of the Comforter who could not come until after Jesus had been glorified. Let there not be anything artificial therefore or conventional in our seeking after God. No wilful, premeditated going out after Jesus to have fellowship with God. Immanuel brings us reconciliation, so that we dare to draw near again. He brings the Divine in human nature so that we can draw near again. We



owe him the Word, the world of thoughts and representations, the blessed results of his work that are showered down upon us, and the supply of powers of the Kingdom which inwardly renew us. But underneath it all, personal contact, real fellowship with God, is always a hidden, spiritual motion, so that inwardly we hear his voice and we can say with Job: "Now mine eye seeth thee." This is fellowship with God as man with man. As Jacob at Peniel.



"IN THE LIGHT OF THY COUN-TENANCE."

In moments of intense joy the human face is radiant. When the soul is depressed, the face is sad, the eye is dark and it seems that instead of showing itself in the face and speaking through it, the soul has turned it into a mask behind which to hide itself. We see a connection therefore between joy and bright colors; between sorrow and half-tints, until mourning expresses itself in black.

The same antithesis meets us when we enter the world of spirits. Satan is pictured in somber colors, while good angels are always seen as kindly appearances of light. In the house of many mansions there is everlasting light; for Satan there is outer darkness. The righteous shall shine as the sun in the firmament, clothed in garments of light. On Patmos Christ appears to John in blinding glory.

This beautiful thought of light as the expression of things that are pure and true and glorious, was bound to present itself in the world of worship by application to God's majesty. God is light. In Him is no darkness at all. He dwells in light unapproachable, and Father of lights is his name. After the creation, therefore, when "darkness was upon the face of the deep," God could not appear in the created world without first sending forth the command: "Let there be light," and then there was light. The majesty of God revealed itself in a column of fire at the Red Sea, in a cloud of light in Solomon's Temple. When Moses was to be marked in a special way as the Lord's ambassador, his face shone with blinding splendor. The Savior showed himself on Tabor in light of glistening brightness. And in the descriptions of the New Jerusalem the climax of its splendor is that there shall be no more sun nor moon there, for that by his benign presence God himself shall lighten the world of glory.

Sacred art has long expressed this by representing the head of Christ and of saints surrounded by an halo and their form in glistening robes. We do not treat this here from its material side. It is well known that certain people, who are strongly impregnated with magnetism, are able to make electric rays of light go out from their finger tips. We need not doubt that radiancy of face in moments of great joy is connected with natural operations. But the source of this facial light is not in the magnetic current, but in the spirit, in the soul, and all the rest is used merely as vehicle and means of direction.

He who watches a child, which never hides anything, an enthusiastic child with rosy cheeks, in such moments of great gladness, observes in the outward play of countenance that the eyes dilate and increase in brightness; that the facial color heightens so that it shines through and radiates, and that especially by great mobility the soul reflects itself in the face. This reflection in part is even permanent. Alongside of the noble countenance of self-sacrificing piety, there is the brutish, dull, expressionless face of the sensualist. In the case of



young, delicate persons especially, who have the fire of youth in their eye and whose complexion is transparent, the expression of the nobility of soul in the face is sometimes unsurpassably sympathetic in its colorings.

Thus the sacred language which speaks of "walking in the light of God's countenance" (Ps. 89:15), is naturally explained by life itself. With God everything material falls away. But the rich, full expression of the spiritual and the essential remains. God can not step outside of his hiding except as everything that reveals itself is majesty, radiancy, animation and glory. That this may also be a revelation in anger, is self-evident. But this we let pass. We deal with the fact that there is a soul which seeks after God, and finds God, and which, happy in this finding, looks into his holy face and drinks in everything it reads there. This brings but one experience, which is that no darkness proceeds from God but only light, soft, undulating, refreshing light in which the flower bud of the heart unfolds itself.

This is the first effect. Gloomy people may be pious, but they do not know the daily tryst with God. They do not see God in the light of his countenance, and do not walk in it. Even when they who in other ways are brave and heroic get dark lines in their face, it only shows that they are out of the light of God's countenance and are striving to regain it. Even among us a kind face, beaming with sympathy, is irresistible and draws out the light from the face of others, which expresses itself first of all in a generous smile.

But this is much stronger with the Lord. We can not look at God in the light of his countenance without having the gloom of our faces give place to higher relaxation. For in the light of God's countenance we know Him. When it shines out, his spirit draws near to make us see, observe and feel what God is to us. Not in a doctrinal way, not in a point of creed, but in utterances of the spirit of unnamable grace and mercy, of overwhelming love and tenderness, and of Divine compassion, which enters every wound of the soul at once and anoints it with holy balm.

The light of God's countenance shining on us compasses us about and closes us in. It lifts us up into a higher sphere of light. And as on the wings of it we feel ourselves carried by the care, the providence and almighty power of God. In the light of God's countenance everything, our whole life included, becomes transparent to us, and through every Golgotha we see the glory that looms up from it. The light of God's countenance shines through us and leaves nothing covered in us of the sins that are covered by grace. This can not be otherwise, for the moment we are aware that the light of God's face shines through our person, all hiding of sin is futile. Differently than X-rays, it shines through our whole heart and life, including our past. Nothing is spared. It is an all-penetrating light which nothing can arrest.

Thus the light of God's countenance ought to frighten us, and yet--it does not. And it can not do this, because it lays bare to us the fulness of grace which is alive in the Father-heart of God. When anyone does not believe in the entire forgiveness of sin, God hides his



face from him. Only when faith in the atonement operates in full does the light of the Divine countenance shine upon, compass and penetrate us.

And then comes the "walking in that light." Walking here implies that not only occasionally we catch a beam of the light of the Divine countenance, but that it has become permanent for us. That is, it is there for our good, even when we do not think of it, and that we regain it every time our soul longs for it. And so we continue to walk the pathway of our life, from day to day, in the light of the Divine countenance. No longer inspired by our own phantasies, no more spurred on by the ideals of the world, which have shown themselves deceptive, and no longer with a dark heaven above us, in which at most a single star still glitters, but we go on by the light which is above the light of the sun and by the outshining of ever fuller grace in the light of the countenance of God.

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SEEK THY SERVANT.

The searchlight, projected from the tower across city and plain, is a striking image of the flashing of the All-seeing Eye. A bundle of white, soft, clear light darts out into the darkness, with the velocity of the twinkling of an eye, from a single point as its source, spreads itself over an ever-widening surface across the country below, and at once every object in the track of that light comes out in clear sight. Nothing remains hidden. And so the heart- and soul-searching light from the All-seeing Eye above shines forth into the deepest folds of the conscience.

But the Psalmist does not mean this seeking and searching when he prays. "Seek, Lord, thy Servant." The figure which the Scripture here uses is that of the shepherd, wandering among the hills and seeking the lamb that strayed from the flock and is lost. Thus the Psalmist himself explains it (119:176): "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments." And this figure from the country-life stands much higher than that which is borrowed from the searchlight. Here love is the appreciation of having again what was lost, the impotence to let go what belongs to the flock, and the motive of the search, or rather the stimulating, impelling passion of the heart.

And here is reciprocity. The lost sheep bleats helplessly for the shepherd, and the shepherd scans the mountain path to find it. The lost sheep wants to be found and the shepherd wants to find it. Its bleating is a call: "Seek me, shepherd," and by bleating it co-operates in the finding. Such is the Psalmist's cry: "Seek thy Servant;" a prayer that he might be found, which is at the same time an utterance of the soul that makes the finding possible.

No child of the world prays this prayer, neither the man who, far distant from God, is engrossed in the pursuit of wealth, nor he who worships himself in his heart as his own idol. There is no reference here to the unconverted. He who here prays knows that he has become God's servant, that he has entered into the service of the Almighty; that he has been with God, and that he has strayed away from him. This is clearly expressed in the image of the shepherd with the lamb. That which has wandered away from the flock has been with it. That which calls for the shepherd has known him. "Seek thy servant," is the direct prayer of the child of God who has known his Heavenly Father in his love, and who now for want of this love feels himself deserted and sick at heart and longs again for the tender enjoyment which he has tasted in the presence of his God.

Do not misunderstand therefore the real meaning of this cry of distress. It is not a call for conversion, but for return. No unconverted soul can do this. He who so calls fell away from a love that had once been found and with all the tender yearnings of that lost love he wants it back.



This is of frequent occurrence. A man had entered in through the narrow gate. He saw his path sown with higher light. The feeling of the new life filled his heart. Powers of the Kingdom coursed through the arteries of the soul. He understood what he lived for. The cup of reconciliation was handed him full to the brim. He rejoiced in his Savior. And in a most blessed way the holy intimate life of fellowship with God in Christ unfolded itself within. But this did not continue. Fog rose across the inner sky. From following the right way it came to wandering, and from wandering to wandering away. And then everything became uncertain, restless and comfortless. Influences from beneath repressed holy influences from above. God seemed far removed from him. The tie of faith in Christ which was once so firmly strung, was weak. It was dark for the soul and in this darkness the heart began to feel lonely and forsaken, till it could endure it no longer and longed after God again and tried to seek him back.



But seeking was not followed by finding. No signs marked off the path. Going this way and now that the soul remained equally far removed from God, or wandered at length still farther away from him. When once we have been enriched with the love of God it is not given us to play with it; first to win it, then to let it go, and then to take it back again at pleasure. He who has known the Lord and afterward has forsaken him does not of himself find him again. And so we learn to know our lack of saving power. We can not save ourselves. But we retain the deep consciousness that we can not do without God; that the want of his love creates an aching void in the heart, until finally it becomes a matter of conviction: I can not seek God back, but God can seek me again. And then follows the anxious bleating of the wandering sheep. A call from the depth of the soul upon God whom he has lost, the prayer, the supplication: O God, seek thy servant.

This longing desire to find God back takes a wonderful hold sometimes upon the human heart. There are those whom God allowed, while they were yet children, and thus but partly known to themselves, to feel his love; that He regenerated them, but that conscious faith did not reach the fuller knowledge of his name. This led to the unusual condition that God worked inwardly with his power, but that in spite of it doubt filled the heart and mind. We have all known certain people who were not able to believe, but whose noble qualities of mind and heart were both interesting and refreshing. They were frequently far more attractive than many confessed believers. They were flowers in the bud, which could not come to bloom, but even then the half-opened bud exhaled sweet fragrance. Inwardly they were consumed with longing after God, but they did not understand their own desires. They did not know that they already belonged to God, though at times they were conscious of nameless drawings after him. And they do not pray, but others who can, pray for them: Lord, seek this thy servant, seek this thine handmaid. For every utterance of their lives proves that they are thy servants. They are children of the family of faith. Only they have not as yet discovered their Father. And as long as this is not a prayer from the lips alone, but from the



heart, it is heard both in behalf of ourselves and of those the burden of whose salvation the Lord has laid upon us. For then God seeks them, and finds them, and gives himself to be found of them.

How this takes place no one can tell. To this end God uses at one time a man's natural lot in life; at another time a written thought which he drives home, or some striking word which he makes us hear. To this end he works by means of affliction that heavily burden, the heart; by means of hard and perilous times, which try us to the utmost; by contact with different people who are met by the way; by impressions of angels that hover about us at his command, and by his secret workings in the heart. It is an embroidering which God works upon the soul in all sorts of colors and forms. But however different and inscrutable these operations may be, the outcome is assured. God seeks us. He finds us. And at length we discover that we have been found. For then God's presence in the heart is vitally enjoyed again.

In the seeking of our God let us not hinder the finding. Not merely doubt, but even the inclination to prefer doubt to assurance is sin against the love of God. When the Lord seeks you and lays his hand upon your shoulder, do not draw back. Kneel at his feet. Offer thanks to him and worship.



STRENGTHENED WITH MIGHT.

It is no longer doubted that atmospheric conditions vitally affect health. Fresh air builds up and invigorates. They who breathe pure mountain air have iron in the blood, while they who live in low and marshy regions breathe air that is impregnated with poisons from the swamps, so that their strength is sapped and their vital forces are weakened. It can not be otherwise. With every breath we take in air with everything it contains, and through countless pores in the skin we absorb atmospheric elements which open the way to influences that affect the constitution. The pale and the anaemic are constantly advised therefore to seek fresh air and a healthy atmosphere. In hot and sultry summer days we pant for the relief which evening brings. And they who are in easy reach of the shore revel in the cool invigorating air of the sea.

And since we are two-sided, that is to say, since we consist of body and soul, the atmospheric influence upon our physical health finds a counterpart in the effects of the moral character of our surroundings upon our moral development. This, too, is above question. Sad and joyous events continually show that low moral standards in life injure character, while moral and healthy environments quicken our own moral sense. In education the light and shadow sides are largely dominated by this atmospheric influence. The secret of mother influence upon the early formation of character is largely due to the fact that childhood days are almost entirely spent in her constant presence. The moral life also has laws of its own. It expresses itself in acts and in events. It reflects itself in writings and in conversations. But apart from all this, moral life is still something else. It is even a sort of moral atmosphere which is either healthy and bracing, poisonous and hurtful or neutral and weakening. However strong our character may be, the influences of this moral atmosphere work out our spiritual benefit or bane.

Nor is this all. Not only does the air which we breathe affect our bodily health, and not only does our moral environment shape our moral life, but a personal atmosphere also affects us strongly. Close fellowship with world-minded people close fellowship with people who are worldly-minded and of little elevation of character degrades us. Daily intercourse with people of nobler disposition, of more seriousness of thought, and of holier aims in life, spur us on to better things ourselves. A good man is like a good genius to us. Pure environments hold us back from things that pull us down. We notice this particularly in the case of men of sterling qualities and women of dominant spirits. They exert a power of attraction upon each other which tends to make them alike. One is stronger than the other, and the stronger is bound to mould the weaker into likeness with himself. Imitation is a fundamental trait of human nature and gradually and involuntarily the weaker inclines to do and to be like

the stronger, which extends sometimes even to the inflection of the voice and to the manner of conversation. And this personal influence leads of itself to religious influence, which is entirely apart from the moral. At heart all religion is personal. Moses put his stamp upon all Israel. The Gospel has been carried into the world by the Apostles. Augustin inspired the Middle Ages. Luther and Calvin are spiritual fathers of the Reformation. And to this day in every community, large or small, where a strongly inspired, religious life dominates, the persons can be pointed out from whom this healthy, bracing atmosphere has emanated. Fire in the heart of one strikes fire in the heart of the other. A devout Christian life wins the souls of its associates for God.

Now we reach the highest round of the ladder, of which as a rule too little account is taken. We may breathe mountain or sea air. We may drink in the moral atmosphere of our environment. We may partake of the inspiration that goes forth from a finely-strung nature among our fellow men. But the highest of all, the influence of which for real strengthening of heart far exceeds all others, is the secret walk with God. Paul prays for the Ephesians (3:16) that they might be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man. This is the highest and holiest atmosphere that can and ought to inwork on us. Imagine that our Lord were still on earth and that every day for a month we could be with Him, we would breathe an atmosphere of exalted and holy living, which in an altogether unequalled way, would strengthen us with might in the inner man. It was the privilege of the Apostles, exceeding every other, to spend three years in this holy atmosphere, and look, with what strength in the inner man they went out into the world. This is impossible now. Jesus is no more known after the flesh. But through him we have access to the Father, and through him we can have daily, personal, secret fellowship with God.

If we think that everything ends with the brief moment of prayer, we remain but a short time in this holy atmosphere. Average prayer, as a rule, does not cover more than half an hour out of every twenty-four. This is not the way the Scripture takes it. David sang: "I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever," (Ps. 23:6). Both before and since this royal harper the saints who have sought and found and known and enjoyed the secret walk with God have always understood that it means repeated thought of God, constant lifting up of soul to him, considering all things with an eye to him who loves us, ever dwelling near unto him, continual consciousness of his holy, encouraging and inspiring presence, personal realization of God's nearness on every side, with all of life immersed, as it were, in the glory that shines out from the Divine Being, and feeling in the heart the throbbings of the Father-heart of God. Churches that are so conditioned are alive. They may be pure in doctrine but without this they are dead. Preachers who bring this to their congregations are ambassadors of God. They who have no eye for this because the heart does not go out after it, are tinkling cymbals.



When "to be near unto God" is our joy and our song; when we dwell in the house of the Lord, and the secret walk with God is daily our delight, we experience the mighty, strengthening influence of the holy atmosphere above, which angels breathe and from which departed saints drink in the never-fading freshness of their soul. Then the powers of the Kingdom flow into the inner man. Heavenly ozone ministers to the soul. Spiritual power restrains what is unholy and impure in us. Draughts from the Fountain of Life make the breast swell with fresh vigor and vitality. Even as in the Holy Ghost God himself touches us, and inspires us to render nobler exhibits of power.

The whole social fabric of daily life would wonderfully change if every soul could breathe this holy atmosphere. Alas, for sin. When the anaemic is advised to try mountain or sea air he at once craves the means to do it. But when it is said, "Get away from your environments, seek the company of those of higher moral worth," someone may be moved, but the larger numbers continue their pleasure in their own evil ways. And when the matter is pressed, and it is said, "Cultivate the secret walk with God and drink in the atmosphere of the life above," no one responds, except as God draws him. And if we are privileged to know this secret fellowship, it but shows what excellent grace has been bestowed upon us. Let us therefore with St. Paul bow the knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that this glorious privilege may be not taken from us, but that from this secret walk abounding might may continually be granted to strengthen us in the inner man.



"TO WHOM IS THE ARM OF THE LORD REVEALED?"

No thought lifts us more securely above the power of material interests and above the temptation of the appetites than the confession, "God is a Spirit," from which of itself the second flows, that he who worships Him can not and must not do so except in spirit and in truth. This excludes from God and from the worship of his name everything that is material, sensual or what is bound to form. God is a Spirit. This liberates the soul from every chain that might bind or oppress it contrary to its nature; always on condition, of course, that God, who is Spirit, is worshipped in spirit and in truth with all the love of the heart. That God is Spirit brings all idolatry to naught, ail creature-worship, and dismisses every sensual horror which idolatry brought with it and which hastened the downfall of the nations of antiquity. Not to analyze the riches of this all-dominating thought too closely, the fact that God is Spirit lifts human life above the whole visible world and exalts the spirit within us to the high spheres of the invisible world where God dwells in light unapproachable. For if God is Spirit, he is altogether independent of this visible creation. He was, before the mountains were brought forth. There was an eternity when nothing material was as yet created; so that in dependent relations all visible things occupy a secondary place; physical death does not end all; existence can be prolonged, though for a while we are only spirit; and we can revel now in the supreme riches of the thought that if needs be we can despise the whole world and yet occupy high spiritual vantage ground and be spiritually rich in God.

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But however strong and superlatively rich the confession is that God is Spirit, it, too, has been corrupted by sin. We see this most clearly when we think of Satan and the world of demons. Some people who deem themselves civilized and highly cultivated may hold Satan and his demons as mere fabrications of weak minds. They who believe, correctly hold that with respect to this matter also Jesus knew more than they who pretend to be enlightened. In the "Our Father" he taught us to pray: "Deliver us from the evil One," and he wove the good rule into it when he furthermore made us pray: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." "In heaven" must mean: by thy angels. And angels are pure spirits without bodies. If Satan was not evil by creation, which can not be otherwise, if originally he was a good and a brilliant creature of God, who felt himself at home in the world of angels, it must be confessed that he, too, is a spirit and that his demons are spirits. This does not make sin purely spiritual, neither does it exclude sin from the world of matter. But it means that all sin, including voluptuousness and drunkenness, originates in the spirit, and that the Psalmist was correct when he prayed: Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins;

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let them not have dominion over me; then shall I be upright and I shall be innocent from the great transgression (19:13).

Nothing offends more greatly therefore than that in the social world immorality is taken to consist exclusively of intemperance, debauch or voluptuousness, and that its attendants of scorn, bitterness, anger and revenge are seemingly no blots on the good name of celebrated people. Along this line the glorious confession that God is Spirit is abandoned to pantheism, while presumptuous pride leads at length to such high esteem of self as to make one dream that he himself is God. This has given rise to the monstrous idea, even among devout souls, that with the "new man in the spirit" all responsibility can be disowned for sins of sensuality which "the old man" has committed. And this in true is entirely the same error as that which is revived again in the school of Maeterlinck that the pure soul within is not stained by sensual misdeeds of the body.

Holy Scripture subverts all this by impressing upon the soul that God is Spirit and that all the workings of God are the personal doings of One who is everywhere present with us. God is a Spirit, upon the soul that God is Spirit, and that all the pervading the whole creation; not a vague working, elusive and inapprehensible. No, thrice no. He is a God who is our Heavenly Father, who speaks to us, who hears our prayers, in whose breast throbs a heart full of Divine compassion. He is a personal God, who companies with us as a friend, who turns in with us for the night, and who allows us to dwell in his holy tabernacle. The works of God are constantly described therefore as personal acts, in connection with which references abound to the face of God, to the mouth of the Lord, to the ear which he inclines toward us, to the footsteps of the Holy One, to the hand which is over us in blessing, and to the arm of strength with which the Lord breaks all forms of opposition. All this is in part personification, by which what is found in man is applied to God. But there is more to it than this. He that planted the ear, the Psalmist asks: Shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see? (94:9). The eye and the ear, the hand and the arm are but bodily manifestations of our inward powers, which God has so made, because he created us after his image. When we say that God hears, sees, speaks, blesses and fights, it is not said so, metaphorically, after the manner of men, but by it is asserted that all this is original in God and that it only appears in us after his image. When the Scripture speaks of an arm of the Lord, it means that there is not merely a vague outflowing of power from God, but that God governs his indwelling and outgoing power, that he directs it to definite ends, that he uses or leaves it unused according to his good pleasure, and that when God employs his power to protect or to oppose us, it is equally much, and in a still higher sense, a personal act, as when we lift up our arm to protect a child or to ward off an assailant.

When the prophet Isaiah asks (53:1): To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? and the question in turn is put to you: Is the arm of the Lord revealed to you? it does not mean in a vague general way whether you believe that there is a God, and that there is a power of



God, and whether you believe that this power is operative. But rather whether in your position and in your experience in life you have discovered that Almighty God has personal dealings with you, that as God he has turned himself in person to your person, and has come in contact with you as a man comes in contact with his friend or with his assailant, and whether in this strictly personal relation you have discerned the arm of the Lord lifting itself up to cover and protect you, or turning itself against you to assail and cast you down.

This is what most lives lack, even among those that confess Christ. They lack what is recorded of Moses: that he endured as seeing him who is Invisible. They do not understand what is told of Jacob, that he wrestled with God as with a man. They have vague impressions that there are certain influences, operations and powers abroad, but they do not see the Holy One, they have no dealings with God as with a Father who comes to his child, looks it in the face with his eyes, listens to it with his ears, puts his hand on it and covers it with the arm of his power. They pray to God and praise him, but they do not meet him in the way. They do not feel his presence with them by night. They do not feel his holy breath upon their cheek. And they do not see the "arm of strength" which is all their assurance and salvation. It can not be insisted upon therefore with sufficient urgency that Bible reading be made a more serious business; that we wean ourselves from the false tendency to take everything in Scripture metaphorically. God's word is a lamp before our feet and a light upon our path, because it alone engraves these two things upon the heart: that God is Spirit, and that, as Our Father who is in heaven, this God meets us in the way and deals with us as a man with his neighbor; invisible and yet seen.



THAT THEY MIGHT KNOW THEE.

"This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God" ([John 17:3](#)). No human word can express a deeper thought or higher aim than this. It was not spoken by a seer to men, but by the Son to the Father. And it must be heard anew by him who would seek God, since it has been put on record for this purpose.

No prayers of our Lord during his more than thirty years' life on earth, in Joseph's home at Nazareth, in mountain or desert place, by day or night, have been recorded in the Gospels, save a few sentence prayers and the cry of distress in Gethsemane. In [John 17](#), however, the high-priestly prayer of our Savior has come down to us in all its sublime grandeur. He who gave us the Scripture to guide us on our pilgrim journey has ordained that this prayer of Jesus to the Father should awake an echo in our own praying heart.

If all the prayers of our Savior had been preserved in writing, it would have been an inexhaustible treasure. First, the child-like prayers of his early life, which already at the age of twelve showed such Divine traits that even in its still undeveloped form it breathed perfection and apprehended it. Then the period in Jesus prayer-life from youth to manhood spent in retirement and in preparation for the great work of our salvation. Then the closing period of three years, so brief and quickly passed, but which is by far the richest, because of the storms that raged and which were battled through at the pains of who can say how many long hours spent in agonizing prayer.

Nothing of all the riches of these prayers has been handed down to us save this one. "I thank Thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight." And in the high-priestly prayer, this sacred diadem which has been handed down to us unchanged and unabbreviated, we discover what is at heart the same thought: "This is eternal life, that they might know Thee, the Only True God." In [Matthew 11](#) it is not the prudent and the wise, but babes. In [John 17](#) it is not the world, but them whom Thou hast given me out of the world. In both instances it is the knowledge of God; that which has been revealed of the Holy and the Highest. And what is to be adored in it all is the Divine good pleasure.

This is prayer: Not criticizing what is holy, but taking it in, drinking it in. And by the entrance of the Holy One into our life, not merely to live forever, but to have a life which in its own nature is eternal.

When something stirs in a secret place and something proceeds therefrom, there is life. The pregnant mother feels life when she is aware of motion within, and then knows that presently life will be born from her. So it is with us. When everything is still within, when



no voice is heard from the soul, and nothing stirs in our inmost parts, who can know whether the soul lives? We may live along with the life of the world and be affected by it, even as the motion of the sea leaves no single drop at rest, but communicates its own restlessness to it. This, however, is not a life of one's own. It is no inner impulse the momentum of which springs from oneself.

Moving along with the rise and fall of the world's life may develop warmth within, may enrich one intellectually, may deepen the affections and widen experience, but it has no root of its own, no individual impulse and therefore it can not convey permanent possession. And when at length death removes us from this restless life of the world, this purely impersonal life that has been lived with others, is shaken off and nothing remains. Real personal life, on the other hand, springs from a Divinely implanted seed, which inwardly germinates and unfolds. But, for its proper growth, it continually asks for food after its own kind. If it fails of this, it languishes and withers. Abundance of provisions, which are not meet, do not help it. It can not assimilate nor digest them. Insofar as they enter into it they only pervert it. Getting food after its own kind only once in a while, in small measures, does not help it. To reach full development it must constantly be fed with food convenient for it.

This is "eternal life" for the soul. Not only life hereafter, but an unfolding here of the inner self, according to its disposition, nature and destiny. In this process everything that poisons the blood of the inner life is expelled, and every need of it is met. And the supply for this inner feeding, strengthening and sanctifying is so constant, permanent and essentially eternal, as to insure perfect fruition. This is eternal life for the inner self of man created after God's image.

According to the teaching of our Lord, the soul only finds this food for eternal life in the eternal God. The Lord is my portion, my everlasting good (Ps. 16:5). What can my heart desire on earth beside Thee? (Ps. 73:25). God is the highest good. In Thy light we see light. With Thee is the source of my life (Ps. 36:9).

Everything comes to us from God. We owe him thanks for everything we have. Every good and perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights. From him, through him, and to him are all things. But the end and aim is, and ever shall be, that God shall be all and in all.

It is beautiful to confess that our God is Lord of lords and King of kings. That he appoints, allows and governs all things. Far greater, however, is the confession that God the Holy Ghost enters into us and dwells in us, and chooses us for his temple, and makes intercession in us and for us with groanings that are unutterable.



In this alone the heart finds rest. Everything that grace bestows are but radiations of glory and love. The burning hearth of all love and glory is in God himself. Every drop of the water of eternal life is refreshing, but the Fountain from which these waters spring is the loving heart of the Eternal. Throughout the entire Scripture therefore, and throughout the whole Church, and in every saintly soul, the confession of passionate delight: It is good for me, it is my blessed lot "to be near unto God," may always be heard. Him seeks the eye. Him desires the heart. And only and alone when the soul has found its highest good in God, can the germ of the personal life in us revive from its withered estate, and begin to develop and to unfold, until from the half-opened bud expands the blossom of everlasting life.



This can not be otherwise on account of the nature of the soul. We have not made it ourselves. The world has not determined its character. It has not become what it is by chance. God alone has planned what the human soul should be. Hence its nature is what he appointed that it should be. And so it continues to be whether it is the soul of a Judas or the soul of a St. John. It can develop itself in holiness, it can also degenerate in sin and become corrupt. But whether it unfolds in glory or in corruption, both are what they are by virtue of the nature of the soul as God has planned it. Every creative plan has gone out from God. A plan for the stars in the firmament, for the corn in the ear. for the lark that sings among the branches, for the angel that sings the Holy, Holy, Holy, in the sanctuary above. But the nature, the essential character of the human soul, was planned and ordained of God to be different from the nature of everything else.

With charming clearness the Scripture defines the nature of the soul in this single phrase: that we are created after the image of God. This includes everything. From this everything explains itself. From this it comes that the soul can never have its "highest good" save in Him after whose Image it originated. The opposite truth no less holds good that everything that turns the soul to another good than God as the highest, wounds, corrupts and poisons it. It is painful to see that the nations with their seething multitudes have no understanding of this. But it is more painful to see that even among serious-minded people many lay hold on everything else but God. Most painful of all is the sight of many religious people who follow after everything that is good, but show that they have never tasted the "highest good."



But our blessed Lord does not despair. In heaven he continues to intercede for his saints upon earth: "Father, this is eternal life, that they might know Thee, the only true God." And in perfect accord with this is the disclosure, in constantly new-born children of the Kingdom, of the ardent life of the soul, which responds to this prayer with a devout: Amen.

"SHOW US THE FATHER."

In this meditation also the main thought is the striking word of Jesus: This is eternal life, that they might know Thee, the Only true God. Its meaning is too profound to be fully set forth at one time. Therefore we come back to it now and will presently do so again.

We have tried to explain what eternal life is. We did not undertake to reduce it to a single definition, neither have we subjected the idea to close analysis. All we essayed to do was, to make the life to be perceived in life itself, and to explain that eternal life means more than mere life without end. Mere endless life would drive us to despair; eternal life, which is altogether different, inspires and rejuvenates.

And now to the point. It does not say that he who knows the Father shall have eternal life. It does not say: If you are religious and earnestly seek to know God, your reward after death will be eternal life. On the contrary it declares that to know God is itself eternal life. The difference is seen at once to be heavenwide. To interpret eternal life as a reward for pains taken to know God is superficial, mechanical and affected. The thought that eternal life is itself the knowledge of God is unfathomably deep. Eternal life as the reward for knowledge is a part of school discipline. First much study, much memorizing, much taking notes of dictations, and then promotion from a passing existence into an endless one. This makes it all a sort of higher life-insurance, or turns it into a course of mental gymnastics, into the study of a work on dogmatics which is subtly composed, every sentence of which is carefully constructed, and which presents in an orderly way what in the course of centuries has been systematized regarding the Being, Work, Person and Attributes of the Infinite. And when at length everything has become dry as dust to the eye of the soul, and when there is no more fragrance of life perceptible anywhere, the reward of this barren, dead knowledge is eternal life. All this falls away when the saying of Jesus is taken as it reads: The knowledge of God is itself eternal life. He who has it, has already, here and now, eternal life. He who dies without having found it here, will never find it in the hereafter. No eternal morning will dawn on him. And this interpretation, which seems to us the only permissible one, affects us like a power that pierces the conscience with the question: Have you this knowledge? And it urges us, now, before it is too late, to seek it with all our might, until in thrilling ecstasy of soul we feel the swell of the undulation of this eternal life.

And now comes Philip with the naive request: Lord, show us the Father ([John 14:8](#)). This was childlike in its simplicity, but he chose the right starting point from which to advance. He who asks like this shows that he means it. and that he is in earnest about it. He wants to know God, It shows that he does not care for book-knowledge, but for life-knowledge of God, And what is more natural than that he begins by asking: Show me the Father.



One of the defects of the religious life, as it has come down to us from the Reformation, is that in distinction from Rome it has been developed too dogmatically. This could not be otherwise. Doctrine can not be sacrificed. But when it appears too onesidedly in the foreground, there is something wrong. The same difference presents itself between the Gospels and the Epistles: the latter are in part controversial. In the Gospel the distinction occurs between the sermon on the Mount and Jesus' controversy with the scribes. The first period of the Reformation was better than the later one. What rapture marks the language of the Confession and the Office of Holy Communion in distinction from the barrenness of later formularies. First there are bounding floods of life, and then we find drained river-beds with only some weak rill coursing through the sand. We will never know how greatly this has impoverished the church.

But Philip knows nothing about these contrasts and formularies. He faces the matter with child-like simplicity. To him God is really the Eternal Being. He longs for God. He seeks after him. The prayer of his heart is that he might see God. Hence the request: Show us the Father. When reports go the rounds about a person and someone asks: Do you know him? nothing is more natural, when you do not know him, than to say: I have not even seen him. For seeing is of first importance. An impression received through sight speaks for itself. Both in Old and New Testaments the desire to see God appears everywhere in the foreground. With Moses when he prayed: Show me thy glory, and Jehovah replied: No man shall see my face and live ([Exod. 33:18, 20](#)). And in [I Cor. 13:12](#) St. Paul declares: But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory. In words like these the life of the Scripture beats and throbs. There is no dry as dust there. Everything pulsates with reality. All interests center in God, in the living God, to see him, to behold him, and ardently to rejoice in this life-giving look. When, therefore, Philip asked: Lord, show us the Father, he made the right beginning, and it sprang from his burning thirst after the living God.

But alas, God can not be seen with our outward eyes. The reason for this is perfectly plain. We can only see things, whatever they are, when they present themselves as parts of the visible world and are sufficiently limited to fall within the range of our vision. No one can see the world as a whole, but only in fragments and parts; now this part, now that, as far as it falls within reach. But even if we could see the whole world, we would still be unable to see God, because the world is finite, and God is infinite. The greatest idea that can be formed of the world falls away into nothingness compared with the infinite God. We can only see what falls within our range of vision and what has form and appearance. But God is Spirit, and they who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. God can not be seen therefore outside of ourselves. To desire to do this is to bring him down to our level, to give him a form and to rob him of his spirituality. Here idolatry comes in. It began when people "changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible

man" ([Rom. 1:23](#)). It did not spring from wickedness, but from piety. Not the worst, but the best people from among the nations built temples and placed an image of God in them. Then the priests showed them their God in an image which they had made. They thought that they had thereby brought God closer to the people, while in fact the miserable image had caused all knowledge of God to be lost to them. With every representation of God, God himself is gone. Hence the searching warning of St. John: Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

Thus there remains the cry: Show us the Father. The cry from the soul, that is not satisfied with a dogma and a creed, but wants God himself; the truly childlike and devout heart that thirsts for the living God. And side by side with this remains the other fact, that no objective representation of God is possible, and that He can not be seen with mortal eye. He is the Invisible. With every effort to represent him by an image the Infinite is lost and man is exiled farther away from God. And the reconciliation of these mutually excluding facts: that we are inwardly impelled not to rest until we have seen God, and that by representations of him we lose him altogether lies in Jesus' answer to Philip: "He that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, show us the Father?" ([John 14:9](#)).

And how? There is an outward look and there is an inward look. But we can not have this inward look as single individuals. Not by ourselves alone, but in our human nature. In the Son of Man God himself appears to us in this human nature. Through fellowship with the Son of Man we see God, in Jesus, through Jesus, and through the Holy Ghost we see him in ourselves. Not the image of God in the temple of idols, but the image of God in Christ.



HE THAT HATH SEEN ME HATH SEEN THE FATHER.



There are sayings of Jesus that make one tremble and stand back--unless he believes on him. One of these is: He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me ([Matth. 10:37](#)). Imagine a man who would dare to say anything like this in a public meeting. Every hearer would take him to be insane. If a man were to come into your home and in your presence address your child like this, would you not take sure measures to prevent him from doing so again? But Jesus spake like this. And you teach your child that this saying is true--because you worship Jesus.

Such is the case with Jesus' answer to Philip: He that hath seen me hath seen the Father ([John 14:9](#)). This rouses the same repellant feeling. We would make a man, who spoke like this, harmless by securing him a lodging in an institution for the insane--unless we honored and worshipped God in him. There is no choice in this matter. In any nation in whose public conscience there glows a spark of religion, public opinion would demand the arrest of a man of such blasphemous pretensions. But to this striking saying of Jesus on the contrary our own heart echoes consent--because we worship him.

It all depends on this. The Sanhedrin and the excited Jews in the courts of Justice at Jerusalem acted consistently from their viewpoint, when they took Jesus for a blasphemer and cast him out. They did not worship him. As long as their eyes were closed against the Divine majesty of Jesus they could not do otherwise. Their sin was not that they cast out Jesus, but that they did not see God in Him. They talked a good deal about God. But when God appeared to them in Jesus they knew him not and denied that it was He. And this is the case now. In times of refreshings, when religious perceptions are clear, thousands see God in Jesus who never did so before. In times of religious decline multitudes abandon the faith and take pleasure in heaping other honorary titles upon Jesus than those that are his own. They call him the ideal man, the model of true piety the hero of faith, the martyr for a sacred cause. These are altogether words, and only words, by which to soothe the conscience and to evade the issue at stake, which is, that with Thomas they should kneel adoringly at his feet with the cry: "My Lord and My God." In daring frenzy Voltaire permitted the *l'infame* to flow from his reckless pen. But he was braver than these irresolute spirits. At heart they are one with him. They do not believe that they who saw Jesus saw God. But they have not the heart to say how this Jesus, who dared to say this, should be estimated.



The highest act within reach of the spirit of man is to see God in Jesus. The Deity of Christ is generally accepted in childhood years. But as time goes on it is given little or no thought. For the rest this conviction is left as a foreign something in the conscience, without being worked over and applied to the same in its later stages of development. This should

not be censured too severely. Many can not advance beyond this. Their mental grasp has no further reach. And even from such a defective conviction childlike faith can borrow moral strength. But the thrice blessed, who have been initiated into a more sympathetic and more ardent piety, can not rest content with this. They think and contemplate; they go through spiritual experiences; and by these inner activities of the soul they enter into this mystery more deeply than mere analytic study of doctrine can effect. Seeing with the eye of sense is not full, clear and perfect sight to them. Without the eye of sense God saw purely, spiritually and immediately, long before we ever saw. And when in the creation after his Image God endowed man with the power to see, of necessity human sight was originally spiritual, internal and immediate. Only because God also clothed man with a body and placed him in a world of sense, did He form the human eye through which man can see this world. For this alone, and for no other purpose, was the eye of sense created. Consequently it can only see this visible world. When the other far more comprehensive, invisible world is concerned, it has no use. And, therefore, man was endowed with another eye, even the eye of the soul, to which as a subordinate instrument, the eye of sense only renders auxiliary aid. There are two worlds: one spiritual and one material. In connection with these there are two eyes: one in the soul and one in the body. And there is a two-fold vision: immediate sight in the spirit and mediate sight through mortal eye. An inward look and an outward look. An imaginary seeing of which we are so clearly conscious that nothing is more common than the saying: "You see that I am right," where seeing refers to what has been said or explained, and not to anything shown to the eye of sense.

From the nature of the case, therefore, to see the Father in Jesus was no primitive act of the eye of sense. God is a Spirit, and he who would see the Father in Jesus, must see in him the Spirit which is God. Spiritual seeing with the eye of the soul alone is possible here. At first something deeply spiritual is discerned in Jesus, even as in other men of holy lives. Further looking into his holy being brings to light that in Jesus this spiritual excellence is of an higher type than in anyone else. In him it is clearer, fuller, richer. And this does not yet explain Jesus in full. That spirituality in him is nobler, richer and fuller than in others, even in the best of men, does not say enough. In Jesus an unfathomable depth discloses itself, so that at length it must be acknowledged that in him the spiritual lives and shines more richly than was ever thought possible. It exceeds human thought. It surpasses the thinkable. Of itself spiritual observation of Jesus passes on into the infinite. Latest distinctions are lost. From the background of his being shines eternal perfection. Everything shifts before the vision of the soul. Unconsciously the transition is made from the finite into the infinite, until God is discerned in Jesus and in wonder and adoration we kneel at his feet and worship.

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But this experience is not something apart from what the eye of sense sees in the Incarnate Word. In this examination the spirit of Jesus is not detached from his personal appearance. The body is not ignored that the soul may be discerned, but Jesus is taken as he was, appeared, spoke and acted. One appearance is faced, one perfect whole, one mystery. Even as among us there are times when a person becomes radiant and allows his soul to shine through his face, in his eye, about his lips, in his word and in his act, so that through the outward appearance the person within is seen--so it was with Jesus, only far stronger, and all the time. His appearance must have been overwhelming. The impression which he made must have been full of wonder. When we think of the soulfulness in his holy eye, the changes of expression in his face, and his modulated, sympathetic voice, it is felt at once that his bodily appearance was no hindrance to reach the Divine in him, but was rather the vehicle by which to approach it. It was as though, through Jesus, God himself came out into the visible world, inviting and alluring all who saw him to admire and to worship God in him. If at the time of Jesus' sojourn on the earth, man had been what he was before the fall in paradise, the perfect God would at once have been recognized in Jesus. But with the blinded eye of the soul sinful man could not do this; it was impossible. God was there in Jesus, but the world could not see him. The eye of the soul had been bandaged. And only when God himself had removed this bandage could man see God in Jesus.

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The eye of the soul is not something apart from the soul. It is rather the sum total of all its powers by which it perceives, becomes conscious, discovers and enjoys. Spiritual seeing is feeling, perceiving, becoming aware of environments with all the latent powers of the soul. It is the internal awakening of human nature, which, created after the image of God, goes back to its original image, has clear vision of the relation between image and original, between image and impression, imprints it upon its own sense of self (self-consciousness) and thus learns to know God with an inner knowledge. Only in this way has human nature in Jesus apprehended God in full and known him. Human nature in its totality is not in every one of us, but only a variation of it in one particular, definite form. In Jesus alone human nature as a whole was embodied. He, therefore, was called the Son of Man. Jesus was not only God, but He alone of all men fully apprehended and understood the Father. "No man knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him." By ourselves, therefore, and if left to ourselves, no one of us can apprehend God with the sense of the soul, nor see him with the eye of the soul. Jesus alone was able to do this, and is able to do so still, but not we. Only when we go to Jesus and enter into fellowship with him is the way to this open to us, whereby we become living members of this mystical body of which he is the head. And then not only do we see God in Jesus, but God also comes to tabernacle in us by the Holy Ghost. Philip, have I been so long time with you, and do you still say: Show me the Father? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father in me and through me, your Savior.

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"WITH ALL THY SOUL."

When the question is raised whether there is one that seeks after God, the Psalmist denies it and bitterly complains: "They are all gone aside, there is none that doeth good, no, not one. There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God" (14:3). But was the singer insincere when in the ear of the ages he sang so touchingly: "As the heart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God" (42:1). Or did Asaph dissemble a state of soul, which would have been self-deceit, when he said: "Nevertheless, I am continually with Thee?" (Ps. 73:23). By no means. The question meant whether by nature there was one man in whose heart the magnetic drawing is after God, even in such a degree as to overcome every resistance and hindrance. The answer to this is: no, and ever again: no. There is no such drawing in the human heart. It has been corrupted and crippled and is no longer what it was by Divine creation, but what it has become by self-delusion. The number of those who take religion seriously is small, and much smaller yet the number of those who recover the true type of piety. Take these, together with those who seem religious, and watch them and listen as they talk, and we find them superficial and mechanical to an amazing degree. We rarely meet with a seeking soul that makes it a business to draw near to God, and to find him. Even in prayer, in church or at home, the question can sometimes scarcely be repressed: Does this man or woman, when the Amen has passed the lips, come away from God, or has the soul, even in devotions, been as far as ever away from him?

Undoubtedly there are always some who in prayer and at other times seek fellowship with God in their heart. Upon inquiry, however, we learn that the magnetic drawing did not originate with themselves, but that God drew them. We do not know why Divine power operates in the case of one and not of another. The fact remains that as the magnet draws the steel to itself, God can draw the soul. And when he does, the drawing is irresistible. And the soul seeks God because God draws it.



Is the approach of the soul to God through the understanding, will, feeling or imagination, or is it through an inexplicable mysterious working which we can not name? The answer differs according to those who give it. The one attributes it to intellectual and doctrinal knowledge of God; the other to the fellowship of love; a third to submission of the will; a fourth to visions; a fifth to inspirations, and the more people are asked, the more widely the answers differ. Here disposition and temperament play the chief role. The subtle, analytical investigator of ideas and definitions entrenches himself in strong doctrinal confessions; the man of action, in devotion to practical ends; he whose nature is finely strung, in the note of pensive longing which he elicits from his emotions; and the imaginative mind, inclined to fancies of every sort, in representations and ingenious imagery. Every one after his own

kind, we may say. Such is the case now, and so it was in times past. From ancient writings we see people of the long ago live and move before us, and things of the past appear like things of the present. All sorts of currents and schools and tendencies of thought are ever abroad, one way and the other another. Unanimity there is none. Seeking God with all the heart is unknown.

This shows that the preference for one method of seeking God bars the way to other equally efficacious methods of doing the same, and that God's children should freely employ all methods in order to be wholly free in their communion with the Eternal. God is not found by one power of soul in distinction from another, but by all the soul. God is not apprehended by human knowledge, or will, or play of imagination, but by the knowing, willing and thinking soul as a whole, in its inner unity and soundness. Ray by ray shines in, but all are caught in the focus of the soul-life in process of becoming aware of itself and of its environments, and the act of catching all these rays is called faith.

Here, too, the difficulty springs from the inward ruin occasioned by sin, which is still esteemed too lightly, because it is sought too exclusively within the scope of morals. The injury worked by sin is only fully known when its fatal effects are traced in religion. Things become far more important when it concerns our relation to God. For in connection with this everything centers in the first and great commandment: To love God with all the soul and with all the strength. This is possible. The soul was created and equipped for this. It can safely be said that when the soul operates normally it can not do otherwise than direct itself altogether and with all its strength to God. In no other realm of life, therefore, does it show more strongly than in religion how utterly abnormal the soul has become by sin. And the worst of it is, that in this matter of religion the soul itself is so little conscious of it. He who has committed a crime knows it, and finds no difficulty on his knees in confessing it before God. With the finer forms of transgression in morals this inner sense may fail us, but with the coarser forms of sin the conscience almost always speaks in every man. But when the first and great commandment is violated, almost no one is conscious of it. Thousands upon thousands every day deny God all love, withdraw their whole soul from him. rob him of all their strength, and thus in the matter of religion they are hardened criminals, who do not even know that they sin. Even with the saved, who have confessed to love God, the case is nearly the same. For some among these give God only a small part of their soul, work for him indifferently with only a few of their powers, and as they kneel in prayer at night are quite unconscious of the fact, that they have broken the larger part of the first and great commandment.

This fatal defect shows itself when the powers of soul, which by reason of disposition and temperament are most prepared to act, and which therefore require the least sacrifice of self, are given free rein. When a man who is naturally intellectual becomes pious, he applies himself to doctrine. If to know the only true God is eternal life, he makes himself doctrinally

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strong. He has nothing to do with knowledge of God that is obtained along other lines than those of close, analytical studies, and in these he is proficient. With utmost pains he traces what the great thinkers have put into their several doctrinal systems regarding the Being, Work, Person and Attributes of God. On this he ponders. To him it appeals. He prides himself on it before others. He really thinks that in this way he has acquired the true knowledge of God. No, says another, Jesus has said that he who doeth the will of his Father who is in heaven, shall know the glories of the faith. As a man of action, therefore, he gives liberally of his means, labors with zeal and enthusiasm, in which few equal and none surpass him, brings willing offerings one after another, and with all his strength devotes himself to the interests of the kingdom--but he has a dislike for all doctrinal niceties. He makes no confession with words. The all important thing with him is confession in practical life. A third has no interest either in doctrine or in works, but is emotional. He, therefore, seeks his strength in tender feelings, soulful utterances, mystical perceptions of love, and thinks that in these he comes closer to God. Imagination is the part of fantasy with another who seeks to establish his strength in visions and mystical representations, and in the contemplation of the things which his soul-eye discerns he is most happy. Did not St. Paul glory in rare exaltations of spirit and in being caught up into higher spheres? Add to these, inspirations, suggestions, experiences in which the soul is aware of sudden motions, and so much more, and it is readily seen that impressions and motions of soul differ greatly when a man becomes inwardly athirst for God.

The pity of it is that so far from realizing that all these workings, powers and exertions are bound to express themselves in love of God, so that loving God with all the soul may become real, the children of God, for the most part, hold themselves back within their own retreat, seek God with only one power of their soul, and not infrequently criticize a brother who seeks salvation by the use of another soul-power than they themselves employ. "With all thy soul," said Jesus. "With a part of my soul," they reply. And just because they are truly pious and sincere of purpose, they do not tremble at the thought of leaving the rest of their soul inactive for God.



I SAW ALSO THE LORD.

"And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the Only true God." But then we must not only know God intellectually, but with every power at our disposal. As knowledge it must be the result and summary of every observation and perception. In connection with this at once the question arises whether imagination, or more generally, the power of representation, plays a part in this. A superficial mind inclines to answer this Spirit means that all corporeity and materiality must be excluded from it, no manifestation of negatively. For God is Spirit. And if the word God is possible in any way whatever. If all outward divine manifestation is unthinkable, how can we make a representation of God. We can make forms and figures of idols after the manner of heathen nations, but these are contrivances pure and simple. And in this matter of knowing God, which is eternal life, we have no interest in cunningly constructed fabrications. We want reality. Hence we would say that there can be no representation of God, no outward manifestation of him can show itself, for the reason that his absolute spirituality excludes every idea of matter, form or dimension.

But however convincing this may seem, it does not end the matter. How can we interpret Isaiah's words in the narrative of his vision-call (6:1)? Including the record of the year in which it happened he declares: "I also saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple."

We leave the question unanswered whether Isaiah saw some outside appearance, or whether something presented itself to him in his inner range of vision. It is enough that God manifested himself to the prophet in such a way that it enabled him to give a description of it in writing. It was an appearance which took such a forcible hold upon him, in connection with which so many things took place, and which resulted in such important prophecies, that it affected all his after life.

We who in his inspirations and prophecies honor the work of the Holy Ghost, can not take this vision of his call as a meaningless product of an unhealthy imagination. There was reality in this vision, and an action on the part of God. And we conclude that among the many means by which God can make himself known to man, he has also used observable representation, however transient.

In the New, as well as in the Old Testament, we read repeatedly of angel-appearances and of appearances of the Messiah before his incarnation. And are not angels spirits like God himself, incorporeal and immaterial? We hear repeatedly that angels appear, and speak and act. The angel that smote the armies of Sennacherib stands in line with the angel that led Peter out of prison. Before his incarnation the existence of Christ was purely spiritual, but with him the outward manifestation, and with it the clear representation, went so far



in ancient times that the patriarch received him in his tent and entertained him with a meal at his table. It is well known that this is scoffed at, and that it is put to the score of innocent fiction; but less superficial psychology is not satisfied with this, and inclines to attach to such an account a much higher, inner value. When during his earthly ministry Christ accepted the Old Testament records of such appearances literally, including those which referred to himself, and ratified them in their immediate signification, what other conclusion can we reach, than that a certain appearance and a certain representation, of a Being which like that of God is purely spiritual by itself, is not unthinkable.

The Scripture always pictures this appearance and representation in the religious life, with human features. In connection with the Cherubim we read of animal forms, of a lion and so on, which serve to represent great power and glory. But in every meeting with man the appearance of an angel, of the Messiah, or as in [Isaiah 6](#), of the Eternal Being himself, takes place in human form, in human dress, and with the use of human language. With appearances of angels there is no mention of wings, borrowed from the animal world; of these we read in connection with Seraphs surrounding God's throne.

The fixed application of the human form in this connection is significant. The appearance of spirits in human form is immediately connected with the creation of man after God's image. Christ himself is called the Image of the Invisible God, "the express Image of his person." And we are told that man is created after this Image, so that there is a certain likeness between these two. What then could have been more natural than that the Eternal God, in order to reveal himself to man, either by himself or by his angels, should have passed over from himself to his Image, and from his Image to man? The very thought that there is an Image of God implies that it is a mistake to think that there can be no distinction and no expression in a spirit. It shows that God's life by itself is not an unbroken sameness, but that it consists of an infinite yet undivided fulness of distinctions, and that this varied life which is continually present with him in his consciousness, is to him the Image of his Divine Being.

In any case it is certain that when God created man after his Image, this Image was there before he could create man after it. And also that this Image has always provided the way by which to reveal himself to man in human form. This was only completed in the fulness of time at Bethlehem, though it was foreshadowed in previous appearances. In connection, therefore, with the knowledge of God, which is eternal life, the imaginative life of our spirit must also be considered.

The key to this secret is, that spirit and matter, God and the world, are distinguished from one another in such a way that it can never be ignored. For if we do we are, whether we will or not, irresistibly drawn into Pantheism. While on the other hand it can not be denied that God has created the world, so that whatever there is in the world can never express anything else than what has been thought out by God, even the Word from all eternity. Likewise as regards our soul and body, it must be inexorably maintained, that these are two,



even in this sense, that after death the soul continues its life in the disembodied state until the resurrection. Though again it should not be forgotten that soul and body complement one another, and that the soul can only reveal the fulness of its power through the body.

This gives rise to a threefold realm of activity. One is the realm of pure spiritual activity. Another is the realm of activity through and with the aid of the body. And there is also a mixed domain, in which the spirit truly operates purely spiritually but with data from the world of sense.

The use of images in spoken language can not be reckoned with this. We know by these that we mean something metaphorical, something outside of reality. When the righteous is said to be as courageous as a lion, everyone understands that it does not mean a real, devouring beast. But it is different in dreams. Then we see people and co-operate with them. We engage in conversation. We are attacked. And everything seems so real to us that on awakening in fright, we find it difficult to believe that the burglar who threatened our life does not stand by our bed.

This impression of reality in what is imagined is still stronger and much more acute in a vision. One can almost say that visions are dreams which one dreams not in sleep upon the bed, but by day, while one is fully awake. And though this vision-life is far more common in the East than it is with us, yet it is a mistake to suppose that it does not exist among us. Meanwhile an appearance far excels in clearness and reality both dream and vision. That we feel so little at home in this realm is only explained from the fact that science can not tell anything about these spiritual operations. It lacks sufficient, certain data for observation, and has not been able thus far to enter this mysterious domain. Before this world of real workings, it stands helpless. This encourages unbelieving science proudly to deny the reality of it, while believing science, confessing its inability to grasp it, gratefully accepts what has been revealed regarding it in Scripture.

We should be on our guard therefore lest we say that in connection with our knowledge of God the imaginative life has no message for us. The intellectual man who asserts this, contradicts Scripture all too boldly. The second commandment certainly binds us; that is to say, it forbids us to make an image of God, even in our imagination. The imaginative life may operate in behalf of the knowledge of God, when God quickens it in us; as in the case of Isaiah's vision of his call, or in the appearances to Abraham. This forming of images has at last been perfected in the "human nature" of Christ. After he had entered into glory, Christ appeared to St. John on Patmos in his human nature and the manner of this appearance has been committed to writing for us. This is the only appearance of Christ, given to the church, that may and should govern our imaginative life.

To this we add that in a child of God even here something of his Father is manifest. The nobler the Christian life, the more this is visible. The weaker the Christian life, the less apparent it is. But when a Christian life is deeply spiritual, they who are equally devout, see



through it, as it were, something of the Image of the Eternal God. From this it follows that if we are God's children it is our high calling, not by our imagination, but by the image-forming manifestation of our entire personality to cause something of the Father to be seen by those who are of the household of faith.

"IF ANY MAN WILL DO HIS WILL."

In behalf of the knowledge of God there is great power in conformity to his will. God becomes known to us by studious thought, by play of the imagination, by inner experience and in other ways. But it cannot be denied that he also becomes known to us by the will. Within the last fifty years the will has been put in the foreground, by which to interpret many things which no one associated with it before. An important school of philosophy has emphasized the will to such an extent that the significance of the other activities of the human spirit has suffered serious loss. The fundamental position of this school is that the will alone determines things, accomplishes things, creates reality, and makes itself known as a power; and that the more deeply one studies the question the more irresistibly one is forced to acknowledge that the will is the only power that governs and employs all other powers. This was confirmed by history. It is observed in the present. In every department of life the man of will exercises authority and overrides the weak. From man we have learned the wonderful power of will. Similar phenomena have been traced in the animal-world, but too little is known of this to build on. And so it has seemed safest to make the power to will, as it showed itself in man, the starting point.

But, of course, it could not stop with this. The phenomenon of the will is too great, and its dominance too prevalent, than that it can exist in man otherwise than derivatively. In the original state of things the will existed outside of man, and man himself was the product of the great supreme Universal-will that brought all things to pass. What until now had been worshipped in the world as God, or had been denounced as Satan, was according to this school nothing but that Universal-will, the gigantic will-power by which everything is what it is. The world shows anything but wisdom and less love. It is but the product of monstrous will-power. Hence the unsatisfying condition of its life. And since in us also, on a small scale, there is a will with power of will, the supreme duty of human life is to train the will, to develop it, to apply it to mighty deeds, and with this strongly trained human will to maintain ourselves in the face of the Universal-will. Hence everything that is, and everything that is called history, and life itself is reduced to one power, and the only thing that is supremely high and holy is our personal will.

That the philosophic school which oracled like this is diametrically opposed to all religion, and more especially to the Christian religion, needs no demonstration. But it is noteworthy that the Christian religion in the Christian church, simultaneously revealed an allied tendency, which likewise put the will in the foreground, and at length subordinated every other utterance of the Christian faith to it. We mean that religious tendency which interprets the confession with ever greater liberality, which allows feeling and sentiment ever less op-



portunity of being heard, and shows evermore the need and inclination to exhibit Christianity solely and alone in works and display of power, that is to say, in utterances of the will. This idea and inclination was not born nor taken from this philosophic school, but owed its rise to an universal phenomenon, which shows itself in human life. The healthful Reformation in the ecclesiastical world was followed first by the barren period of dogmatics in the 17th century, and after that by the period of emotional religion in the 18th century. As neither the one nor the other proved satisfactory, and as it became evident that between these two, Christianity was losing strength, it naturally came to pass that with the depreciation of subtle credal statements, and an increasing distaste for weak emotionalism, another extreme was reached in the effort to realize the Christian spirit in acts of the will. Not the hearer, but the doer of the law shall be holy. Not every one that sayeth, Lord, Lord, but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven shall be saved. If any one doeth His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God ([John 7:17](#)). In brief, in behalf of this new effort, many clear and strong utterances of Holy Scripture could be cited. Thus a tendency found an open door in every direction, which could boast of its meritorious exhibition of Christian works, but with this drawback always, that it under-estimated both the confessional statements of the church and mysticism.

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The well-known fact that in the Christian struggle of the 19th century English Christians stood in the front ranks, was a powerful aid in this direction. The period of concise confessional statements was dominated by Switzerland, France and The Netherlands. The emotional period had been brought into prominence by German and French sentimentalists. But with the 19th century England appeared in the foreground. England with its matter-of-fact system, its commercial spirit and cool determination of will. From England the thirst after deeds crossed over to the continent of Europe, and what this tendency of will accomplished in the interests of philanthropy and missions can never be fully appreciated. It gave birth to a new life and encouraged the desire to exercise power. It simultaneously put to shame the barren and meagre results of intellectual orthodoxy, and the weak and sickly fruit of sentimental mysticism. It inspired a willingness to give. It inspired a devotion and an energy of faith such as had not been in evidence among us since the days of the Reformation. In the Salvation Army, which is the most sharply defined exhibition of this tendency and at the same time its crudest expression, there showed itself a many-sided activity in behalf of the poor and the unfortunate which aroused sympathy even in unbelieving hearts.

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The onesidedness, however, of this movement is a matter of regret, since it incurred the danger of abandoning justification by faith, and of putting in its place salvation by good works. The center of gravity was transferred too much from God to man. The outward supplanted the inward life of piety. And as on the part of unbelievers there was great and self-sacrificing activity along philanthropic lines, it soon became evident that people of this "Gospel of works" felt themselves in closer sympathy with unbelievers who shared their ideal

of works than with the confessors of Christ, who fell short of it. And what cut more deeply still is that real religion, which is the search after fellowship with God, was undeniably more and more lost in this Gospel of the Will. There was too much lack of loveable, tender piety. The delicate plant of devotion became more and more mouldy. And both in preaching and in private conversation the hidden walk with God, the quiet ways of the secret of redemption, salvation by faith and being hid in Christ received ever less attention, until at length nothing more was heard of it. Everything had to be doing, nothing but doing. All that was asked for was facts and still again facts. The method came in vogue to compute these deeds in numbers, and from high figures to infer that God crowned the work with blessing. There were statistics of converts, of moneys raised, of society memberships, of the hungry that had been fed, of the naked that had been clothed, of the sick that had been healed. And flattery on account of such showing was not always unacceptable.

And when it was objected that Christianity in this way was externalized, and that the knowledge of God which is eternal life was relegated to the book of forgetfulness, the answer was, that this surmise rested upon a misunderstanding, since true knowledge of God does not come through the intellect, and not through emotion, but through the will. He who doeth the will of God knoweth the Eternal. This pretext will be examined in the following meditation.



"INCREASING IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD."

He that doeth the will of God naturally grows thereby in the knowledge of God. Of two persons, the one who is careful and conscientious in his confession, but careless as to his manner of life, has less chance to know the Lord than the other who is careful and conscientious in his manner of life, but indifferent in his confession. The so-called practical Christianity, the tendency which seeks salvation in christian works, was correct to this extent, that doing the will of God is certainly one of the means which is indispensable to him who would have a full knowledge of God.

If the knowledge of God is eternal life, Divine knowledge can not be something apart from life. Do not forget, eternal life is not life hereafter. It is a life which does not spring from the cistern, but from the fountain. Such knowledge of God which is itself eternal life is unthinkable, therefore, apart from practical life. When a will operates in all our works, and when our works are only good when they conform to the will of God, it is evident that there is a connection between the knowledge of God and the doing of his will.

The ox knoweth his owner, Isaiah tells us, but Israel does not understand. We would say: A horse knows his rider. The draft-ox is not much used among us. But how does he know his owner, or the horse his rider? Certainly in part by the eye and by the ear, but even more by the manner in which they are treated. When the rider comes up from behind, so that the horse does not see him, and utters no word or sound, so that the animal does not hear him, the thoroughbred knows his rider at once, and knows immediately whether his rider or a stranger springs into the saddle. A good riding-horse knows the will of his rider. He knows it even so well that at length horse and rider become one, and on the field of battle the horse will do his rider's wish, even with loosened bridle. Thus by careful training the animal has obtained such knowledge of his owner that to him it has become a living subordinate instrument.

Likewise the child of God that has lived according to God's will, and at the hand of that will itself has conformed himself to it, has come to an instinctive knowledge of God such as no Catechism or Confession can impart. We do not say that this knowledge thus obtained is the only knowledge of God, nor that it is sufficient, nor that it offers satisfactory clearness; all we mean to say is: that doing God's will introduces a trait of its own into the knowledge of God, which is indispensable if that knowledge is to be a living knowledge, and which can not be replaced by anything else, be it understanding or feeling.

Take the case of forgiving those who have trespassed against us. As children of God we well know that this is our duty. We know it even so well that we are well aware that the matter is not ended when we are outwardly kind and return no evil for evil. Christian for-



giveness goes farther and deeper than this. It must be honest forgiveness without any reservation. Our greatest enemy must be forgiven. Those who curse us we must bless. We must love those who spitefully use us. Consider it carefully: we must love our enemy. We must not show him love that we might exhibit our generosity. This, in fact, can only humiliate him. No, we must love him as ourselves. It is almost incomprehensible, yet such is the command. As it is prayed in the Our Father: Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. To forgive from love is the measure of the forgiveness of sin which we ask of God for ourselves. Not as though God could be bound to our measure, or forgive us because we forgive. That would be turning the Gospel around. But it signifies that we dare not ask more of God than what we know is in our hearts to do to our debtors.

All this only shows that when in forgiving our enemy we do the will of God, we learn to know what it is to forgive, what it is to receive from God the mind and the will to forgive, and what it is to come to the knowledge of God as regards his mind and will to forgive us. He who himself does not forgive, who in opposition to God's will harbors hatred in his heart, and does not conform himself to God's will in this matter of forgiveness, lacks this particular knowledge of God, which makes it clear how God forgives him.

From this one example it clearly appears that doing the will of God increases the knowledge of God; not metaphorically, not unreally, but in deed and in truth.

There is still something else to be learned from this. The practical "Gospel of Works" puts special emphasis upon doing extra things; things which are outside of the ordinary life. By preference, therefore, it speaks of "Christian works," by which it means things outside the ordinary life of business, family and society, such as zeal for missions, visiting the poor, care for the sick and blind. And in part this interpretation is instinctively correct. When Christianity goes out into the world nothing of all this can stay behind. It all belongs to it. True, genuine Christianity can not be satisfied with inspiring ordinary life alone. It brings with it all sorts of things which remain unknown without it. Only it is a great mistake to suppose that the roses that grow against the wall are the main thing, and that the wall itself can be left to fall into ruins.

No, the doing of God's will covers all of life, the ordinary as well as the extraordinary, and the knowledge of God's will in common life is far finer, more intricate and more difficult than it is in those extraordinary things. To know what God's will is in our personal life, in our business or profession, in the family with its several connections, in society and in the world in general, is a study that is never ended on this side of the grave. To learn not only what God's will is in it all, but to bend the mind according to it, and to conform the life to it, even to its minutest detail, is not only a daily study, but a daily struggle, in which he alone triumphs who is led by the Spirit of God.

He who applies himself to this, who makes this his daily task, learns to understand God's will, and with every victory gained increases also in the knowledge of God. A knowledge

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which he does not acquire with his understanding, but with his whole personality. The more we begin to feel as God feels, and the more we become minded as God is, the more truly do we become children of the Father who is in heaven. For then we will not think that we do the will of God, when only once in a while there is heroic self-denial. But we will understand that to do the will of God is to be so changed of mind and inclination that we ourselves will what God wills. And he who attains unto this and is daily engaged in this, of himself increases in the knowledge of God by increasing in the knowledge of himself.

This will be plain when we remember that Being and Will in God are not two, but one. God's will is the crystal-pure expression of his Being. Hence knowledge of God's will becomes of itself knowledge of his Being. The one can not be separated from the other. Only this: the will of God can only be truly known in the way of the will. To know the Ten Commandments by heart, and to make a list from the Scriptures of every utterance of God's will, does not justify a man in the least for saying that he knows the will of God. He may know it from memory, but the will is within, and can only be known within, by having the personal will enter into the will of God.

He who in a book on the art of navigation has read what a captain has to do in times of storm, does not know what it is to pilot a ship into a safe harbor. This is only known to him who has himself been out at sea in command of a ship in a storm and has brought it safely to port.

Likewise the knowledge of God's will is not acquired by learning lessons in morality by heart, but with the organ of our own will God's will must be so understood that we ourselves fulfill it. And thus only in the-way-of-the-will do we come to that knowledge of God, which can only be learned in this way.

We should not criticize therefore the Gospel of works, as though it had no use. On the contrary, it is absolutely indispensable. Only it must gain in depth. It must be applied to all of life. It should also be clearly understood that so far from being all the knowledge of God, the knowledge of his will is only a part of it. Forsooth, it is an indispensable part, but only in union with the other knowledge of God, which is obtained through the understanding, feeling and imagination, does it form one whole. All these together constitute that full knowledge of God, which is eternal life. Only do not lose from sight that the daily increase in the knowledge of God is obtained solely and alone in the way of the will. There is a two-fold will of God: the one is over us, the other is concerning us. The will of God over us determines our life, our career and our lot in life. It was with reference to this will of God that Jesus prayed: Not my will, but thy will be done. But the will of God concerning us shows us how to will, what to do and to leave undone; and regarding this will of God we pray in the Our Father: Thy will be done as in heaven by the angels, so also on earth by me. And it is this second, this last-named will of God which if we live in it, and conform ourselves to it, unconsciously makes us increase day by day in the knowledge of God.



"BESIDE THE STILL WATERS."

If there is a desire to know God, the will must be studied still more closely. In the days of our fathers the field, in which the will operates, was not sufficiently plowed and harrowed. The great question was whether the will was free or bound. For the rest, even in preaching and in catechising, the supreme significance of the will was ignored. Is not even now almost the whole realm of the will left fallow?

Of course this does not mean to say, that both in the times of our fathers, and in our own past, there has been no increase in the knowledge of God through the will. How could this be otherwise? The will does not come into action by what is written about it in a book, or preached on it from the pulpit. It is the Lord who inspires the will to act, and in action to direct it for good. It is he "who worketh in you both to will and to do his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13), and how could the Lord be bound to sermon or lecture?

We only mean that he who is so fortunate and blessed as not only morning by morning and evening by evening to be refreshed with a drop of grace from the fountain of Divine Compassion, but also to have time and insight to meditate on holy things, does wrong when he neglects the investigation of such an important component part of the power of the soul as the will. This makes poor; while to give one's mind to it makes rich. For the will is inscrutably wonderful. In the creation of the soul it constitutes a marvelous piece of Divine workmanship, and it is so deeply engraven a trait of the image of God, which reflects itself in us, that to leave it unstudied betokens lack of reverence and wonder. It is, moreover, so mighty a tool that the thoughtless use of it readily does harm.

We must also distinguish between times and times. There is a time of childhood followed by that of early youth, when we live by instinct, and are not able to give a reason for the acts of the will. But then there comes a time when the troubled waters settle, and the mirror of the consciousness becomes clear, and we begin to think. Our age is farther advanced than that of our fathers, because it is older. Earlier instinctive life gradually becomes a conscious life. He who takes no part in this transition is left in the rear.

The whole church will understand that she loses power when she adheres to the old, without harmonizing her insight into the past with the claims of our clarified consciousness. She then loses her touch upon life. Her preaching does not join itself to what stirs and moves in the world. She does not equip the faithful with needed armor, and becomes herself the cause, that in ever weaker positions in the conflict of spirits she is incapacitated. Confess, in times such as these, when in every way the will has become the object of investigation and thought, will it do for Christians to act as though the knowledge of the will did not concern them?



Here we confine ourselves to our subject. It is the aim of these meditations to bring the soul into secret fellowship with God. This requires knowledge of God, even that knowledge which is itself eternal life. In that knowledge of God we must increase. And this increase is more possible through the will than through the understanding. This is the point which we emphasize. The holy apostle expresses it so clearly: "Walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, whereby we shall be fruitful in every good work, and at the same time increase in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10).

He who bends his will so that at length he has no other will than to forgive his debtor, comes through his own will to the knowledge of the compassionate God who forgives him. To God forgiveness is no outward rule, which he applies. To forgive proceeds from his will. And this will to forgive proceeds from his Being. If we come to will like this of ourselves, we become conformed to our Father who is in heaven. The words of Jesus: Be ye perfect, as your Father who is in heaven is perfect, are then realized in us; they are realized in this particular; and conscious that we are of the family of God we come to this knowledge of God, which is not a lesson learned by rote, but which proceeds from our divine relationship itself. Do we understand the beauty and godliness of this?

All men are not alike either in mental capacity or in the disposal of time. Some are able to analyze all things and to study them out deeply and accurately. But more by far can not do this. We would not call them stupid for this reason, but as a matter of fact few people can make exhaustive studies of every part of our glorious confession. They simply can not do it. They have not the ability. Freedom of time also differs greatly in given circumstances. The day-laborer, who is away from home from morning until night has little or no time for the study of sacred things, especially as compared with the clergy or professors of Theology, who can devote all day to it. And apart from time, opportunities differ widely. Such study requires education, books and retirement. And see the difference between a farm-hand at the plow and a university trained clergyman in his study, who is well supplied with books.

If we take the knowledge of God as consisting mainly of book knowledge; if we say that the knowledge of God obtained in this way is eternal life, are we not cruel? For does not this imply that eternal life is a right that belongs to the man of study, and not to the swain who follows sheep? And we know this can not be true. If the knowledge of God is eternal life, the increase in this knowledge must be for sale for something which is at every one's disposal, the professor in his study, the day-laborer at his work, the busy mother in her home. This brings us of itself to the will. Intellectual attainment is not enough. Many students of great learning appear to have no knowledge of God at all, while many hardworking plain souls exhale the fragrance of eternal life.

Here we touch the sensitive nerve of life itself. In every person operates a will. It comes into action every day. The will is in all and is active in everything. The working, the action, the power of the will, its impulse and passion may differ widely, but without will there is no



action, no deed, no career in life. Every difference between man and man here falls away. Every one faces it daily for himself. In whatever high or low position one finds himself, there is a will that wills, a will that operates. It proceeds in a quiet and peaceful way. It is not something apart that is added to life. It is the urgency of life itself that beats and throbs in every artery. Softly, by the side of very quiet waters, this action of the will continues all day long throughout life. It is a never resting, but an ever newly fed stream of choice of will, decision of will, action of will, continually, quietly rippling along, bearing life company and partly carrying it. Thus by these utterances of the will it is in the power of every one to continuously increase in the knowledge of God, and thereby to obtain ever larger possession and fuller enjoyment of eternal life, provided we separate this utterance of the will less and less from the will of God and derive it more and more from the will of God. Thus every idea of cruelty falls away. Whether life is limited or large, makes no difference. Even though it wears on like the quiet flow of a gentle stream, every day the knowledge of God can be enriched by it, and we can increase in everlasting life; a queen on her throne as well as the farmhand behind the plow, a professor in his study who is no better than he who moves the shuttle in the loom.

This goes softly, as by the side of very still waters, and the glory of it is that it asks for no extra time outside of the daily life. Every kind of learning demands special time. The daily task is broken up for it. Special time must be set apart for it. On the part of many people this is almost impossible. For most people's life is a mill which never stops. But even this is no drawback to the knowledge of God through "the willing of the will." For the will never operates outside of, but always in the life. Whether, therefore, you walk behind a plow, or stand behind the school-desk, or care for your children at home, or nurse the sick, it is all the same. It is all utterance and activity of will. And provided we do not oppose our will to the will of God, and do not diverge from it, but bend our will after God's will, it is all one process of activity, whereby we increase in the knowledge of God, in order through this knowledge to mature in eternal life.



"WHO WORKETH IN YOU TO WILL."

By doing willingly what God wills us to do, we increase in the knowledge of God; not in barren book-knowledge, but in living soul-knowledge, which is itself eternal life. This springs from all sorts of causes, but not least from the fact that our willingness is not born from us, but is wrought in us by God. "He it is, writes the apostle, who worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). Hence there is first the willing, after that the working through and according to our will, and while we work this action of the will in the soul, it is God who worketh it in us. It is self-evident that in this connection this last distinction must be made. Otherwise our willingness would merely be on the surface, and the child of God, in good works, would merely be a puppet moved mechanically. This distinction should be clearly understood. We ourselves will, not because of ourselves, but because God so worketh in us, that now we ourselves truly and actually will to do thus and not otherwise. It takes some pains to see this clearly, and it is easy to follow the advice not to concern ourselves with the several distinctions. But when we lend our ear to this advice of spiritual sloth, we do ourselves a wrong.

Ask any physician how many distinctions he makes in a single group of nerves, or how many differences he observes in germs of disease in the blood. And will it do, that so much pains are taken in behalf of the body, which perishes, and not in behalf of the soul, which is so much more precious? But this tendency prevails. While almost every one has some sort of a manual, illustrated if possible, from which to learn how the body is constructed, nothing is read about the soul. By far the larger numbers of people do not investigate it, but speak at random about the soul, and about the will, and the understanding, and everything is in a chaos and so most people continue all their lives strangers to their own inner selves. Everything else can be described. One is familiar with his house, village or city, and sometimes also with foreign lands. But the key to the chambers and vaults of his own soul has never been found. And since lack of self-knowledge is punished with meagre knowledge of God, one deprives himself of his share in the eternal life, which far excels all things else. We therefore urge the remembrance of the distinction that has been made. When a martyr says: I will die for the name of the Lord Jesus, he must himself will to do it. It must be his own act. But that he himself so wills it, does not by nature spring from himself. It is wrought in him by God.

To illustrate: Bring to your mind a ship. It has an helm. Attached to the helm is the tiller, and this is held in the hand of the boatswain. If at sea the ship moves with the suction of wind and waves, without being directed, every time the ship turns the helm turns, and with it the tiller, and with the tiller the hand and the arm of the man. This is the image of a man



without a will. He is adrift on the sea of life. As the wind and waves move, so moves he, subject to the currents and influences from within and from without, of inclinations and of circumstances. As life moves him along, so he goes, and so turns the rudder in his inner purpose, and the tiller, and the hand that is upon it, i. e., his will. He is a man without a will. This is altogether different when there is direction in the ship. Then the man at the helm directs the course. He knows where he wants to go. And when wind and waves take him out of his course, he resists them. Then the hand takes firm hold on the tiller, turns it, and with it the helm, directly against wind and wave, and the ship that obeys the helm cuts the waves, not as tide and wind should will, but as the helmsman wills it. Such is the man of character, the man of will-perception and will-power, who does not drift, but steers. But there is still a third. On the bridge of the ship, far away from the helm, stands the captain. He knows the intended course, and as on the bridge he stands much higher, he can see far better whether the ship should turn to the right or to the left. Then all the man at the helm has to do is to listen for orders from the captain on the bridge and to obey them.

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Applied to the soul, God is the captain on the bridge, and the man at the helm is ourselves. When with the tiller of the boat of our soul in hand we but will what God wills, and turn the helm to the right or to the left as God orders, then there is no danger to be feared, and presently through wind and waves, the boat safely reaches port. If this goes on for life, we become accustomed to it; in the end we learn to know ahead whether the captain on the bridge shall order right or left; we come to know God's will more and more as of ourselves; and so the knowledge of God brings us nearer to the haven of salvation, i. e., to eternal life.

From the illustration we come back to the matter itself. When God so works in us that at length we ourselves will what God wills, the process is not outward but inward. It is not that we are here on earth below, and that far away from us, and seated high above us in the heavens, from immeasurable distances God imparts a mechanical impulse to us. Far from it. God enters our inmost selves.

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To a certain extent this is even the case with the captain on the bridge who calls to the mate at the helm. For what is it to call? He who calls makes air-waves to vibrate and these vibrations extend themselves to the spot where the man stands at the helm. Thus the vibrating air-waves enter the ear of the mate, touch his auditory-nerve, which communicates the motion to his soul. Hence there is a direct, continuous movement, which from the captain penetrates into the soul of the mate. Thus the illustration covers the ground.

But with the case in hand it is yet stronger. When God worketh in us he is the omnipresent One, who is both high in heaven and close at hand. Even "close at hand" is still too weak a statement, for God is in every one of us. There is no part in our being where God is not omnipresent. This is the case with all men. But when God deals with one of his children, this inward presence is much closer and more personal, for God dwells in such an one by

his Holy Spirit. If we believe that the Holy Spirit is himself God, we understand that God himself tabernacles in his child, that he has his throne in the inmost recess of the child's soul, and thus has fellowship with him, not from afar, but in the sanctuary of his own person. There God worketh upon us by day and by night, even when we are not conscious of it. He is our Sculptor, who carves in us the image of himself, and makes us more and more to resemble his own Being. Thus he transforms us, and also the willing in us. It is God who worketh in us, not only our emotions, but also our willing, by transforming "the self that wills."

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When we understand it this way, it is plain that there is a constant holy entering in of God's will into our will, thanks to this purifying and refining and transposing of our inmost selves. This work goes on in us mostly unobserved and unperceived, so tenderly and gently does God's hand direct the task. But not always just like this. Sometimes the sculptor must forcibly strike off a piece from the marble, so that it crashes and splinters as it falls. These are our times of violent inward struggles, when everything within us quakes with the reverberations of moral shocks. But whether it be gentle or whether it be violent, it is ever the process of sculpturing. And the sculptor works not after a model that stands before him, but is himself the model. He forms us after his own image.

This Divine labor in the realm of our will brings us ever into closer resemblance to the image of God. And to be more and more transformed after the image of God only means that God's will ever more deeply enters into our will, which in turn means an ever better understanding of God, a better knowledge of him, and an ever clearer insight into his will and purpose. Thus we see that there is still another way of learning to know God than learning about him from books or sermons.

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Further on we will try to show that this knowledge of God from books and sermons is also indispensable, but we pass it by for the present. It is eminently necessary that eyes that are now closed against seeing God's work in the inner life of the soul shall open to see this glorious work. Without an understanding of the reality of the life of the soul, and of God's work therein, there is neither power nor outpouring of the same, nor fruit of that power in the life. In that case the Church is dead. It only echoes sounds when it thinks that it sings Psalms of praise unto God. Then the world pushes the Church to a side, and not the Church the world. All attention therefore must be centered on the will, on the willingness, on the self that wills, and upon God who in the self works the willing.

The poet in his songs prayed for feeling, imagination and heroic courage. For feeling, will-power and heroic courage let every child of God supplicate the Father.

"WHAT I WOULD, THAT DO I NOT."

The distance that separates the noblest and mightiest man on earth from God is immeasurably great. We fully understand that it can make us exclaim almost despairingly: "Why should we seek after knowledge of God? Behold, God is great, and we know him not. The most we can do is to kneel in worship before the unknown God."

This is what the doubters meant, who at Athens had reared an altar to the "Unknown God." They did not mean that besides the many gods, whose altars had been reared, there was still another God, whose name they did not know and to whom they brought their offerings as to an unknown god. No, that altar to the unknown God stood for a system and a viewpoint. By that altar they meant to say, "Our fellow-citizens in Athens, who kneel before Minerva or Jupiter are mistaken when they accept the stories about the gods. All that is said to be known of God is founded upon self-deception. Of the Infinite himself nothing can be known. There is an Infinite One, or at least there is something Infinite. Who or what it is, is an impenetrable mystery. Worship this Infinite as the great Unknown. Do it with the confession of ignorance. Candidly confess that all knowledge of God is withheld. And then mysticism will work wholesome effects. But let us not confess to have what we have not. Let us not pretend that we are introduced and initiated into the knowledge of God. For this is self-deception. It will only deceive others and is the key to priest-craft."

This was the thought of that small group of men in Athens. And among the ablest and noblest of our race there are many who think so now. From choice they call themselves "Agnostics." Their aim and purpose is to have it understood that they are by no means godless, and least of all that they are irreligious; that indeed they are most religious and that therefore with deep humility they are frank to confess, that the God whom we worship is One who by his Supreme Majesty withholds his knowledge from men.

However devout this may seem, their viewpoint is essentially untenable. It is diametrically opposed to Christian doctrine. What Paul declared to the Athenians: "That God, whom ye ignorantly worship, him declare we unto you," remains unchangeably the confession which we hold in the face of these misguided people. Surely, had not God revealed himself, no one of us would have known him. But God has made a revelation of himself. This is the glad tidings which every true Christian makes known in the world. Wherefore in the face of this seemingly pious not-knowing of the Agnostics, we boldly maintain the word of Christ: This is eternal life, that they might know thee, the Only true God.

There is also excess on the other side. There are ministers and laymen who talk so familiarly about God, without reserve or constraint, and who speak to him in prayer so irreverently as to arouse aversion. These are men and women who have no actual fear of God in their



heart, who think that they know well-nigh everything about the Most Highest, and who do not even faintly perceive that all our speaking about the Eternal, and all our speaking to him is nothing more than stammering. Love truly casts out fear. But fear must be there first, and love must struggle against it. In this way only the victory is gained of the child-like Abba Father.

When God is spoken of in a way which shows that there has been no fear of God, nor love to cast it out; that there has been no struggle and consequently no triumph, there is no child-like Abba, dear Father, but a pedantic show and pretense of knowledge, which exhales no fragrance of piety, but rather destroys the germ of vital godliness. To avert this it is needful that our knowledge of God is properly related to our whole inner self, to our creation after God's image, to our childship in the family of God, and especially to our will and purpose. Purely intellectual knowledge of God is a frozen crust of ice from under which the stream has run dry.

Another distinction must be observed. There are two kinds of willingness. One just remains what it is, the other is translated into doing. In our days the inclination is strong to attribute an inner excellence to the willingness that expresses itself in doing. There is something bold and almost brutal in the will-life of our times. All one needs is to will. He who wills must dare. Then let come what will. In every case the will must express a power that can do everything. "Where there is a will there is a way." And under the lead of such men as Ibsen and others, this will-effort has been driven so onesidedly, that in their effort irresistibly to carry out their own will many pride themselves on their indifference to opposition.

Compared with these present-day heroes of the will, a weakling like St. Paul cuts a very poor figure. He candidly declares that he has known moments in his life when he had to confess: "What I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that I do" ([Rom. 7:15](#)). This is an honest confession, which age upon age has been shamefully abused, that under the cloak of piety one might continue in sin and keep the conscience quiet. An abuse which shall be judged of God. But apart from this abuse the language of St. Paul is the honest description of actual life, which declares that the ideal always stands above us, and that we always have to mourn our inability to reach it, and to make it actual in life.

There is willingness of heart, and an effort to realize it in life. This willingness of heart is for the most part free. He who restrains evil tendencies and conforms his will to the will of God, fosters an holy aim. This involves conflict, but only in connection with the remnant of the old nature that is in us. As long as we stand aloof from life, and take council with our heart, a child of God will inwardly triumph, and finally he will come to will only what God wills, and find happiness in this harmony of his will with the will of God.

Now, however, follows a still greater difficulty. And that is: to carry into effect what we will at heart, against the world, the flesh and the Devil. In connection with this it continually



happens that with the best will of the heart we meet with stubborn resistance; that we find no power in ourselves to cope with it; and that in the end we leave undone what we honestly meant to do and still want to do. This tempts us all too often to underestimate this inner willingness of heart. What is the good, we ask, whether we foster the best of intentions and cherish holiest purposes, when at the time of trial we are bound to fail? And this mood must be resisted. This is debasement of self. It not only unfits one for the battle of life, but severs the vital nerve which binds one to his Divine ideal. Better faint ten times and suffer the punishment of God's judgment in the conscience than to have part with the world in everyday sin without an accusing conscience.

This inner willingness of heart to will what God wills has supreme worth, even though as yet strength fails to carry it into effect. For it is the development of the life of God's child. It is coming into closer fellowship with God. It is the increase in the knowledge of God. It is a discipline which keeps the conscience tender, and the ideal bright, and makes progress in the way.

Of course the progress is greater when willingness of heart is carried out in the deed, until it becomes a part of life. For then the moral power of faith operates, the nature of the hero awakens and the power of the Almighty, which overcomes the world, becomes manifest in us. But it does not begin with this. It begins with the transposing of the willingness in the heart. This is followed by the sad and painful experience that the willingness is there, but that the doing still tarries. In that stadium the strong and penetrating working of the conscience performs wonders, for it brings us at length into the final stadium, where from bare willingness what God wills we are brought to the doing of his good pleasure.



"NOT AS I WILL."

In the "Our Father," and in Gethsemane, it is each time the same prayer: "Thy will be done." But though the emphasis and the words are alike both times, the meaning is different. In the "Our Father" "Thy will be done" means: "Thy will, O God, be done by me." In Gethsemane it means: "Let thy will, O God, come upon me. Let come to me what may, not as I will, but as thou wilt" ([Matt. 26:39](#)). The latter prayer brings a large part of the knowledge of God which is eternal life. We increase in this knowledge when our will conforms itself to the will of God, so that we think, speak and act in perfect harmony with his ordinances. Thus we grow in the knowledge of God, because his will then enters into us, whereby our will is transformed, and conformity to the Image of God becomes ever more apparent.

But there is another increase in the knowledge of God which comes to us when we are willing to suffer what God allows to come upon us, when we adapt ourselves to what in his council he has appointed in our behalf, and when we accept the things that come to us therein not merely without murmuring and complaint, but with heroic faith. This increase in the knowledge of God progresses differently and along lines of a far more painful discipline. The stress consists in this: That, accepting the will of God in our lot, we bear it passively. When "Thy will be done" means: "Let me fulfill thy will as the angels fulfil it in heaven," it stimulates our energy, stirs up the will, and when we overcome sin the heart overflows with the feeling of supreme joy. But when "Thy will be done" means: "Let things occur not as I desire, but in keeping with thy plan," there is need of submission and resignation that we might endure what God appoints and allows. In the lower school of suffering at least there is no development of energy at such a time, but inward enervation; no stimuli to spur the will, but cords that tightly bind it; no smile of courageous heroism, but the tear of poignant sorrow. It leads to deeper knowledge of God, but as a rule in a far more trying way, through dark mazes of many unknown and unsolvable riddles. Problems that try one's mettle to the uttermost, when it comes not merely to momentary suffering of pain, but to the endurance of a bitter lot, which begins early in life and ends only with the grave.

This frequently happens in life. Here is a woman who was a happy wife. Husband and child were her daily delight. She was not irreligious. Heartfelt gladness found frequent expression in thanksgivings and praise. "The love of the Heavenly Father was great. He made her happy and glad." But circumstances changed. Great illness broke in upon her peace. Husband and child were snatched away by death. And now that everything is gone she can not be comforted. The grieved and deeply-wounded soul rises up in rebellion against God. It has all been self-deception. She feels that in every way she has been misled. God can not



be love. How could a loving God cruelly cast her down from the heights of her great happiness into the depths of bereavement and woe? In perplexity of grief her language becomes that of despair and of defiant unbelief. "Speak no more of God to me. Cruelty can not be love. There is no God." And so the break of happiness in life becomes the break of faith on God. She thought that she knew the Lord. Now that he shows himself in a different way from what she had imagined she abandons all she ever believed. With husband and child she also lost her God. And nothing is left in the soul but the burned-out hearth where the last spark has been extinguished.



This shows how hard in the school of suffering the lesson is by which we increase in the knowledge of God. When for the first time in life the full weight of the cross is laid upon the shoulders, the first effect is the opposite from that for which it was imposed. It makes us numb and indifferent, and all knowledge of God is lost. The hymn of love was so beautiful. It sang itself as it were in the soul. A God who is nothing but love, who blesses and enriches our life and makes it glad, who would not treasure such knowledge of God. It is pleasing to us when love is shown, and nothing but love. How blessed and rich is the heart with a God who makes only streams of love, happiness and peace to flow out towards us.

But the day of adversity dawns, the day of trouble and disappointment, the day of sickness and bitter grief. "Where now is the love of my God? Where the outflow of love from the Father-heart? Not only has he not saved me my dying husband and child, and left me praying without coming to my aid, but he has brought these sorrows upon me. He sent illness into my home, and, it is almost too cruel for words, he has torn my husband from my heart and has killed my darling child." In the end this will lead to another and a better knowledge of God, which will make his doings plain. But the first feeling of the heart is, that with God, as we imagine and dream him to be, we can not get along. We lose the God we had, and it takes many bitter conflicts of soul before, purified in our knowledge of the true God, we embrace him in place of the other.



Thus the first lesson is, that in everyday life we learn to submit to an higher appointment and bow before an Omnipotence against which we can do nothing. This seems dreadful. But it is the discovery in actual life of God as God. When we have but just come into the way that leads to the cross, we take ourselves as the main object of interest. It is our happiness, our honor, our future, and God is added in. We look on ourselves as the center of things, and God comes in to make us happy. The father is for the sake of the child. And the Almighty which is confessed is but to serve our interests.

This knowledge of God is faulty through and through. It turns around the order of things. In all seriousness it makes self God and God our servant. This false knowledge of God is entirely overthrown by the cross. Cast down in grief and sorrow we suddenly perceive

that this great God does not concern himself with us; that he does not apportion or regulate the course of things according to our desire; that there are different motives in his plan, which have nothing to do with our wishes; that if necessary his Might crushes us on the spot; and that in the working of the plan and of the might we are nothing else, and nothing more, than particles of dust that cleave to the wheel, and withered leaves that are driven before the wind. Hence we must submit. We must bend. We are utterly impotent before it. And from the heavens in which we beheld thus far only the play of light and clouds, darkness descends upon the soul, thunder-claps reverberate in the heart, and flashing lightnings fill us with dismay. This is the discovery of the reality of God, of his overwhelming Majesty, of an Almightyness that absorbs everything we call our own. And for the first time we realize what it is to have to do with the living God. For such is God. Now we know him.

And now begins the new effort of the soul to learn to understand this true God whom we have come to know in this way. Then we begin to wonder, to query and to ponder why Almighty God doeth thus and so. Then the troubled heart seeks an explanation. It looks for it in its own guilt and sin, in the after-effects of the past, in the purpose for which the cross was laid upon us, and in the fruit which it shall bear in the unravelling of eternity. For long times it is always the effort to find the explanation of God's doings in ourselves. Until the soul makes further progress and abandons the theory of Job's friends, and like Job out of the whirlwind receives the answer from God himself, and now learns to understand that the government of God covers all suns and stars, all hours and centuries, and causes every creature to revolve itself about him, the Eternal, as the one and only center, for the sake of his majesty and honor; that therefore his council and plan are as high as heaven, and far exceed our comprehension; and that not the verification of his Council, but the entering into the life of it, whether through joy or whether through sorrow, is the honor and self-exaltation of the soul.

This breaks the passiveness which made us numb, and awakens again the impulse to willingly drink the cup; to drink it with heroic courage and not allow it to be forced upon us. To will to drink it even as Jesus willed to die on Golgotha; with a broken heart to co-operate in the work of God, and in this passive co-operation with God, who slays us, to find eternal life. It is even as the sentinel who lets himself be shot down at his post, and in dying receives the look of approval from his general, which exalts him, because he knows, and now understands, that he who exposed him to death, yet loved him.



"I LOVE."

At times there is something so overpowering, extravagant and unreasonable in the early love of a youth for the maiden of his choice, and of the maiden for the elect of her heart, that we feel that there is a mysterious, inexplicable power at play. This is not always so with those who are betrothed. Eccentric tension of the mystery of love is rather the exception. Neither should this dotting, intoxicating love be associated with sensual inclinations or voluptuous desire. "The ecstasy of love" in question here only shows itself with those who are in love, and while it pervades the soul and body both, even in our sinful state, it can well be free from sensual propensities.



When this rapture is equally warm and true on both sides, the world hears nothing of it. Near families and friends alone are in the secret. Frequently, however, it reveals itself in a tragic manner, as when the young maiden discovers that her ardent love finds no equally ardent response in the heart of her lover. Scarcely a day passes that the papers do not report the case of some girl, in the home-town or abroad, who was betrothed and passionately in love, and who upon discovering that her lover was untrue to her, found life itself too heavy a load to carry, and preferring death to life sought it in suicide.

"Ecstasy of love" is a high-strung degree of affection which takes the person whom it masters out of his normal self and transports him into an excited state of mind, which though it is not insanity, shows signs that are similar to it. Therefore we began by saying that it is outside of reason. One who is in this state of ecstasy can not be advised nor reasoned with. As Burger in his *Leonora* tells the tale so graphically, for those who so love, there is only one of two things thinkable; either they must be loved with equal warmth in return, or they can find no rest until they find it in death.



This should not be taken too ideally. It does not follow by any means that such a young maiden stands exceptionally high as a woman. Rather on the contrary not infrequently such ecstasy takes hold of girls who are very ordinary otherwise, sometimes even very egotistical. In course of time also in many cases this ecstasy entirely passes away and nothing remains save a very ordinary, and sometimes a low-lived person. In the ordinary sense it is not passion that overpowers such a girl. And this ecstasy may be best explained as an inclination bordering on insanity to identify her life with that of another. It is a noteworthy phenomenon. An overpowering desire in the heart, which when doomed to disappointment makes one quickly and resolutely seek death, is an utterance in human life which deserves attention.

The Song of Songs describes this ecstasy of love, and aims to outline an image of the love of the soul for God. The whole Scripture stretches the canvas on which at length the Song of Solomon embroiders the image in vivid colors. Human marriage is the embodiment

of the tie that binds God and his people together, God and the individual soul. Jehovah calls himself Israel's husband, and declares that he has betrothed himself to Israel in righteousness. Infidelity against the Holy one is called a whoring in idolatry. Thus it is ever the God-given love between husband and wife, which in vivid imagery is the standing expression of the love that binds the soul to God. In the New Testament this is applied to Christ. He, the son of God's good pleasure, is called the Bridegroom of his Church, and his church is the Bride, who invokes him.

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When Jesus analyzes the great commandment of love, he turns to the Eternal Being, and outlines this love in terms which describe the ecstasy as in life. To love God with all the heart, with all the soul, with all the mind and with all the strength, what else is this than to be entirely lost in, and consumed by, a higher drawing, which makes us ignore every other consideration, in order to know and to find and to enjoy the object of our love, in which to lose ourselves altogether? The deep significance which the love between husband and wife should always have, and which it frequently still has, can only be explained from the fact that in this love God has imaged forth the highest love between himself and the soul.

This lends an holy and exalted character to this high-strung love. This accounts for the fact that when this love develops harmoniously and nobly, it creates the purest happiness on earth; that in its sensual degeneration it works ruin and corruption; and that when suddenly and inharmoniously it takes hold of a receptive mind, it wrests the intoxicated soul away from itself and leaves it a prey to semi-frenzy. For back of it all operates the higher love, which God has formed in the tie between himself and his creature, and it is only the sinful character of our earthly existence that unites what does not belong together, makes soul and body part company, and breaks the equilibrium of the inclinations, so that what is best and holiest turns itself into sensuality or frenzy. Like the snow-flake, which comes down from the clouds pure white but is soiled through contact with the impurity of this world.

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Nevertheless, if we would understand what our love for God should be, we must come back to conjugal love. In the authorized version [Psalm 116:1](#) reads: "I love the Lord." In the original it only states: I love. We would say: I am in love. It is an utterance of the soul when it perceives that the power of love has irresistibly taken hold upon it; when it feels itself inwardly moved as never before, and driven by an unknown inward pressure; perceives and knows that this is love, and in ecstasy exclaims: "I love, I love, I love." And as this wonderful inner motion of the heart transports the maiden with delight, when this love directs itself to the young man of her choice, so here the same irresistible pressure operates, only in an entirely holy manner, lifting the soul above every other thought and directing it to God. With the young maiden it was but the faint impression of the highest; here it is the highest itself. Eternal love, which at last moves the pure tie between God and the soul to operate

fully and harmoniously, and makes the soul to love with all the intensity which human powers can command.

This is not the mysticism of imagination. It is not knowing God by the acts of the will. Neither is it knowing God through the analytic studies of confessional standards. It is the close approach to God with the warm, tender feeling of the throbbing heart that craves to be cherished; it is to have longed and languished for what can quiet the burning desires of the heart; to have tried everything that can be tried; to have suffered disappointment with it all, and now at last to find the true, perfect and holy object of the love of the heart; to receive God himself in the soul; and in this love to be supremely happy.

The difference is perceived at once between this love and what is commonly passed as loving God. Who does not love God? Every one indeed, who is not out and out an atheist. Why should he not be loved? In him everything is pure and holy and exalted. There is nothing in him why he should not be loved, and every one feels that he is worthy of the love of all. The masses in general love God. They have nothing against him. In God they find their ideal of what is beautiful, right and good. Therefore they can not do otherwise. Even as they love virtue, and right, so they also love God. But in this Platonic love glows no tiniest spark of personal relationship and attachment. It is called love for God, but God has no place in the soul or in the mind. The inclination and drawing of the heart do not go out after him. There is nothing in this love of a burning thirst after God, such as makes the heart pant after the water brooks.

By the side of this cool, measured, pseudo-love of the world, which is heartless, the Scripture places the utterance of tenderest piety that seeks after God, and finds him, and is aglow with warmest love for him; can not do without him; of itself thinks of him; is continually busy with him; and directs every utterance of the soul to him and to him alone. And in this love there is a knowledge of God, which no analytical study, no work of the imagination, and no power of the will can bring us. It is to love, and in this love itself to enjoy eternal life. And thus to know God with an intimacy such as you would deem would not be seemly in a creature. Until in the hereafter every wall of separation shall fall away, and God in us and we in him shall be the perfection of highest Love.



"THOU HAST NOT LAID ME UPON THINE HEART."

To the superficial mind nothing seems so easy as to love. Of course, one loves himself. It is not at all difficult to love God. The only trouble sometimes is to love one's neighbor as oneself. Even this is not because there is no will and no power to love, but because at times this neighbor makes it almost impossible.

This is altogether a mistaken view. To love God is far more difficult than to love one's neighbor. It can safely be said that where there are ten who love their neighbor, there is at most only one who is consumed with love for God.

Jesus, therefore, has put love for God in the foreground as the first and great commandment. There is less complaint in the Bible about lack of brotherly love than about forgetfulness of God. The Apostle shows that this was no Jewish exaggeration, when in his epistle to the Romans he reiterates the bitter complaint of the Psalmist that: "There is none that seeketh after God, no, not one." This does not exclude the fact that love for God can be poured out in the soul. It is frequently observed that this Divinely-out-poured love which at first was small and weak, afterwards became stronger and more tender. But take a man by himself, as he grows up by nature, not only among good-for-nothings and criminals, but equally much among cultivated and honorable people, there is no love in that man for God. He does not seek God. Indeed, there is no one who really loves God in the way in which God requires it.

For a long time this seemed to be different, but it was appearance only. Even at the beginning of the last century it was still the rule among the rank and file of our people to favor religion and to abhor every form of atheism. Without willing to be called pious, no one desired to be known as irreligious, and on solemn occasions the name of the Lord was always remembered. Are people worse now than formerly? By no means. They have emancipated themselves more generally. But on the whole people now are what they were before. Only with this difference, that now unbelief is preached more boldly from the pulpit and university chairs, in the press and in open meetings. Has this practice provoked a single protest? Not at all. On the contrary, in the course of an ordinary lifetime the faith has been abandoned in ever widening circles, and there is almost no more shame now in being credited with atheism. Even this is nothing new. The selfsame condition prevailed in Israel in the days of its spiritual apostacy. This is convincingly shown when God himself through Isaiah utters this reproach against his people: "Thou hast lied, for thou hast not laid Me upon thine heart" (Is. 57:11, Dutch version).

It is very necessary therefore to examine still more closely what it is to love the Lord. Necessary also for believers, since even among them there glitters much that seems like the



gold of love, but which is no gold. The first step is to realize that "to love God" is not the easiest, but the hardest thing to which faith calls us. Ordinarily love is taken as willingness to consider others and to do all we can to make them happy. This is seen on every side where philanthropy awakens. Love there directs itself first, most generously and easily, to the unfortunate, and it is a matter of congratulation that this generously interpreted philanthropy is carried, in these days, on such large scales. This teaches us to bring offerings, it invites devotion, it lessens much suffering.

But with this aspect of love, we make no advances with God. He is blessed forever more. He is not in need of anything. In nothing is he in need of us. We can furnish him no supply. Pity, which gives rise to philanthropic love, can never inspire us when it concerns the ever Blessed One. Here another kind of love is required. A love which springs from the perception that we belong with God by reason of our origin and manner of existence; that we are his creatures; and that therefore we can have no reason for being, no object for existence and no future destiny except in him. The hollow idea that we have a reason for existence in ourselves is robbery committed against God. It is the wheel which detached from the wagon wants to roll on by itself. And when a man has thus actually detached himself from God, and from the heights of his imagined independence has turned himself to God, to love him as an outside something, and calls that love, it is worse than caricature and mockery. It is the outrage of love, which does not make us holy, but accuses and condemns us before God.

To love God is to abandon everything that separates us from God, and every moment of our life to live wholly for God. To love God is to reconsecrate to God what became separated from God. It is a motion in the soul which is born in us, when magnetizing power goes out from God. and draws us to God. A pressure and an inclination in us, which leaves us no rest for a moment; and every time pushes aside, or back everything that separates or draws us away from God, and thus leaves us free to hold communion with God.

This is first observed in prayer. Take heed, says the Apostle ([I Pet. 3:7](#)) that your prayers be not hindered. You feel this yourself when you want to pray, and cannot, because of the things that stand between you and God. Your thoughts, inclinations and feelings must first be detached from them all. They must be driven out from the mind. And then God comes back to you, and you can pray again. And what happens in prayer one moment must happen in every particular of your whole life; for only then will true love for God begin to awaken in you.

Jesus had this in view when he said: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." These four together constitute the inner organization of our spirit. These four get implicated every time in egotistical or worldly interests. And therefore they operate wrongly. They separate us from the Holy One. And this is love, that we detach all four from these wrong connections and turn them, not in part, but entirely, to God.



This is not really an offering. An offering is something of our own, which we could keep for ourselves, but which we freely give up to another. Nothing is said of this here, and never can be. Our heart is from God, our soul is from God, our mind is from God, and all our powers are his property. Hence we bring God nothing. We but return what belongs to him. And when we do this, and do it in such a way that our heart and soul and mind and strength, all four, direct themselves to him, and serve him altogether, the separation is ended and love celebrates her triumph. Then it becomes the shamefacedness of the thief, who returns what he had stolen and makes no boast of merit; but prays to be forgiven.

This is what the prophet calls "to lay God upon the heart." Love is a tender, touching emotion, which needs symbols. This gave rise in olden times to the custom among lovers to wear each other's picture on the heart. It meant that one had given the other heart and hand, and that now one wears this symbol on the heart as a continual warning not to let the heart, thus sealed, for a moment go out to another, but to keep it faithfully for the one that is loved. And to lay God upon the heart means that the choice has been made, that the heart has been given to God, and that now the symbol of God's name is placed upon it, to seal the heart for God, and closely to guard the heart for God and God alone.

The case remains always the same. It is not to love God in order to bring him something, but to lose self in God because we belong to him, and because by this consecration of ourselves to him alone, can the end of our existence be realized. To do all this, not in the mechanical form of a calculation, but through the losing of self in the ecstasy of tenderest love, is the first and great commandment; this is to know the Lord, to feel oneself as a child with his Father, and to be inwardly consumed by the love of God which is poured out into our hearts. The question remains, how many there are, even among the pious in the land, who in this way have laid God upon their heart?



"WITH ALL."

The commandment that we shall love our neighbor as ourselves is so strongly emphasized in these days, that among the rank and file of people the first and great commandment is more and more forgotten. That it is everyone's calling first of all not only to serve the Lord, but to love him--who thinks of this?

This substitution of the second in the place of the first commandment has captivated the popular mind to such an extent, that even among believers love for God has lost much warmth and tenderness. Appeals in the house of prayer for charitable and philanthropic work get more eager hearing than the far higher call of love for God. This changing and turning about of the order here is fatal. He who loves God will also love his brother. But it does not hold true in every case that he who loves his brother also loves God. The first commandment guarantees the second, but not the second the first. To be warmly affectioned toward God, and cold toward a brother, is unthinkable. But many men and women are prominent in all sorts of charitable and philanthropic works who are stone-cold toward God, and who at times even deny his existence.

It is necessary, therefore, that the counterpoise be placed in the scale, and that throughout the church the great commandment to love God be solemnly impressed upon the heart. The voice of this call should everywhere be loudly heard again. And the preacher would have a right understanding of his duty if week by week he would bind this love for God upon the conscience of his hearers, with such warmth and eloquence, that the whole congregation would be impressed with his tender devotion to God, and would be inspired by his zeal to such a degree as to be itself revived in its love for God, with the board of official in the lead. The press also should have a part in this. By means of these meditations we seek to direct attention in every possible way to the necessity of making, more than has yet been done, communion with, and knowledge of, and love for God, our daily business. Sound creeds, a blameless walk, and good works are undoubtedly indispensable. But the marrow of all religion is fellowship with the Eternal. And in this fellowship it is only love for God in which the brightness of gold glitters.

And yet as soon as we press this love for God, we face a very great difficulty. It presents itself in the two words, which stand at the head of this meditation, or rather in the last of the two, even in this painful word *all*. Would you love God? Then, says Jesus, you must love him with *all* your soul, with *all* your heart, and with *all* your mind. And this, let us humbly confess, is not achieved in this life by the holiest of saints. Sin and the world have so estranged us from God that sometimes it takes an utmost effort, even a few times a day, apart from our regular prayers, to lift up the heart to God in a conscious utterance of love. Is it saying



too much when we add, that many prayers are said at home and in church, during which the soul does not commune with God? And when at times we did succeed in having the soul go out in love to God, what then was the degree of tenderness in the love, and how long did this exaltation of soul continue? More yet, how often did it become in us a thirsting after God? And suppose we have come thus far, not every day, but most days how far distant are we even then from loving God with all the heart, and all the soul, and all our consciousness? For this *all* must also include *all* the day, so that our love for God never escapes us, even in sleep.

Naturally, a distinction must here be made. Love for God can spring up in the heart, can scintillate in the word, can restrain sin and selfishness, and inspire deeds of devotion and heroic courage. But the inspiration of this love can very well operate in us, while we may not be conscious of our love for God, nor of the reciprocal working of God's love for us in our heart. From love for God a martyr can go into death, and in the moment of dying be so abstracted by deadly pain, or by the taunts of his executioners, that for the moment tender communion of love with God is impossible. It is equally true that business or professional duties, intercourse with people and the cares of daily life may so engage our minds that with perchance a passing thought of God, we are utterly unable to center our mind on God. But though we keep all this out of count, it is still the great commandment, to love God with all the heart, with all the soul, and with all the mind. And who of us has ever succeeded in doing more of this than a small part of the whole?

But there is One who has not fainted before this first and great commandment, but no more than one: even Christ. Jesus alone has fulfilled the second commandment of love to fellowmen, and with respect to this, be it at a far distance, many saints have pressed his footsteps. But in the fulfilment of the first and great commandment Jesus stands incomparably alone. He alone has loved God with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his mind and with all his strength, always, even unto the end, without one moment's interruption. This is his crown of glory. Therein is the life of the world. Think him away and the whole world, with its thousand millions of people, stands before God without one among them who has kept the great, supreme and first commandment. But he has come, and now there is One from whose real human heart and real human soul and real human consciousness proceeds this pure, full, unalloyed love for God, for the joy of which, Almighty God has created all mankind. This is the shield which is lifted up upon us. This accounts for the fact that God can still tolerate this world and bear it.

With us also this will come. Many of our beloveds, who in the earth did not reach it by far, in the realms of everlasting light now bring this perfect love-offering to God. And we shall come to it when in death we shall fully die unto sin and we shall be done with the world, and shall know God even as we are known. That is, if we fall asleep in Jesus, if in death there shall be nothing left to separate us from him.



And that which makes us cleave to Christ is just this: That we love God, that the love of God has been poured out in our hearts, that the love of God has operated in us, that with us the love of God has come first, and that with all our imperfections and shortcomings it has been our deepest desire and will to have God's love be our supremest inspiration, and that it has prepared us for what is highest and best. And this is the mystery of being a Christian, that as we hide ourselves in the perfect love wherewith Jesus has loved God, through the glow of his love for God, we feel the spark of our love for God burn in our own heart, and that, when it goes out, Jesus kindles it again.



"WITH ALL THINE HEART."

Underneath, still deeper than the heart, lives the soul. When God searches a person he tries not merely the heart, but enters still more deeply into his being. The Scripture expresses this plastically by saying that after God has tried the heart he also trieth the reins ([Jer. 11:20](#)) in order to examine us in our inmost parts. In moments of extreme tension it is felt, even among us, that the heart is not yet all, but that we must reach down to the marrow of our inmost self. We see it in the case of Jonathan. When David had sworn that he would always be faithful to him and to his house, Jonathan, deeply moved, replied: "Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee" ([I Sam. 20:4](#)).

In all seriousness the only element of worth in the heart is that which comes into it from the soul, and passes through it to the soul. What goes on outside of the soul may indeed be very attractive. It is less captivating when only the outward appearance interests us. It is more strongly attractive when we admire a man's courage and energy, devotion and self-sacrifice. But all this passes away. We do not assimilate it into our life. As a rule, the emotions of the heart, which do not touch the soul, do not rise higher than the feelings, sometimes not higher even than the pseudo-life of sentimentality. The function of the heart only derives all real, abiding worth from the relation which it sustains to the soul.

This does not imply by any means that the heart is a superfluity, and that the soul alone is important. On the contrary the heart has been given us of God as an absolutely indispensable organ of the soul. That which stirs in the soul can only come through the means of the heart to that supreme perception and lofty utterance which we glorify as love. In the great commandment, therefore, Jesus puts the heart in the foreground. First: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and only then: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul.

This could not be otherwise. Love does not have its beginnings in the soul, but in God. It comes to us from God. And only when this love from God enters through the heart into the soul does it awaken in the soul the life of reciprocal love for God, which now presses from the soul into the heart and makes us to love God. But this last stage is only reached through the heart. In the heart only is the flame ignited, and there the fire of love burns. As long as love is confined to the soul it partakes more of the nature of worship. The heart alone breathes forth tenderness and warmth. Only when we love God with all the heart does this love begin to glow in us with real human feeling.

Love of the heart is irresistible, mutual attraction. The Scripture speaks of it more than once as: "a cleaving of the soul unto God." When the magnet draws the steel so closely to itself that there is even no more air between, the steel cleaves unto the magnet. Hence when



so tender an affection springs up between people, that at length everything that separated them falls away, heart cleaves unto heart and soul cleaves unto soul. In the same way there is no perfect love for God until everything is removed that made separation between him and us. And it also applies to this love that our heart, and through the heart, our soul cleaves unto God.

This is a strong and forcible expression, such as the Scripture uses again and again. So strong that we ask: Shall it ever be true with us? But this is no question for the child of God. As a rule, indeed, a mountain of hindrances rises between the soul and God. In spite of this, however, every child of God has known brief moments, in retirement and solitude, in which the love of God drew him so strongly and irresistibly, and God's blessed fellowship in Christ overwhelmed him so blessedly, that really everything fell away, and for the moment the cleaving of the heart unto God was the only true expression of what the soul enjoyed and felt towards God. What is called power of attraction in nature, in the spiritual is called love. Love is not something artificial, something studied, but is of itself. When any one loves you, you feel it. You feel whether the love which interests you, and draws you, is strong or weak. And when a great love directs itself to you, goes out after you, and begins to affect you, you likewise feel the irresistibility of its drawing.

Jesus himself calls this outgoing of love "drawing." The Father draws his elect. Of himself the Savior said I will draw all men unto me. That is to say, I will play upon your heart with such power of grace and love that you will come with me, surrender yourself to me, and serve me. There is overwhelming power therefore in this love, but so far from violently inflicting injury, it affects one most blessedly. As the sun draws the flower-bud upward, and by his cherishing warmth makes it to unfold, so this love of God draws you up to himself, fills you with most blessed sensations that make the heart to leap with holiest joy. You drink in this love, or if you like, it is richest enjoyment for the soul. And in the wealth of this tested love of God, pure and tender love for God awakens of itself in your heart.

There is also love for the impersonal. We can speak vaguely of love of nature, when it interests us by its beauty and loveliness, or awes us by its sublimity. We can love science, righteousness, everything that is noble and of good report. But all this is visionary love--love in general, which finds no rest because the soul that personally lives and loves, can only find satisfaction in personal love. For this reason there is something tender already in the love for a song-bird or domestic animal. Here love concentrates itself upon a definite object and there is a reciprocal utterance. The attractiveness of a dog can be very great, because there is personal response. This is not the case with nature, nor with science or jurisprudence; but it is with a dog that will risk his life for you.

All this, however, is but the prelude of higher love, and only with man it begins to speak in richer language, and to reveal its higher nature. And here, too, is ascent with differences. The love of mother and child, of father and son, of brother and sister, of friend and friend.



Until at last we come to holy wedlock. This may at times be degraded by sin, but in its ideal interpretation it is highest love on earth, and therefore it is stamped by God himself as the symbol of the love that binds him to his elect.

But even in marriage love does not reach its full fruition. According to its nature it is conscious of an impulse which rises higher still. And when finally love begins to reach out after the Highest Being, and you feel that the spark of love for God has been kindled in your heart by God himself, you perceive that love in you is now where it ought to be, that it can rise no higher, but also that it has no such desire, and that therefore it is thrice blessed.

The conflict which then ensues is caused by our inequality with God. He is everything, we nothing. He the High and Exalted One, we the vain creatures of his hand. We owing him everything. He needing nothing. And therefore he can take nothing at our hand. Among ourselves love is mutual as between equals. No great personal love can develop between a strong man and a small child. The little child can not rise to the level of the fully developed man. Nor can he descend to the child otherwise than by disinterested kindness.

And this is just what God has done for us. He has done it in Christ. In Christ he has come to us as man, to make the inequality equal, to join himself to our life and in everything to become like unto the brethren, only sin excepted. This is the great mystery, by virtue of which with those who have joined themselves to Jesus, who believe in him and have become one with him in soul, true love for God can develop itself independently of the hindrance of inequality.

And if now you say that Jesus gave you everything, and that therefore you can put no crown on his head which already he does not have, then bring to mind that there is one thing left which God alone can claim from his people, and that this one thing is the love of the heart. But then it must be love with all the heart, until the heart shall yearn after God, as God's heart has yearned after us.



"WITH ALL THY SOUL."

If you begin to feel troubled and even guilty that with the passing years you have made so little advance in love for God, then examine with more care than before the rule of Christ regarding it. You have known the great commandment from childhood. You have learned it by heart, and your conscience has admitted unconditionally that Christ is right. In your love for God nothing can be wanting. With all the heart and soul and mind and strength it must be unbounded love. Everything must go for God even as you have to look for everything to God.

But even this broad admission did not satisfy Jesus. He did not say: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God in everything. He has carefully distinguished between the heart, the soul, the mind and the strength. And did you do well to ignore this? There was a purpose in this distinction. Our Lord has deemed this distinction to be necessary for the whole church. It was his will that ministers of the Word should bind this love for God severally with the heart, the soul, the mind and the strength upon the conscience of believers. It was his will that every child of God should continually examine himself, whether he practiced his love for God in this same fourfold way.

True godliness would have rooted more deeply and more firmly in the life of the church, if both preaching and self-examination had been applied more seriously to the cultivation of this full, warm love for God, and if it had derived more vital strength from the keeping of this first and great commandment. No holier power can animate us than love, and in all love the love for God wears the crown. Love, therefore, is the bond of perfection, provided it is not volatilized into a vague conception of ideal love without rule or object. Everything noble and exalted in love that can be idealized and celebrated in song, is only real, when it is a love that first loves God and for his sake one's neighbor.

Attention is at once arrested by the fact that in commending love for God, Jesus gives the heart the first mention, and not the soul. We would have done otherwise. The soul as the center of our inner life would have been mentioned first, and from this we would have derived love with the heart and mind and all our strength. Jesus, on the other hand, begins with the heart and then points to the soul, the mind and the strength.

This difference between heart and soul is made clear by the word of the Lord in [Jeremiah 4:10](#) and 18. At one time Israel is told that the terrible outpouring of God's wrath shall reach unto the heart; and at another time that it shall reach unto the soul, but with a sharply-outlined distinction. When the troubles that come upon Israel are described in their first stages of alarm, it is said: "This is thy wickedness, it is so bitter that it reacheth unto thine heart" (4:18). When suffering continues and the case at length becomes fatal, it is said: "That the



sword reacheth unto the soul" (4:10). Thus the heart is the seat of the emotions and sensations, and the soul is the seat of life itself.

Applied to love, it is the heart that receives the impressions of love and makes this ardent feeling to flow forth. But love is clarified in the soul, and the impulse of the passion of love springs from the soul. Without the heart love can not be enjoyed, neither can it be exercised. But neither can love, which is thus enjoyed or exercised, touch yourself if there were not something deeper back and underneath the heart, even the source of life itself, and if there were there no operation of the tie that binds heart and soul in one.

Without ears there is no hearing, and there is no speaking without voice. But it is the soul which employs the ear as an instrument to hear, and which speaks in the voice, if the saying shall be true. In the same way there is no drinking in of love, and no exhibition of love, without the heart; but it is always the soul that employs the heart as instrument by which to enter, with its deepest and most hidden life, upon the wealth of love.

To be able to say, therefore, that we love God with the heart, will not suffice. With the heart one can feel sweetly moved by enticing love, and become aware of reciprocal feeling of love within, and be quite innocent of actual true love, simply because the soul has no share in it.

This is strikingly evident in art. In grand opera we listen to a touching recital of human suffering. At the time we are deeply moved and carried along. The sensations of anxious forebodings, described in song, were sympathetically felt in the heart. We lived with the characters of the plot and shared their suffering. But presently the play is over. For a moment the impression stays by. But an hour later everything is forgotten and we continue our ordinary course as though nothing had happened. The case is not that the heart had not been moved, for even shallow feelings touch it. But the soul had no part in it, and therefore it did not touch us.

The same thing continually happens in life. A mother can not detect a tear in the eye of her child, but is at once almost moved to tears herself, and at the moment will do everything she can to comfort her darling and help him to forget his woes. But in many instances this does not go beyond the confines of the heart. When the child that wept, laughs again, everything is over. Because the love for her child does not spring from the depths of her soul, she does not know how to love the soul of her child, hence she does not save but spoil him.

So there is a love for God with the heart, which is offended when the Divine honor is attacked, and which takes pleasure in tender feelings toward the Lord, but the object of it is self and not God. There is love there, but not the love that goes down deep enough to reach unto the soul. Our self is in our soul. There it stands before the face of our God. And therefore on the floor of the soul the question must be decided whether God exists for our sake, or whether we exist, solely and alone, for the sake of God.



When we can say: As for me, the latter is the case, it is glorious. But now the second question arises: Do we consent to have it so from submission, from the sense of our own unworthiness, or from love? Would we exist for no other purpose than for the sake of God, because we can do no other? Or because we would not wish it any other way, since God is our tenderest love and our whole existence is lost in love for him. If this be so, this love will be enjoyed through the heart, and it will express itself through the heart. The costly instrument of the heart was given us for this purpose. But he who employs this heart and plays on it in happy love, is always *self* in the center of the soul, in the deep underground of existence, where our person lives in the holy presence of the Triune God.

Have you become aware of any such love for God in your inmost self? If so, do you understand what it means to love God in your inmost self with all your soul? Not whether there are times when this is so, but whether it has become the fixed habit of your life. Not whether you surrender yourself to the love of God with a part of your soul, with a part of yourself, to the end that you might be saved, and be forever happy, but whether you give yourself to it, to the end that you might glorify God forever. It is not the division of the soul between yourself and God which is required, in order that you may commit continual robbery in the soul, and withhold from God part of your desires, part of your future, and part of your self-consciousness. The claim is terribly great. It is all comprehensive: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul. It means that there shall be no single utterance of life in you except such as springs from your love for God.

To do this, it may be said, we should be angels and not men. And this is true, provided we say: Not sinful men. But for this you have your Savior who, as man, has fulfilled this perfect love for God in your behalf. And if by a true faith you fly to him for refuge, in spite of your lack of love, you will have peace in your soul.



"WITH ALL THY MIND."

It is singular that the first and great commandment includes the claim: to love God with all the mind. When Jesus holds the high ideal before us, to love God with the heart and with the soul, we understand it at once; for these are disposed to love. But how can we love with the mind? The mind has been given us to think, to ponder and to understand. How can it be an organ of love, an instrument on which love can play its holy melodies? As a rule it does not impress us, because in reading this commandment no attention is paid to it.

No account is made of it. The task of investigating the several parts of this first and great commandment is not taken seriously. In reading it over hastily we take it to mean that we should use the mind in the service of God, and leave the heart and the soul the task to love. But this is not so. It does not say that the mind must serve God; that we must direct our thought to God; that with the mind we must come to a clear confession of God, nor how we should direct the working of the mind to God. It declares clearly and plainly that with the mind we must love God. Jesus includes all religion in the one great idea of love, which love must penetrate and pervade every part of our human personality. From the soul it must have dominion not only in the heart, but also in the mind, and must bring it to pass that all our vital forces are led by this one supreme motive of love for God.

The mind here does not mean simply logical thought, clear judgment and learned concepts, but the whole glorious endowment of our consciousness, including representation, imagination and intellectual activity.

"Powers" are also at work in nature. Far stronger powers than in us. But though nature is alive, it is unconscious. And though we are aware of some consciousness in the more highly domesticated animals, it is exceedingly weak with the best of them. The glory of conscious life, which is only perfect in God, is found in man alone, because with respect to this also he has been created after the Divine image. Consciousness may not reach by far its highest development in some people. With the insane it is sadly disturbed. But the most unfortunate idiot clearly shows the unspeakable greatness of the gift of consciousness, of self-consciousness, and of a conscious life which even the ordinary man has received from God. Hence we have no right to estimate it as inferior to the heart. And all religion that would confine the service of God solely to the heart, and to good works, to the exclusion of this glorious human consciousness, cripples itself, robs God, and is bound to degenerate into pseudo-religion.

This shows at once that it is the Christian duty of human science to direct itself to God, and that not only a part of it, such as Theology, should take the knowledge of God for its object, and leave no path untrod in which it can enrich itself, but that science as a whole,



and everywhere, should exhibit the glory of God. All science, however much disciplined and learned, that leaves God out of count, that awakens doubt about his existence, or dares to deny him, is no science but sin. It sins against the great commandment that with all the mind we should first of all love God. And since it is at variance with every idea of love to pass its object by with indifference, or to ignore it altogether, it follows that the scientist, who in his science does not feel himself drawn to God, and with his scientific knowledge, does not before all else seek God and his glory, breaks the great commandment. And this is the curse that rests so heavily on the science of our times that it does not feel in its veins the pulse-beat of love for God, and that it behaves itself as though the great commandment, to love God with all the mind, had never been given.

The same applies to our doctrinal standards. The priests of science are only few in number, but every man is called to confess the faith. It is not difficult to understand what this means. Every man has a conviction, a system of principal ideas from which he starts out, a world of thoughts, however small, by which he lives, for which he contends, and from which he acts. By saying, therefore, that every man is called to make confession, we mean that no man should hold godless convictions of life, but that in every life-view God should be the center; that this world-view should cleave unto God, go out from and return to him again; and that everything else in this life-view must adapt itself to the love, the ardent love, for God which it claims.

Not every man can make this clear for himself. In every other particular the world derives its great ideas and representations from knowledge that has been handed down by past generations. With its confession of the ages, therefore, the Church of Christ simply comes in as an aid to the ordinary man. In the Church, with respect to the knowledge of God, every man receives the results of age-long experiences of faith. And no national conditions can be healthy and normal, save as the rank and file of the people take the confessional standards of the Church as the starting point of their views and convictions of life. Hence it is ruinous to love for God with "all the mind," when Christian confessions are left out from a man's convictions of life, and when it is falsely preached that everything depends upon the mysticism of the love of the heart and upon the act of the will. He who drives this propaganda impoverishes the love for God, by excluding from it all the mind, and does not tread in the footsteps of Jesus, but diametrically and directly opposes his supreme command.

With this, however, love for God with all the mind has not yet reached its limit. Apart from science and Christian confessions there is the ordinary daily consciousness, the activity of the mind in daily avocations, in social intercourse, in plans we make, in lines of action which we lay out for ourselves, in intentions which we foster, in reading, in thoughts about persons and affairs, in representations, in imaginations, in appreciation of art and literature, in review of the past and in outlook upon the future. All this together forms the many-sided activity of our consciousness; it is the daily sphere of activity of all the mind; the school and



workshop of our thought, study and contemplation; and all this can go on either without God, or continuously and at every point it can be inspired and ruled by the thought of God, and by the love of his name.

With every one of us, therefore, Jesus claims all this for God. It is his will that love for God shall not only lead, direct and rule us in all this, but also that from an inner impulse all this shall form and clothe itself in the way which we know and understand is well-pleasing unto God. Above all else it is his will that we do this not from a sense of duty, because we must, though of ourselves we would like to do otherwise; and not for the sake of escape from the wrath to come or of earning heaven thereby; but from love, purely from love for God, because for the sake of God we can no longer allow ourselves to use this costly gift of our consciousness in ways that will grieve God.

And though, as we think of all this, we may realize that in actual life we are still far distant from this high ideal, in reading and re-reading the great commandment the true child of God will be arrested in his course by this claim also, that he must love God with all the mind. He will seek to control his conscious life far differently than before. And if he succeeds in making his love for God more evident in all his thoughts and in all his plans, the deeper experience of the love of God will be his daily gain, and in his inmost self secret fellowship with the Eternal will become ever more sweetly known.



"WITH ALL THY STRENGTH."

Nothing is more grievous to a Christian soul than the superficial fencing and boasting of love, which is current in our loveless society life. This play with what is highest in heaven and on earth is especially trying, when in unbelieving and semi-believing circles, especially by entire and partly emancipated women, the high ideal of love is used as a weapon with which to oppose the faithful confession of the Gospel.

Love is then said to be "the whole of religion." There is no need of anything more. The Old Testament is by far too unmerciful. Paul was too severe in his anathemas, and only saved his honor by the hymn of love in **I Cor. 13**. Only St. John, the apostle of love, is a man of whom to be proud. That he should have asked for fire to come down from heaven to destroy the enemies of Jesus, is probably not true. His advice not to show hospitality to one who denies the doctrine of Christ (**II John 10**) occurs indeed in his epistle, but these epistles are unauthentic. More over as devotees at the altars of love, they make Jesus their boast. He never allowed himself to be governed by anything save gentle, tender love. At times, indeed, Jesus could be hard, even sharp, in his retorts to the Pharisees, but these Pharisees are the so-called orthodox Christians of today, whom they themselves do not spare because this is not necessary. These slaves of the letter are outside of the law, outside therefore also of the law of love.

This false mania of love is inexorably condemned by Jesus in what he said about the first and great commandment. Truly, love is of the highest importance. It is the one and only thing that is required, provided that it is conditioned by this rule: That all your love goes out from your love for God. That is to say, that in the love-life love for God stands in the foreground, and that it shall so dominate all of your love, that you love him with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength. And as though this does not state the case sufficiently sharply and definitely, and as though to make the last misunderstanding and misconception impossible, Jesus adds a fourth claim and binds it upon the conscience that this love for God answers to the high ideal only when it is also love for God with all the strength.

Hence Jesus does not do what many professed Christians do. He does not say: "God is love, but you should also count with his holiness." No, the Savior puts nothing above, and nothing alongside of love. Love to him is all-sufficient. But he objects, that in principle, this love counts only with the neighbor. He demands and wills that in our love, the love for God shall be the all dominating starting point. He will not let you go until you understand that no boundary of any sort may ever be put to this love for God, and that therefore it must likewise be a love for him with all your strength.



Love for God with all the heart, all the soul and all the mind may be lost in sentiment or in vague idealism, but when it is required that we love God also with all our strength, the claim is laid upon the actual life, the entire personal existence and upon the whole outlay of personal and vital powers.

Strength is what goes out from us as utterance of the talents wherewith we are endowed, of the powers and capacities that are at our disposal, of the means at our command, of the influence we exert, of the time that is apportioned unto us, and of the circumstances which call out the exhibition of our strength. Jesus demands that all the powers that are entrusted to us, on the condition of responsibility to him who gave them, shall be exercised in such a way that in their working the love for God shall show itself as the dominant element.

Do not take this in a sickly-spiritual sense. The idea lies at hand that love for God really only shows itself in our work and influence when we apply our strength exclusively to religious and spiritual things. For then it is imagined that a clergyman loves God better than a lawyer or a physician; that a missionary is more devoted to God than an editor or a publisher; that an institution for the saving of unfortunates is nobler than one for scientific investigation. In brief, that love for God is more fully expressed by service in the realm of particular grace, than by life in the broader domain of common grace.

This is all wrong. God's greatness and omnipotence do not limit themselves to the more restricted interests of the salvation of souls, but pervade all human life. And with every one of us, according to our talents and callings, love for God must show itself with equal zeal and strength in every department of life. An artist or sculptor can and ought with equal consciousness and purpose glorify God from love, as a missionary or a philanthropist. The humblest calling is not excluded here. A farmer, who is an elder or warden in a church, must serve God from love with all his strength in stable and granary as well as in his duties as church official. A mother in the bosom of her family has as sacred a calling to love God with all her strength as a nurse or as a woman missionary in the foreign field. False dualism which relegates the mother or the servant to common life and pronounces the nurse sacred, does not feed the love for God, but poisons it.

Three forms of sin in this connection lower human life: Neglect, misuse and abuse of our powers. In each of these sins love for God is denied. No star has been placed in the firmament but has been called to shine for God's glory. God has imparted to no human soul a grain of gold, but the brightness of it must appear and glisten in his honor. But what the stars do not do is done by indolent man. Many people of conspicuous talent, instead of improving it for God do nothing with it at all. Of course it would require effort, sacrifice and self-denial to improve each latent talent to the full. But when they are not willing to make this effort, sacrifice and self-denial for the sake of God, where then is their love for God? Even among Christians God's honor would be far more glorious, if instead of being



buried under mountains of self-sufficiency and indolence, all the particles of hidden gold could glisten in public sight.

The misuse of talents is different, but it is equally sinful and loveless before God. Here no efforts are spared; sacrifices are freely made; but the object of it all is to secure position for *oneself*; to make good along material lines; to please others; and to become rich, not in God, but in public esteem. Very hard work is done, but from selfish motives, and not for God's dear sake, and for love of God. It is not working while it is day, as a child from love for his Father, in the sure confidence that he will supply all our needs, but slaving for the sake of providing the means oneself. It is for money and not for God.

And along this line the third sin is easily committed, even the yet worse *abuse* of one's talents in the face of God and of his sacred claims. O, who can count the men who might have shone as stars of the first magnitude in honor of the Lord, but who have abused their noble gifts in breaking down what is holy, in attacking the Word of God, in opposing religion, and at length in the daring attempt to eradicate faith in God from the lives of others. Who does not know them, the singers and the artists, who have abused their glorious talents in behalf of wantonness and artificial tastes, and in drawing souls away from God. How much wit has been abused in mocking at holy things and in making them appear ridiculous. What keenness of insight has degenerated into cunning and tricky slyness for the sake of cherishing lies and dishonesty. What maidenly beauty and loveliness has been sinned away in the passion to please and to cherish impurity of purpose. All this abuse has been banefully expressive of enmity against God and not of love for God.

By the side of this neglect, misuse and abuse of our gifts and talents, Jesus places nothing save the love for God. He does not bind this claim on the conscience of the worlds for the world does not know true love, because it knows not God, and all true love proceeds from love for God. But he puts the claim in all its fulness and boundlessness upon you, who confess his holy name. He will not let you go until the scales fall from your eyes and you begin to see that you sin your life away as long as you do not know that craving after the fullness of love for the Eternal which can not rest until it loves God also with all its strength.



"HE THAT LOVETH NOT KNOWETH NOT GOD."

Knowledge of God is eternal life. Not that the one is something which is added to the other, for this knowledge is itself eternal life. This knowledge of God, therefore, can not be limited to what the understanding grasps or does not grasp, or to what has been committed to memory. Knowledge of God truly reflects an ever clearer image in the mirror of our consciousness, but it can never be outward, abstract or a barren jugglery with words. This knowledge comes to us in virtue of our second birth, even as a child knows his father and mother. In bold words, one might say this knowledge is in the blood. It is a Divine atavism. This knowledge is taken hold of in the will, when the will takes hold of the will of God. This knowledge continually increases in the secret walk with God, and it matures in the life of prayer. In the gloomy depths of sorrow and on the sunny heights of joy and prosperity this knowledge brings us ever nearer to the riches that abide. It is a knowledge which comes of itself continually from the stream of life to the surface; which uses our person as its organ; and which at times has moments when it seems that "seeing face to face" as through the veil of the sanctuary is already granted here.

This rich knowledge of God, ever more mature, ever more full and overflowing with Divine sweetness, must of course be apprehended in the clear consciousness, and be poured over as it were into

the doctrinal standards of the Church of Christ, and into our personal confession. Unless this is done, mystical corruption quickly enters in as well as mania for hallucinations and weakening sentimentality. It fills one with sorrow, when in Church and out of it barren school-learning is seen in the place of life, and the knowledge of God is treated as though it were a corpse rather than an inspiring, elastic life pervading the soul. This is not in accord with, but diametrically opposed to, Scripture. Hear the proclamation of the apostle of the Lord: "He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love" ([I John 4:8](#)).

If this puts it strongly, the fact remains: that by being most like God in what we do we enter into the pure knowledge of God. With this in view consider the forgiveness of sin, and you will understand the mystery of this knowledge of God. The chief question of your life and of your future which concerns you personally is now and always will be whether God forgives you your sin. This is not the way in which it is presented in the preaching of the day. For this makes the great question of life to consist in ridding ourselves of sin and in working out our own sanctification. And this is self-delusion. It is and always will be even as St. Paul and Luther and Calvin bound it upon the soul. The great question of life is, how shall I be just before God? Forgiveness of sin is the way to dying unto sin; not otherwise. How we, who are in the midst of sin until we die, can be called unto sonship with God, to



dwell forever in the Father-house above, this and this alone is the mighty problem of life which immediately touches our relation to God and our knowledge of the Eternal. Thus the riddle of the world and that of our soul always comes down again to this one inquiry: Is there grace for me also, and forgiveness and perfect reconciliation?



It is exceedingly significant that in the Our Father the brief petition for forgiveness links itself as with an iron hand to the declaration, that we ourselves forgive. "Give us this day our daily bread," is immediately followed by the prayer for the daily bread of Divine forgiveness for the life of the soul. And this is joined to the honest and fully-meant declaration: As we forgive those that trespass against us. In other words: You must love, with that best love, which makes you forgive, from the heart, those that have wronged you. And he alone who loves like this knows God. He alone knows God in this his highest love, that though our sins be as scarlet he will make them white as snow, yea, though they have risen mountain-high, he casts them into the depths of the sea.

Actually, therefore, in the Our Father itself is expressed this significant thought which it seemed so bold to utter, that we, by forgiving others, learn to understand that, and how, God forgives us; that is to say, that by loving others we learn to know God in his love for us. And that he that so loveth that he forgives his enemy entirely and altogether from the heart increases in the knowledge of God, learns to know God, and learns to understand how God loves him.

Does this begin with you, so that you love first, and that afterwards God loves you? Far from it. Love never begins with you. Back of the first stirrings of love that ever moved the soul, it was God who put it there. Neither can you ever forgive from yourself. You can forgive in a way which makes your forgiveness itself to be new sin to you, but never in the way which can release the soul. Frequently we hear of a man of the world who forgives. Indeed, as such, you have done this yourself from a sense of superiority, in order to show that your enemy was of too little consequence than that he could offend you; or to make a show of your own virtue in not carrying a grudge, and so to rid yourself of him and to be at peace with yourself.



Such forgiveness, however, has nothing in common with real forgiveness, except appearance and name. What the Our Father means on the other hand is forgiveness from love, which is so warm, honest and real as to make you feel: if God will so forgive me I am saved. For then it is God himself who has quickened this love in my heart, who from his own love has made this love to forgive flow into my soul, and who in my forgiving of my enemy makes me to know his eternal, compassionate and unfathomable love for me, who was once myself his enemy, but now his child.

At the sound of the Apostolic word: "He that loveth not knoweth not God," the conscience as a rule falls asleep with self-satisfaction. What man is there who loves nothing and no one. Even robbers have been known to love an animal, a child or wife at great sacrifice

of self. But what is that? When it says: He that loveth not, it means: He who does not live by love; he who is not governed by love; he who does not rejoice in love, and has no love that can endure the test of fire. And love is put to this fiery test, not with respect to those who are necessary to us, and who are agreeable to us in life, but only with respect to the man who stands in our way, whom we can call our enemy. The genuineness of your love therefore is only evident in forgiveness, even in the forgiveness of him who has offended you, who has opposed you, and who has embittered your very life. To forgive such an one, not from duty but from love, this alone is proof that there is this love in you which makes you learn to know God.

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But you say, "This is impossible. I can forgive for God's sake, and also because I myself am sinful. I can forgive from the sense of Christian duty, but not otherwise." And yet Jesus demands it: Love your enemies, bless them that curse you. Consider it well. Thou shalt love God with all thy soul, with all thy heart, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. And the second like unto it is: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself; and he is thy enemy. Not only must I love my neighbor also, but this second commandment is like unto the first. When it is asked: "How can this be?" we reply: only when you love in your neighbor what there is of God in him. Nothing more. Not his sin, neither his wrong committed against you. These you should rather hate. But even as you love nature because it shows forth the power and glory of the Lord, and an animal because it is wonderfully organized and endowed with instinct by its Maker, so you should much more love your neighbor as man, because God has created him after his image and has endowed him with wonderful talents and gifts.

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If all this has been corrupted and spoiled and has become hopelessly satanic, so that there is nothing more of God in him, then love ceases and turns into hatred, even as it should. Satan also was a most wonderful creature, but he has sinned away his all, and therefore every child of God hates this monster. But however deeply fallen he may be, man in this life is never like this. The murderer on the cross rejoices before the throne. Jesus has renewed unto life those who have wandered farthest away from the fold. And this is the glory of the Gospel that in every man, thus also in your enemy, there is a point of connection where grace may enter in. By this alone is the gospel our salvation. And he who for God's sake heartily loves this remaining spark even in those who have wandered farthest way, loves with a love which learns to know God in this his eternal love wherewith, while we are yet sinners, he also loves us.

"CLEARLY SEEN AND UNDERSTOOD BY THE THINGS THAT ARE MADE."

From of old the Church has pointed to nature and to the Bible as the sources of our knowledge of God; that is: the knowledge of God which comes to us from without; which can be expressed in abstract ideas; and therefore has a place in Christian creeds. This does not include experimental knowledge of God, which comes to us personally from spiritual experience, from communion of saints and secret fellowship with God.

The knowledge of God which comes to us from without is majestic. Confining ourselves to what nature brings, the Reformed confession truly and beautifully declares, that all creation is as a living book, the letters of which are the creatures. But the book of nature brings us no further than the recognition of the attributes of God, his power, wisdom, goodness, and so much more. It has nothing to say about life in the spiritual kingdom, of direction and rule by the Holy Ghost, of making our will one with the will of God, of having Divine love poured out into our hearts, of drawing closer to him, who is love, or of mystic contemplation.

The Confession is a banner with clear inscriptions, which we lift up before the world in order to declare the glory and majesty of him whom we worship; but it is not the intimate communication of that knowledge of God which comes from the knowledge of self and from one's own experience.

In these meditations we have put this more intimate knowledge of God in the foreground. Devotional literature is not acceptable to the world, because it speaks from and in behalf of communion of saints and from spiritual experience to those who have enjoyed the same, or at least know the yearning after it. But we have repeatedly sounded the note of warning against sentimental emotionalism in this sanctuary of mysticism. So we come to the knowledge of God from nature, not that we might interpret it in a material sense, but rather that we might weave it into our spiritual life.

In this respect also the erring soul frequently impoverishes itself. It has been learned by heart, and in general it is agreed, that Divine attributes exhibit themselves in the works of nature. From these we can infer that God is great in power, in wisdom and in goodness. But now that this is known, we are through with the book of nature. The sum of the knowledge of God, which it brought, is made out. So the book is put aside, and there is no personal, lasting impression of the majesty of God which nature was intended to convey. No one looks for it. No account is made of it. And there is almost a feeling of impatience, when in behalf of their superficial religion the men of the world appeal by preference to nature. It saddens one to hear it said with certain exultation, that the Church has served its day, that



the Bible has lost its significance, and that there is a far richer religious joy "in the temple of uncut wood."

But here the faithful are at fault. However much they deserve praise for their love of the Church of Christ, and however precious the treasures are, that have come to them from the Scripture, they should not have been indifferent to the fact, that we are equally called to remember that the invisible things of God, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, i. e., from nature, even his eternal power and Godhead (Rom. 1:20).

There are three progressive stages in the knowledge of God. It begins with nature, it goes on to man as created after God's Image, and finally is made perfect in Christ, in so much as He is the express Image of God's Person. And these three do not stand loosely side by side, but form, if we may say so, a climbing pyramid. Nature forms the broad ground surface, it ascends in the rich unfolding of human life, and reaches its highest point in the Incarnation of the Eternal Word.

Christ is not clearly seen, nor understood apart from the knowledge of man, and man is not clearly seen and understood apart from a sympathetic touch upon unconscious nature. Hence the faithful should always live under the deep impression of the majesty of God in nature. Believers must live the life of mankind, i. e., history, over again in themselves. Only thus can they obtain the clear, full, living impression of Christ, who reveals God to them in the riches of his grace.

In this way Almighty God began, and continues until now, the revelation of himself. First in unconscious nature. When this was ended, as a richer revelation of himself. He created man after his own image and likeness. And when man had corrupted his way, and in part had worked out sin to its baneful end, as the richest revelation of himself, God sent his Son.

These three links of the holy chain perfectly fit into one another. First there is the material world. In this world of matter man is created from dust. And in our flesh and blood comes the revelation of the Son of God, as man.

The starting point here is, that God is invisible. Let us understand this well. In himself the Eternal Being is not invisible, and we are definitely told that once we shall see God face to face. We shall know him, even as we are known. Intellectual knowledge, and even spiritual knowledge is not the highest. The highest is vision; clear, immediate sight. Seeing without inter-medium; without mirror; seeing essential Being itself. How this will be possible, is the mystery of the life to come, although however latent, the organ for this is even now present in the soul. It is not given us to use it in the present. This is the dispensation of limitations, of the finite, and of the things that are bound to form, color and dimensions. And since God is not limited, and has no form, dimension nor end, He is, in this dispensation, the Invisible to us. There is no clear vision of God in this life. The question was, how in this life, God

could reveal himself to us in his Majesty, even in such a way as would crystalize itself as a clear and fixed impression in us. And God has realized this aim, 1st by revelation in nature of his Omnipotence and Divinity in dimensions, which give us the impression of the infinite, even through we know they are finite; this is what we call the sublime; 2nd by the imprint of his life in the personal existence of man, creating him after His image; and 3rd by the restoration in full of this ruined and broken image, and by showing it to us, in Christ.

Hence God himself is in and behind nature. Hence nature is not a finished work of art, that exists by itself outside of and apart from God. But God himself gives us to see and to hear his Majesty in the starry heavens by night, in the colors of light by day, in the wonders of the vegetable and animal-world, in the splendor of the sea, in the roar of the hurricane, sometimes even in the rolling of his thunder. In all this, is, and lives, the God Whom we worship. In the throbbings of the life of nature throbs his own Divine life. Whatever moves in creation, flows through it, and addresses itself to us from it, is the inner motion of God's own life. All nature is nothing else than a living, throbbing veil back of which God hides himself, and in whose folds and undulations he reveals Himself to us, clothed with Majesty. In the profound saying of the Apostle: The Invisible God is not only understood in nature, but is also clearly seen.

This clear sight is the all-important matter. Though this screen, this veil, this investiture of nature, God must be seen in his Omnipotence and Divinity. We are not to look upon nature as upon a dead palace which is beautiful by reason of its vast variety of lines and forms, but we must feel and know, that standing before the firmament, the cloudy heavens and the varied scenes of earth, we stand before God. That it is He who presents himself to us in it all, enters into us through it all, addresses us by it all, and who throughout the length and the breadth of it all gives us to behold the workings of the fingers of his Majesty. It is God who makes the lark sing for us. It is God who cleaves the sea, so that its waters foam. It is God who calls forth the sun from his tent, and at even tide directs his return thereto. It is God who every evening lights the twinkling fires in the stars. It is God whose voice we hear in the thunder. And only he who in all this, feels the very life of God, and clearly sees in it all, the Divinity of Omnipotence, understands the glory of the Invisible.



"AND THE SECOND IS LIKE UNTO IT."

God is invisible. He hides himself behind the veil of nature. But the folds of it move in undulations and in vibrations, from which we perceive that God behind it, is close by. In everything that lives in nature, rustles, throbs, and stirs itself, we feel the pulsebeat of God's own life. The Scripture has nothing to say of a dead nature, but in all sorts of ways it makes us watch that we might hear "the voice of God" and his "footsteps" in nature. When the earth trembles, it is because He is "wroth" and makes "the foundations of the mountains to shake." In the darkened firmament "God bows the heaven and comes down." In the whirlwind "God rode upon a cherub and flew." When "the deep abysses of water" foam, it is God who "rebukes" them and drives them forth with "the blast of his nostrils." The flashes of lightning are arrows, which He shoots forth into the firmament. When it grows dark the stars appear, because God calls them, and behold not one faileth. He drenches the mountains from his heights. He sends forth the fountains, so that they walk among the hills. He makes grass to grow for beasts, and for man bread to come up from the ground. It is He who cleaves the sea, so that its waves foam. And he whose ear is spiritually trained, observes how God as his good shepherd goes before him in the way, hears the sound of God's rod and staff on the ground, and is comforted thereby.

All this is not for the sake of giving us a poetic, vivid view of nature. Heathen poets have done this. In nature also everything is for the sake of religion, to reveal to us in it the glorious presence of God, to bring us the fostering sense that in nature everywhere the living and almighty God is with us on every side, and to fill us with the sublime impression of his Power, Divinity and Majesty.

But this is not all. This self-same living God, who in nature always envelops you and imposes his presence upon you, reveals himself altogether differently and far more richly in you as man, whom He has appointed as lord over nature. The revelation of his life in man is so wonderfully divine, that after having said: thou shalt love God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind and with all thy strength. He transposes this great commandment into an altogether different one: thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, and adds to this second commandment, that it is like unto the first; that to love God in his majesty and to love God in one's neighbor is one and the selfsame commandment. To love God in God himself and to love God in man, or in one's neighbor, differs in form and in fulfillment, but as commandment it is one.

Vagrant wisdom forces the representation that from dead matter gradually the plant evolved of itself, presently from the plant of itself the animal, and finally from the animal,



man. This wisdom has been christened with the name of involution and Darwin is called the prophet of this new evangel.

This whole system is nothing more than self-infatuation of unbelieving thought. But there is this truth in it, that the whole creation seems to have been built up as a temple in which man should serve as priest. Everything in it points to man. It calls for man. And when at length man appears in this temple of nature, everything that went before, appears to have served merely as preparation for his coming. Man has justly been called a world in miniature. The creation only finds its end in man. Almighty God who hides himself in nature as behind a veil, makes personal revelation of himself in man, not only in his power and majesty, but, what is far greater as Spirit. In man there is self-perception, clear consciousness thinking after God the thoughts of God, revelation of will, thirst after holiness, the spark of genius, appreciation of the beautiful premonition of eternal existence, the resumption of being in one personal existence, the imprinted, increased knowledge of the Eternal Being, and all this is in him, solely and alone because God created him after his image.

You can know a master-builder by the palace that he has built, a poet from his poetic works, a cogent thinker from his writings. But the impression of him that remains is altogether different, after you have seen in his picture the features of his face, the flaming of his eye, and the expression of his person.

Such is the case here. The Divine Masterbuilder and Artist first showed his works in nature. He comes a second time and shows his image in man, the portrait of himself. Not in one individual. This is impossible. But in man, as in the course of centuries, he was born, has lived and has died by the millions. Among these millions there was the hyssop and the cedar. In these occasional instances of mighty personalities, who like cedars have stood high above the ordinary rank and file of men, the revelation of the Being of God centered itself ever more clearly. And when you take all the virtues, excellencies and rare capacities together, which have characterized the best and noblest of the sons of men, the grand and overwhelming sum-total brings a revelation of God, which far exceeds God's self-revelation in nature.

This is still the case now. What would it not have been, had not sin marred and ruined the features of the Divine Image in man? Now there is disturbance. The mirror in which the image is reflected is ruined by a thousand cracks; it is weather-beaten and blurred. Parts of lines and features are still discernable, but no more the image in the loveliness of its unity, nor in the clearness of its tints. And when even so, this image still interests and attracts, and ever and anon fills you with warm sympathy, what must it have been to Adam, when in Eve he beheld it in its original perfection, and how deep must have been the fall in sin, which at once and irrevocably marred and ruined it.

Experience of human baseness at times is very disheartening, and makes it easier to become misanthropic than philanthropic. But from the course of centuries history retains

what was best in human nature, and by its magnificent revelation of noble human lives reconciles us again unto man. There is the picture gallery of history, of the heroes in common life and of the heroes of faith, as the Apostle declares: (Heb. 12) "we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses," wherefore we should "lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us." This is revelation of God even yet in fallen man. And if love awakens in you real drawing love for man as man, it is in virtue of the glory that is seen in man, the glory of God in human talent, in human genius and in human heroism, pouring out its rays in human love towards you.

There is something mysterious in your own self, which is attracted by something equally mysterious in another, whereby you overlook his failings, forgive his sins, disregard social differences, and with the mysterious power of love envelop him in the hidden parts of his being. And though this love can be spoiled and become itself a sin, it is in love for one who loves you, that the warm glow of Divine sympathy overpowers your heart, and the mystery of love in the Being of God reveals itself to you.

At first it is a matter of choice. In its beginnings love is limited, narrow-hearted and repellant to others; a gleam of light, which casts correspondingly the darker indifference for others as a deep shadow round about itself. This continues as long as love is still held in the meshes of selfishness. It is love from God, but it is not as yet love for the sake of God. Love for a few whom we deem worthy of our love, but it is not yet love for the neighbor, i. e., for man as man, a creature of God created after the Image of God. But the Spirit purifies this love. Love for man must be like the love for God. There must be no difference between these two, or else the love for man will detract from the love for God in the heart.

Thus it becomes more and more a process of distinction. Love of whatever of God there is in man. Likewise hate of whatever of the Evil One there is in man, with the serious purpose of love to oppose it, until it is gone from his heart. This is the way to discover whatever of God, hidden and latent through it be, still glows in other men's hearts, to encourage this spark and not to tolerate its extinction. Until at length this neighborly love reaches down to the latest trace, which in every man on this side of the grave, even in those who have most deeply fallen, still reminds us of his creation after the Image of God, and of the possibility of its restoration. Even as the lover of choice porcelains gathers with great care the shards of the broken dish because he appreciates their worth in the possible case of their being glued together again. But even so your love for your neighbor has become nothing else than love for whatever of God there still remains in him. The second commandment is like unto the first.



"THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD."

God is a Spirit. God is Invisible. But with increasing clearness He reveals himself. There are glimmerings through and back of the veil of nature. In man, who is created after his Image, he becomes more transparent. He is fully seen in Christ, who is the express Image of his Person, the Image of the Invisible God ([Col. 1:15](#)). Image and not picture. What has been sculptured conveys more reality, than what has been pictured in lines and tints. It gives the full appearance. In marble or in metal the image imitates the massive form of life. The picture that is drawn with the pencil or painted with the brush conveys in turn warmth of life, glow of soul and mobility of features, which cold stubborn marble refuses to express. But the image is more impressive. It is overwhelming by reason of its greater reality and almost tangibility.



The Scripture therefore does not speak of the portrait, but of the image of God, who is invisible, and in this expression the whole action of religion centers itself. God gives his image. Man corrupts it. Man himself wants to make an image of God. This is a heinous sin. In the end sin reaches its utmost height, when Satan, as the Beast, the Man of Sin, the Anti-christ, erects an image of himself, and demands the worship for it, which is due alone to the "express image of God's person" i. e., Christ.

This revelation of God is not to be taken in a figurative or metaphorical sense. On the contrary it is supernatural reality. Hence the saying of Jesus to Philip: "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father," ([John 14:9](#)) and hence the hope of glory for every child of God, that once he also shall see Christ as he is, and that in seeing the glorified Christ he shall see God himself face to face. He shall not see Christ and afterwards and alongside of him see God, but he shall see God in Christ. In the unregenerate, sin has made the image of God unrecognizable. In Christ God gives his image in all its fullness and perfect clearness. This was possible in our human nature, because the Son was the Image of the Father from all eternity, and as by the shadow of this Image our human nature was formed from the dust of the earth. He therefore who rests content with the revelation of God in nature, depressed as it is by the curse, or he who rests content with the revelation of God in the natural man, who is dead in sin, can not come to the true knowledge of God, but must of necessity fall away into idolatry or false philosophy, "No man knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him" ([Mat. 11:27](#)).



Christ therefore remains the center of our Divine worship, not only by what he spake, by what he did, or what he suffered, but through his own Personal Self. The glory of the apostles lies in what they have heard, and seen and handled of the Word of life. Christ is not only the chiefest among the prophets, and the Head of the apostles, He is himself the

personal embodiment of everything that is comprehended in the glory of our religion. "In him dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead bodily." We name ourselves after Him. Salvation is given us in his name. From his Person and Name has gone forth the regenerating, life renewing power, which has changed the fashion of this world. True Christianity is only where he is worshipped. He rules not merely by the tradition of what he once was, spake, did and endured, but by a real power, which even now, seated as he is at the right hand of God, he exercises over lands and nations, generations, families and individuals. The course of the world's history and the final destiny of every individual life decides for him or against him. In loyal subjection to him, the world will rejoice in peace, turned against him, it will be troubled, and will continue to be troubled, until it either returns to him, or in rebellion against him works out its own destruction.

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And therefore every effort to weaken the Christian religion and to detach it from Christ, or to mingle it with philosophic and heathen inventions must result in spiritual and moral retrogression. He who in any wise puts the supreme name of Christ on a line with that of Buddha, Confucius or Mohammed, undermines the Christian religion, and all religion, together with the happy development of mankind, since it all leads away from the knowledge of God, falsifies it, and hastens its loss. And while to know God is itself eternal life, to be enjoyed here and in the hereafter, all alienation from Christ, all beclouding of his Name is no search after life, but after death.

Seeking Christ for the sake of salvation is the beginning. But he who understands what salvation is, will for its sake cultivate the knowledge of God. Of a truth Christ is the surety that once the soul will be free from sin; the guarantee that no guilt of sin will any more distress us; the promise that once the body will be restored in glory; and no less the hope of a home in the Father's house of many mansions; of sacred joy in the realm of eternal light, and of endless fellowship with all the saints of God; in brief, of an inheritance that will provide what no ear has heard, no eye has seen, and has not entered the heart of man. But all this is yet nothing else than the glory of the palace and of those who may enter therein. But the glory of salvation is found in God alone. To own God; to know him with clear-sighted understanding; in humble worship to fellowship with him; that alone is the heart and the soul of everlasting salvation.

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Hence there is salvation in Christ both because he delivers you from sin, and because he guarantees the inheritance among the saints in light. But salvation in Christ is realized in full only when in him, as the Image of the invisible God, you lay hold on God himself, and in the knowledge of God, which radiates from this Image, you imbibe eternal life. Salvation is not prepared by Christ, brought down to us by him, and into which he shall once lead his own, in order that, when all is done, he may retire from the scene. On the contrary, there would be no salvation even in the realm of glory, if Christ would not be forever there, as the One in whom God can be seen and known and enjoyed.

But this does not tarry until we come to the house of the Father on high. In the heavenly life our knowledge of God will be made perfect, but it is begun here. We have no bare promise of future revelation, but there is a revelation of God in Christ now within our reach. The Image of God in Christ is sketched for us upon the sacred page. God is a Spirit, and this self-revelation of God in the eternal Word is expressed for us in the written Word. After his ascension also Christ lives in the Word. With it the portrait of God's Image has gone out into the world. Its presence lives among us. Thanks to the Word we are so familiar with the person and appearance of Christ, that he walks with us by the way. As he moved among the people of his times, the imagination brings him into our own surroundings. And we take his word of the long ago to ourselves, as through he speaks personally to us for admonition, encouragement and comfort.



There is moreover not only a portrait of Christ in the written Word, but powers, operations and influences have gone forth from him, which have kindled fire in the human breast and have inspired love, holy resolves and spiritual consecration, in all ages to this day, the thought of which uplifts and cheers, and as it were, brings close the very breath of Christ to us. All this is not merely the passive result of his appearance twenty centuries ago, but in sober fact it is daily fed and nourished by himself, and from him makes its appeal to us. Every soul that is born anew, every holy thought that comes into the mind, every good work which we are enabled to do, is all the work of Christ through the wondrous indwelling of the Holy Ghost. He would come and take up his abode with us. And He is come, and still comes every day and every night to confirm this indwelling in the congregation of the saints. He knows and calls us by name and adapts himself to the needs of the heart. And so he, who is the Image of the Invisible God, holds himself before us, continues in us the work once begun, and through ebb and flood tides makes the ocean of God's unfathomable mercies glisten ever more gloriously.

Thus there is a knowledge of God which we learn and derive from Christ. But there is a far greater knowledge of God which He himself imparts, which He brings, and makes fully clear to us in the hidden parts of the soul. The mystical part of it is, that he who is the Image of the invisible God, not only shows us this image, and fascinates us with it, but he chisels this image in us. Our inner life is made conformable to the inner life of Christ. His image is imprinted upon the saints of God. The highest knowledge of God that we can obtain in the earth is, when the image of God in Christ renews the image of God in us.



"HALLOWED BE THY NAME."

True knowledge of God does not come from storing the memory. It only becomes this when it finds its startingpoint in the things, which the soul inwardly discerns and experiences. Every thing here must go out from personal contact between us and God. There is no knowledge of light possible for one who was born blind. And as long as we do not perceive and discover God in ourselves, and are consciously affected by workings that go out from him, true knowledge of God is impossible. This is not felt by the sense of touch, but in our own immediate spiritual perception, so that not from reasoning, and not from what others have told us, but immediately from our own selves we know that God is and that God is great.

In times when defence of the faith called for heroic sacrifice, our fathers steadily held this in front. They insisted on the fact that God had implanted the sense of himself in man (*sensus divinitatis*), and that this was the seed of all religion (*semen religionis*). But when persecution ceased, this real spiritual background of all true knowledge of God was wantonly forsaken, and far too much place was given to intellectual abstractions. Abstract knowledge of the true God superceded the knowledge which is eternal life, with the necessary result that book-learning supplanted true godliness, and that the life of the church become enervated and weak.

The Church stood not alone in this. The retreat from reality to the paper-world of abstract inventions of the mind became noticeable in every department of the higher life. Even art, and with it poetry, became at length infected with this evil virus. Forms, words, phrases, rhymes and poeatastry took the place of golden speech, which springs up from the fountain of life itself. This was inevitably followed by an equally one-sided reaction, which brought nothing but emotions, simple impressions, pure sensations, with the necessary result that the consciousness was dimmed, inner perceptions became vague, thought became confused and utterances chaotic. Such was the case in poetry and literature, and such also in religion. Nothing remained except perceptions, sensations and impressions, which with unbelievers led to a return to polytheism, and made believers lose themselves in sentimental Mysticism.

For let it be well understood, all this is dominated, in every domain, including that of religion, by strong currents in all of human life. Things are only right when the workings of the emotions and of the intellect unite in proper equipoise and in pure harmony. But sin can not tolerate this. It continually breaks the equipoise and banishes harmony, so that first, there is a time when the intellect kills the feeling, and then there is a period when the feeling sentences the intellect to silence. And in the face of it all it is ever the sacred calling of

preaching to form just estimates of every abuse, and to jealously urge the restoration of equipoise and of pure harmony.

In these meditations on the knowledge of God we have first considered, therefore, the working of the hidden fellowship from every side. We have seen what the imagination, inspiration, the working of the will, love, the impressions obtained from nature, from man, and finally from Christ, contribute to the true knowledge of God. The reality of the secret walk with God had first to be made palpable. This was done the more easily because it harmonizes with the trend of the age.

Emphasizing the reality of inner sensations agrees with current notions of the times. Barren trifling with ideas in religion has at length also repelled the common mind. Men crave the things that can be felt and handled and immediately enjoyed, and that can pleasantly affect the entire personality. But it would be an unpardonable fault, which would soon avenge itself, if this were all. The Scripture does not allow it. The Church enters its protest against it. Every child of God asks for more.

In Scripture the significance of the name is profound and far-reaching. The name of the Lord calls us out from the flood of emotions to higher and clearer consciousness. The feeling is a gift of God. but the gift of consciousness as a feature of the image of God in us far excels it. Feeling can do no more than furnish the material which the consciousness thinks upon, classifies and transposes into clearness of form. Even the plant is sensitive. In an animal feeling is sometimes exceedingly fine. But neither plant nor animal received the glorious capacity of the higher consciousness, which enables man to take in everything, to scrutinize and to estimate things in their significance, to appreciate, and to mirror them in his own thought. Consciousness makes man a King. In feeling he suffers and endures.

Consciousness has all sorts of forms. A form for art. A form for the moral, and a form for the religious life. But of all these forms it is always consciousness first, in which man finds himself back again, becomes capable of mighty action, and lifts himself up to the spheres of the eternal Word. One-sided absorption in mysticism has therefore always ended in degeneration. Hence the Church must ever and anon send out the sacred summons to elevate the treasure of our religion to the height of our consciousness. Mysticism without more is darkness, and chaos. In our consciousness is the light.

In behalf of the knowledge of God this light is first kindled by the Name of the Lord. This is at once understood, when on our knees before the Eternal, we first address him in general as God, and then proceed to call him Abba, Father. He who in addressing God quietly, with emphasis and attention calls him: My dear Father, perceives at once, that by this name a world of thought passes through his heart, and that from the high and holy places God comes nearer to the soul. The name is what I call someone, and I can only name him whom I know. The name is immediately connected with the knowledge of the person. It is the summary in a single word of what comes before me in the person. And though our

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human names are thread-worn, so that they no longer express anything, yet we look differently upon the man whom we hear addressed by name, than upon the stranger who passes us in the street.

This can be applied to God in a far higher sense, in so much as the Name of the Lord is the expression of his Being. Call him by the covenant name of Jehovah, by the patriarchal name of God Almighty, as child call him Father, or address him by the full name of Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and the Name always expresses the being. God's name is no human invention. God has given it to himself and has revealed it unto us. It conveys to us a summary knowledge of God, and brings him closer to us. It carries him into our consciousness, and explains him to us.

Without the Name of the eternal Being, religion and idolatry merge into one another; everything terminates in a dark religious perception; the ocean of polytheism presents itself to us; and personal knowledge of the personal God is more and more lost. But with the Name of the Lord, distinction presents itself. Antithesis becomes plain between false and true religion. We come personally to stand before the personal God, and learn to know with whom we have to do, provided always that we do not allow this Name to run dead in empty sound. Sin also accounts for this. The "Our Father" is said without any thought of him, or of what the Father name implies, as though it were a dead term. It is the curse of custom, which by continuous repetition dulls the spiritual consciousness. Thus there is hasty, thoughtless and senseless use of sacred sounds, until in a moment of seriousness you turn in upon yourself, reverently repeat these holy names putting your soul into them, and you become surprised at the riches that glisten in them.

When this becomes the case, the Name of the Lord is a torch that is lighted in the consciousness, and from the darkness of the emotions, gradually and of itself the hidden being of God looms up before you with ever increasing clearness. Then you stand personally before God. and his Name always explains as much of his being, as at that moment the heart needs. And thus thoughtful consciousness can not and must not be content with stammering the Name. For then the name becomes the occasion for thinking out what it implies, and for explaining God as far as possible to the consciousness. Not every one can do this equally well. The capacity of the consciousness to absorb is very limited with one, and wonderfully great with another. Indeed there is no advance save as each one acquires knowledge of God according to the measure of his consciousness. That we should in this wise acquire knowledge of the things of the world, and of the several departments of science, and that with respect to the Name of the Lord we should neglect the same, can never be allowed. The name of the Lord must be hallowed. Indifference with respect to this is irreconcilably opposed to the hallowing of God's Name.



"THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON, AND OF THE HOLY GHOST."

In our intercourse with the world and with society, intimacy is wonderfully deepened by the permission of calling a person by name. This intimacy becomes closer still, when the family name gives place to the baptismal name. Children do not know this transition. Rules of politeness only come in force when the shoes of childhood have been outgrown. These rules but intend to heighten the unconventionality of childlife, and to elevate it to nobler forms, which purposely create a certain distance between man and man, and allow individuals to develop themselves more freely. When in later years, however, closer acquaintance leads to friendship, or association in a common pursuit lessens the distance, and titles fall away, and for the first time we call one another by name, the method of intercourse modifies itself entirely. We feel ourselves at once drawn closer together, and it seems that mutual confidence but waits the chance to reveal itself.

As a rule, the higher the station of the person who allows us to call him by name, the greater the leap from the estrangement to the more confidential intercourse. It is great indeed when we call a man by his family name. It is greatest when we address him by his personal name. Another difference is, that among women, even as with children, the personal, baptismal name is used, and almost never the family name, while among men as a rule the family name is in vogue, and the use of the personal name indicates a far higher degree of intimacy. While at length in family life every more dignified title falls away, and the use of the family-name has no meaning, but everything hinges on the baptismal name, or passes over into an entirely other sort of names, which express the relation which one sustains to the other. Until finally we come to the mother-and father-name, and we speak of husband and wife, and parents say: my child. These names of common use in the family are more than sounds. They express something essential in the mutual relationships. They are somewhat on a par with the names we give to a physician, clergyman, or sexton, which indicate that we do not mean their person but their office. But while with the latter these persons, and the relation in which they stand to us, separate themselves, the father-name, the mother-name and the name of "my child" contain this excellent trait, that they express simultaneously both the persons and the relationships, and that in this way they indicate the highest that a name can express. If then after these observations we address God as Our Father or as Abba, dear Father, we appreciate more fully than before, the supreme privilege which this Father-name confers upon a child of God.



The names by which we seek to indicate the Eternal, are not all equally intimate. The vague name of God brings no approach. The mere word God indicates a highly-exalted Being, that far transcends mankind. But by itself it has no meaning. It is exclusive and reveals nothing. It does not indicate a single relationship. It only becomes significant and vital, when we put the word my before it, and speak of "my God," or of the "Covenant-God."

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The same applies to the name: the most High. In Scripture we find it used in circles outside of Israel. It occurs in connection with Melchizedek, with Nebuchadnezzar, [Isaiah 14:14](#); in the heathen world where Daniel dwelt, and with good and bad angels. In [Ps. 82:6](#) angels are called: children of the most High. Gabriel speaks of the power of the Highest that shall overshadow Mary. Demons likewise call Jesus: Thou Son of God, most High ([Luke 8:28](#)). This is but natural. This name of the most High merely indicates that our God is exalted far above all created things. But it is not a name that brings him closer to us, or that initiates one into his secret fellowship.

It is altogether different when God reveals himself as the Almighty, as Jehovah and as Lord. The patriarchs were permitted to call Him the Mighty God. This indicates protection, a refuge in time of trouble, surety of the given promise, a party to the Covenant, who will break every form of opposition in our behalf. Hence the rich development of this name in the manifold references to God as our high tower, our Refuge, our Rock; as of a God in whose tent we may dwell, and who is our hiding-place. It is all the unfolding of this one idea: God is the Almighty One, who watches over us to bless us.

The same is true of the Jehovah name. This also is no hollow sound, but an expression of the Being of God; even of that in him which we need for our comfort in the midst of these changing scenes of life. Everything about us comes and goes. We ourselves change continuously with every changing thing around us. Scarcely has spring given way to summer, before autumn is at hand to pass on into the winter-sleep of death. This antagonizes our inner being, which calls for immortality; which longs to remain like unto itself, and which at the bar of its own consciousness maintains in old age identity with the self of the child. But this change around us and within us ceaselessly goes on. There is nothing sure. It is all as the rocking of waves, on which we are rocked and irresistibly driven along. And in the midst of this restless ocean the wonderful name of Jehovah: I am that I am, is the revelation of the enduring, the abiding, the eternal, the unchangeable, and becomes one with the name of Rock. Thus the result of this name-revelation is, that he to whom Jehovah has shown grace, and who himself has laid hold on Jehovah, has in God the fixed point, from whence he defies the restless tossing of the waters on the sea of life, and lays hold on eternity itself in the God whom he worships. To know Jehovah is to have eternal life.

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The same is the case with the name: Lord. He who only speaks of God says nothing of the relation in which he stands to Him. But he who says: Lord, our God, or God the Lord, bears witness to a relation which he sustains to the Eternal Being. He is His property and

servant From him he expects orders and ordinances. He acknowledges that he should live for God, because God is his Lord, so that he exists solely and alone for the sake of God. In this revelation of the Name, the love of God that sought us and drew us, has made still further progress. Israel was taught to know the Father-name, which is by no means revealed for the first time in the New Testament. When God said to Malachi: If then I am a Father, where is mine honor? this one saying clearly shows that the sense and significance of the Father-name was well-known in Israel. Even the antithesis with the child was understood in it. Or was it not said of David: I shall be to him a Father. And he shall be to me a son. Every one feels that in the Father-name the Eternal Being comes close to us. It is as though all distance falls away, and as though by this name God himself invites us to warm confidence, close fellowship and intimate communion. The mother-name would have done this still more tenderly, but not so significantly, because the mother-name is more closely associated with childhood and early youth, while the father-name embraces all of life. The Father-name of God moreover includes both the tenderness of the mother-name and the energetic confidentiality of the father-name. "Though a mother may forget her sucking child, yet will I not forget thee." (Is. 49:15) .

The inner religious life awakens in all its richness and fullness only at the sound of the Father name. For now there is family life, continuous dwelling with God, the outpouring of the heart, the holding of oneself fast by God in confidence and love, in the fellowship of prayer and in a tenderness, which no longer hides anything. More yet, the Father-name includes the name of the child. With the Abba Father comes the surprising discovery that one is himself a child of God, and with it is disclosed the nobility of our race, the royal exaltation above everything that surrounds us in the unconscious creation, and the thought which transforms all of life, that this is not our real life, for that our real life is with and by and in our God.

With this the last step is made possible. And at length comes the full revelation of Father, Son and Holy Ghost, of the one and threefold Being. This at once establishes the connection of the relation which we sustain to God with the Being of God itself. By itself the Father-name might yet stand outside of the Divine Being, and merely have been borrowed from, human family life. In this case it would merely imply, that as we are children of our father at home, God also watches as a Father over us. But all this becomes different at once. In his Being God is eternally Father, and in this same Being of God is the Son. Hence what is known on earth in the family is only the image of what eternally was in the Being of God. It is no longer a comparison. The real is expressed in the Father-name. Likewise when we are privileged to be called God's Child, this name is not borrowed from comparison with the family, but it comes to us directly from the image of God. He is not merely called our Father, but he is eternally our Father. We are not merely called his child. We are his child, generated by him and born from him.

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47. THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON, AND OF THE HOLY GHOST.

This is salvation. Wherefore he who takes the confession of the Trinity as a mere doctrinal question, does not fathom by far what this revelation of Father, Son and Holy Ghost implies. Only the Triune God is the wealth and the delight of the soul.



"WHO DWELLETH ON HIGH AND BEHOLDETH THE THINGS" IN THE EARTH.

He who seeks to live near unto God, and does not know how to keep his distance from God, commits sin. This is sadly evident at times in prayer before others, and shows itself at once by the use of "you" in place of "thee" and "thou." In countries where the language contains two forms of address, one more common and one more dignified, it has always been the custom to use the more common form in prayer. In France we have the "Notre Pere qui est aux cieux, ton regne vienne"; and in German: "Unser Vater der du im Himmel bist, dein Name werde geheiligt." In addressing his father a Dutch child always used the terms du and dein, which in meaning lay in between the vulgar Dutch "jou" and the dignified "thee and thou." But this has been changed. To address his father now otherwise than by "thee and thou" would be considered a breach on the part of the Dutch Child of the Fifth Commandment. When thus in addressing an earthly father a wholesome appreciation of language avoids the use of vulgar terms, it betokens a want of sufficient reverence before the Father who is in heaven, when one tries to show a certain daring, in thus addressing the Highest Being. It betrays the tendency to show how intimately the man who prays holds converse with his God. And while this is done at the expense of reverence towards God, it leads to sin.

Both what is exalted and what is ordinary have very naturally a certain trait in common. A king on his throne is exalted, his butler is only ordinary. Yet they have this in common, that their family name is rarely used. As a rule they are spoken of by name. In England people speak of King George. Almost no one thinks of his family name of Windsor. Likewise every one knows the butler by his first name, while in case of a payment of taxes his family name is frequently a subject of inquiry.

This is because the exalted departs from the ordinary measure of our life, and so does that which falls below it. As we read in [Isaiah 57:15](#), "For thus saith the high and lofty One that in habiteth eternity; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit." The lofty and the humble are here mentioned in one breath. Our ordinary life has certain measures, forms and dimensions, certain well known figures and appearances. All this together forms our human life. And it is the sin of every thing that is called heathen, that it brings the Almighty down to the level of the human. Thus the heathen make an image of a man, or of an animal, and kneel down to it, and so destroy the incalculable difference between human and Divine life.



In the face of it Holy Scripture discloses the holy sphere of the lofty, i. e., of a life that goes out far and high above our earthly, human life. Nature gives us an impression of it in the firmament that arches high above us, in the sky that hastens upwards, and in the mighty thunder that rolls through the dark hosts of clouds. In a heavy thunder-storm, in the hurricane that rages upon the great waters, in an earthquake which makes the ground to vibrate under our feet, with a volcano that vomits forth its lava, every one feels that we have to do with powers that exceed the limits of our human life. They are the interpreters of the existence of a higher, mightier world than ours. Wherefore all this takes its place in what we call the lofty. It ascends higher still when we lift up our soul and mind to the world of angels and of the blessed in eternal light. But higher still is the Most Highest, Our God in his Majesty. And every portrayal which God himself gives in prophecy of the palace of the Divine King, and of the throne of his Omnipotence above, lifts itself so high and far above all measure of our common life that of our own accord we honor therein the Past in its completeness. This must be so, in order that we might continue to be man, and leave God to be God, and that we might never lose from sight the distance at which the Creator stands high above the creature. When we realize this distance reverence attends our worship, and in deep humility of spirit we kneel before his lofty throne.



This same God who dwelleth on high, in the lofty and holy places, also dwells with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit. He humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth (Ps. 113:6). The laborer and the poor are frequently treated with far more consideration by those of assured position, than by those of lower social standing. When a subject approaches his king, as a rule he is surprised by the kind treatment which he receives. And since the Lord God is highly exalted above every one of us, it is no contradiction, but entirely along the same line, that when he turns himself to his creature, he refreshes and comforts it by an holy. Divine familiarity.



Sacred reserve therefore becomes us in our approach to God. Familiarity with the Eternal must always proceed from the side of God, and may never be presumed upon by the creature. When man makes bold to ignore the boundary of reverence, God repulses him. For then man exalts himself at the expense of the loftiness of his Lord. This interrupts the secret walk with God. At last he retains nothing but vain beating in the air after the Infinite, after a higher Being, a higher blessing, a name without content, a sound that volatilizes; and he has lost his Father and his God.

The Our Father puts us under solemn restraint. By grace we are permitted to invoke God as our Father. But for the sake of reverence it follows at once: Who art in heaven, in order that, as the Catechism warns us, no one should think of God in an earthly way.

That God is the Lofty and Holy One who dwelleth on high, and that there is a secret walk with him, because he humbleth himself to behold the things in the earth, creates of itself a two-fold endeavor to overcome the distance that separates him from us. One is, that God

comes down to us. The second is, that we lift up our soul to him. It begins with the first. The second follows. In Paradise after the fall God comes down, to Adam, and this condescension on the part of God goes on throughout all Revelation. This coming down is made perfect in the manger of Bethlehem in behalf of our entire race. At the great feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem God the Holy Ghost comes down into human hearts. This descent of God still continues with every soul that passes from death into life. Then God comes to take up his abode in the heart. Then he prays for us, and in us with groanings that are unutterable, and he who dwelleth on high dwells at the same time in the contrite heart.

Parallel with this runs the lifting up of our soul to God. "Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul" (Ps. 25:1). What we seek is "to dwell in the house of the Lord," to take refuge in him as our "high Tower," and to live our life apart from the world in order to dwell with the Holy One. "Seek the things that are above where Christ is" (Col. 3:1) and to you will be given "walks to walk among those that are above" (Zech. 3:7).

When God comes down to you, the idol of self, even as Dagon's image, must be thrown down. But when this is done, and your spirit is contrite, and you have come down from your imagined heights to humbler perceptions of yourself, the wall of separation falls down, the distance shortens, and the moment arrives when you feel that God is with you in your own heart, and that you cannot live otherwise than near unto God.

Reverence before the Almighty has always proved itself most deep and most true with those who stand nearest to the Lord. While on the other hand they who have never entered into secret fellowship with God. have become more and more devoid of all salutary fear, awe and reverence before the Lord our God. In many cases they even profane his Holiness by reckless and thoughtless use of his Name as an expletive.

It is grace, and grace alone, that the High and Lofty One takes his finite creature into his confidence, enters into secret fellowship with him, admits him into his tent and visits him in his heart. And they alone enjoy the delight of this sacred privilege, who receive it in a thankful and worshipful spirit. They have the promise that they will be translated one day from this earthly into the heavenly state, in order that in the high and lofty Fatherhouse of God, they may dwell forever with the Lord.



"BEFORE I WAS AFFLICTED I WENT ASTRAY."

There is also an entirely personal knowledge of God which comes to us through the ebb and flood tides of sorrow and of joy. But this must not be exaggerated. The idea that disappointment and sorrow as a rule open the soul to God, and that suffering always makes perfect, is loudly contradicted by experience. Undoubtedly great disasters, which strike heavily and suddenly, such as pestilence, storms that threaten shipwreck, destructive earthquakes, danger of death in sudden illness, remind the thoughtless for a moment, that there is a God with whom we have to do. But as soon as the danger is past, it takes but a little while for the faint impression to wear away. After a deliverance from pestilence, for instance, unblushing worldliness has frequently shown itself more godless than before. Everything was all right again. One was almost ashamed that at heart he had been afraid. But now one was master of himself again, and would improve his chance to enjoy life, before the possible return of similar ill luck. Or where they did not take so wide a swing as this, and dissipation was carefully avoided, the return after disaster to old-time self-sufficiency was almost systematic, and life was lived again, if not directly *opposed to, yet without*, God.

And this was not always the worst. Great adversities have frequently led souls, that shared a general belief, into atheism. It was firmly held, that if in the hour of need God were but invoked, deliverance was sure. At the sickbed of husband or child the prayer arose: O, God, save them. But when this prayer evidently brought no relief, and inexorable death dragged the loved one into the grave, the whole soul rose up in rebellion. If, prayer brings no help in distress, there is no God. Or if there is a God, he can be no God of love, and in bitterness of soul life is lived in rebellion against God.

Suffering truly makes perfect, but only when grace is known in the heart, and not with the unregenerate child of the world. In sooth, suffering can be a means in the hand of God to bring a wanderer to a stand, and to conversion, but even then conversion is effected by the work of Divine grace in the soul, and suffering in connection with this is merely an accidental means of aid. As Job sat among the ashes his wife did not hesitate to say to him; "Curse God, and die," And it is only the soul, which like that of the Psalmist, is a subject of heavenly grace, that is able, after deliverance from trouble, to confess before God: "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now, being instructed, I keep thy word" (Ps. 119:67).

In joyous and prosperous times conditions are still worse. As a rule they who live at ease are farther estranged from God, than they who have to work for daily bread. The sharply drawn antithesis between the rich man and poor Lazarus has been verified in all ages and among all peoples. Radiant beauty, abounding health, unbroken prosperity in one's career or business, great happiness at home, abundance of material wealth, so that care and trouble



were unknown, have almost never seemed able to foster true godliness. They rather fortified a man in his self-sufficiency, in the high estimate of his own self, and drew the soul away from God, rather than that by them the soul felt itself drawn toward him. Such has been the case with individual persons, with whole families and nations. When there was peace, and national power grew so that the people revelled in wealth, they went with equal pace almost always spiritually backwards. When the Dutch had to fight hard and long for spiritual liberty, religion and public morals stood high. But when in the 18th century gold streamed in from every side, and wealth became the law of life, the nation became decadent. The mighty world-empire of Rome fared the same way. Sobriety and restraint made it great, until luxury and love of pleasure began from within, what barbaric invasions from without brought to a finish. Even of South Africa it may be asked, if the gold from its mines which suddenly cast treasures into the laps of the people, did not hasten its present estate.



There have been persons, families, and whole generations, which from gratitude for material blessings became more tenderly united to God. But this was only because grace preceded and accompanied prosperity. Solomon remains the historic type of how even with God's children prosperity can work a spiritual decline. They are strong legs that can carry wealth, says the proverb. And the exception is rare in which Satan does not succeed in the abuse of our prosperity against him from whom it comes.

In joy and sorrow both however most helpful means are offered to obtain deeper knowledge of God; negatively in joy, positively in sorrow. When in examining his ways the child of God discerns that in days of joy and plenty he incurs the risk of becoming mechanical in prayer, of fostering pride, of building more confidence on himself than on God, and of being less persistent in his secret communion with God, it will turn, if he is sincere, the trend of his mind and heart. As strongly as his heart inclined before at times towards the goods of this world, he will now begin to be afraid of them. It becomes clear to him that God and worldly wealth do not agree, but rather antagonize each other. He feels that wealth itself is not at fault, for there was wealth in Paradise, and there is nothing but wealth in the Fatherhouse above, but that sin in our heart poisons our wealth, and creates a power that is hostile to God.



In this way God becomes more spiritual to him, and in God, who is a spirit, he learns by contrast to understand better than before the price, the significance and the worth of the treasure of the spiritual life. There have been men and women among the saints of God who in the midst of wealth have become richer in God, and have been merely stewards of the goods entrusted to their care in his Name, for the good of his church and of his poor. The impulse to do good sprang not infrequently from the fear, lest their wealth should draw them away from God.

But greater is the knowledge of God which is learned in times of deep sorrow, when there was previous spiritual knowledge of God in the heart. Grievous affliction breaks the

highness of self. It makes us realize that there are powers over which we have no control, and which can violently attack our strength, our lot in life, our family, our prospects of the future, and the loves of our heart. We may call these powers death, sickness, slander, anger, hatred, or what we like. But when they come upon us, and succeed in threatening or in breaking up our happiness, we feel that they stand before us as powers in hostile array, that they are independent of us, and that they have far more power over us than we over them. And this revelation of power is a revelation of the real power, which God has over us and over the world.

As long as life runs a smooth course we know about God, we worship him, and his spiritual power is felt in the inner life of the soul. But it is an altogether different matter when the power of God is seen in the material, outward life. For it is in this that affliction makes a breach. It breaks it, and you see and feel and handle the power, that comes into the life from without, working havoc and distress. There is no power with us to face it. And in our powerlessness we discover that there is real power in God alone, which great and strong is able to bring deliverance, and to repulse the evil that is arrayed against us.

Thus life becomes an arena in which these destructive powers work against us and our God, and the saving power of God enters into the combat on our side. At first we continue to take part ourselves, but when it becomes most fierce, we are incapacitated, at length we become altogether passive, and we feel and perceive that God and his angels fight for our salvation. When they are snares of sin, by which Satan seeks to foil us, this conflict is most exalted, most holy. In the end we feel that all the angels and all the devils watch intently to see, what will gain the day in the soul; the power of sin or the power of God.

This conflict may also bear an exalted character with sorrow in the outward life, as by means of new affliction Satan seeks to do us harm, and when in the end by God's help, we may sing of victory. For by this very struggle the soul learns to understand more fully than ever before, that in the thing which Satan brings upon us, the appointment of God's love is carried out; that it is the purifying process of the melting-pot; the separating process of the winnowing fan; the unfolding process of the power of faith; the inspiring process of our spiritual heroism; the loosening process of ties which we prized more highly than the tie which binds us to God; the equipment with the whole armor of God against still greater temptations to come; the anchoring of the soul to the higher world; and the humbling of self within us, in order that even in the heart, God alone may be great.

And then it is no longer the question of highest importance, whether we are delivered from our trouble, or whether we are overcome by it. If God brings deliverance, there is outward triumph, which at times is sorely needed to exhibit the splendor of the supreme power of the Lord over death and pestilence, over slander and anger, over Satan and fortune. But this deliverance is not the main thing. If the exhibition of the supremacy of God is deferred to the life to come, we must rest content. The chief matter at stake is, that the gold,

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that was darkened, may glisten again; that we shall come forth from the fiery trial with greater spiritual riches than we ever had before; that Satan shall be the loser by us and that God shall be the gainer; that God shall more clearly and more intimately be revealed to the soul in his reality, and that, as from the soul of David, so from our soul, may rise the word of testimony: "Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now have I kept thy word." All glory to Thy Name.

**"WITH THEE THERE IS FORGIVENESS, THAT THOU MAYEST
BE FEARED."**



There is still another way that leads to knowledge of God. It is one that cannot be dealt with save with most delicate care. We mean the awful way that leads through the depths of sin. A single word of Jesus indicates it at once. To Simon the Pharisee he said: "To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little" ([Luke 7:47](#)). With this word our Lord places two persons in contrast with each other. On one side the most honorable citizen of Nain, Simon, his host. And on the other side a woman, who was known in the little town as one of ill repute, a public sinner, as was the case. As her sins were many, she had been forgiven more, and consequently she loved more. The virtuous Simon, on the other hand, who had sinned less, was forgiven less, and consequently he loved less.

If love for Christ is one of the richest sources, from which vital knowledge of God flows out towards us for this woman, the way of deep sin thanks to the larger forgiveness, was the means to attain fuller knowledge of God. He who only strives after book-knowledge of God, can not understand this, and will never be able to put up with this vigorous word of Jesus. He on the other hand who knows from experience that warm, and upbuilding knowledge of God is fed and carried most effectively by love for God, accepts this word of Jesus gratefully, even though it makes him shudder.

The contrast between the dark nature of sin and holiness is so sharp, that for the moment it takes a violent effort on the part of the soul to understand that a deep way of sin can be one that leads to richer knowledge of God. And it behooves us to treat this aspect of the subject in hand the more humbly, because of those who, even in our land, in a satanic way have misapplied this word of Jesus, at times shamelessly confessing in private: "I gloriously sinned again, after which I had a blessed time of finding." Such satanic sayings are nothing else than a slander on the mercies of our God. But though this horrible abuse of Jesus' word compels utmost carefulness, the heavenly gold that glitters in this word, must not be dimmed. It is and remains true, that greater sin with greater forgiveness can lead to greater love and thereby to a richer knowledge of God.



This word alone offers us the key to the beatitude of the murderer on the cross, and to the promise of Jesus, that presently with himself he would be in Paradise. Fundamentally it is the same as what David wrote in [Ps. 130:4](#) "But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." From the forgiveness of sin springs tender attachment in the service of the Lord. Sin, forgiveness, love, and from this love knowledge of God, are the four beads in the one sacred string.

The whole Gospel rests in fact upon this recognition, and the saying of one of the heroes of the faith in earlier days: "Felix culpa," which means that there was something glorious in the fall, can never be entirely ignored. The angels of God have no knowledge of sin, hence also they know no forgiveness. Hence again they have no knowledge of the tender love which springs from forgiveness received, nor of the richer knowledge of God which is born from this tenderer affection. It is foreign to them, and therefore the apostle writes regarding this mystery that they are desirous "to look into it." Undoubtedly the revelation of the Being and Attributes of God, as it came to us in the mighty work of the Atonement is far richer, far more tender and more striking than the first revelation in Paradise. The grace, mercy and compassion of our God for the Sinner give us a look into the Father heart which apart from sin would never have been possible. The knowledge of God which we receive in and through Christ far exceeds all other knowledge of him. And yet in the Scripture the mission of the Son to this world is motived by sin alone. Every deeply moved utterance of love for God in old and New Testament springs from the thrilling experience of the heart, that the servant and handmaiden of the Lord have been redeemed from sin and delivered from misery. And neither reconciliation and sanctification, nor deliverance from misery would have been thinkable, had not sin engulfed the world. Even now it is frequently seen that the cool sympathy for God on the part of the unconverted differs from the warm attachment to God on the part of the redeemed in that the unconverted always discount sin, while the redeemed always start out from the knowledge of misery, that by reason of the knowledge of sin they may arrive at the knowledge of God. Love for God apart from sin operates most purely with the angels. And yet, however glorious their love for God may be, it is a different and a lesser love than that of the redeemed sinner for his God and Savior. It is not for us to say, how revelation would have unfolded itself, had not Adam fallen and had not Christ come. This much is certain, the rich knowledge of God's boundless mercies is the highest knowledge of God for us, and this is immediately connected with the loss of Paradise in sin and misery.

This holds true with individuals. Many people who call themselves Christians in these days count little with the knowledge of sin. They were religiously brought up, and have not fallen into open sin. Hence sin does not oppress them, and the need of reconciliation is no longer felt. The Cross addresses them differently. Their Christianity is one of high ideals and good works. The sad result is that they have less and less mystical, tender and cherishing love for God, and that the "Blessed is the man whose sin is covered" (Ps. 32:1) indicates a state of happiness, which is foreign to them.

There are others who have become deeply versed in the knowledge of sin, either through the terrors of the law, or by the fact that God abandoned them to their sin. But at length they came to a halt. A burning thirst after reconciliation took hold of them. And having found the same in their Savior they are now filled with praise and adoration of the mercies

of the Lord. Their love for the God of unfathomable compassion is more and more increased. And according to the greater measure of their sin, they enter into a far richer measure of fellowship with the Father who is in heaven, and of the knowledge of his holy Name. A more brutal outbreak in sin is not at all the necessary background of this experience. As in the case of Luther, a deeper insight into ordinary sin can create an equally burning desire after reconciliation. Of all the apostles St. Paul glories most enthusiastically from the love of the redeemed, because, having persecuted the church of God, he felt himself to be the chief of sinners. And so it still remains true, that he who has fallen deeply into sin, and has come to a full and genuine conversion, has attained the thirst after reconciliation and the gratitude of love for the same, in such a measure of intensity, as to spread in a surprising manner blessings everywhere, even to the extent that at times one can envy him the warmth of his inner life.

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Shall we then sin, that grace, and with it love and knowledge of God may increase? Far from it. This question is diabolical. He who propounds it does not love God. He offers God's love an insult in the face. But it does imply, that it is safe for every child of God to look more deeply into the sins of his own heart; not to ignore his secret sins; ever and anon to apply again the full atonement to all the breadth and length of the sins of his heart; and thus to become ever more deeply sensible of how endlessly much there was that needed forgiveness, and that has been forgiven.

There are two ways that here present themselves. One man minimizes his sin. He is offended when he is told of his guilt. He will not hear it said that he is guilty in all sorts of ways. He holds himself erect, and deems himself a saint. This is the way to cover up one's sin, and not to thirst after reconciliation; not to return thanks for reconciliation and love; and consequently to remain far removed from the knowledge of God. But there is also another way. It is that of humbling oneself. In this way the child of God distrusts himself. He is grateful for having sin pointed out to him. He investigates ever more closely his heart, his past, and the present state of his soul. And so there is everytime new need of reconciliation, new joy in forgiveness received, more love for the Merciful One, and an ever deeper entering into the knowledge of God his Savior.

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Moreover he who as a Christian man imitates Simon the Pharisee, and esteems himself to be just, can not bear that one who is a "Sinner" is addressed by Jesus. There is the exalted sense of one's own saintliness, which has no place for the compassion shown the prodigal who returns.

But when by a deeper knowledge of our own sin we feel that we ourselves are small, and we refresh ourselves each day with a new draught from the cup of reconciliation, there will awaken in our hearts something of the joy of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth, which is greater than the joy over the ninety and nine who have no need of repentance. For this is the Gospel of Christ.

"I ACKNOWLEDGE MY SIN UNTO THEE."



Although it is a Divine appointment, for which it behooves us to give thanks, it is nevertheless difficult for us, sinners, to realize that in the end even sin is compelled to become a means of leading us into deeper knowledge of God, and of making the majesty of the Lord to shine upon us more brightly. That as the tempter of men, Satan abuses this appointment of God, that in a heaven-defying way he may mingle sin and religion, does not in the least darken the glory of this appointment. Neither can anyone say, whether, in case Satan first, and after him Adam, had not fallen, the Lord God would have opened another way, unknown to us now, by which to lead us into an equally deep, if not a still more intimate knowledge of his Name and Being.

All these reflections however do not advance us a single step. We have been born in a sinful world. We have to count with it. And this being the case it is meet for us to thank God, that he makes good to come out of evil, and that he uses even sin to enrich the knowledge of his Name and Being in the inner perception of his child. Grace, compassion and mercy, as revelations of Divine love are more profound, than Divine blessing in prosperity and Divine help in time of need. But the knowledge of this grace and compassion can only be known by him, who has tasted the sweets of reconciliation, and who can count himself not only among God's creatures, but also among the redeemed. In Christ there has come to us a knowledge of God's name and being, such as has never been known outside of him, but Bethlehem as well as Golgotha find their cause alone in the salvation of sinners.



Even the knowledge of the Almighty power of God has been greatly enriched by sin. Does not the apostle say that the "exceeding greatness of his power, according to the mighty working of his strength ([Eph. 1:19](#)) was only revealed to us in the resurrection of Christ and in the regeneration of believers." In the re-creation there was a greater exhibition of majesty and of almighty power than in the creation. In causing Christ to rise from the dead there was a mightier unfolding of Divine strength than in the first call from nothing into being. But there would have been no resurrection without death, and no re-creation without fall, and since both fall and death find their starting point in sin alone, this higher revelation of the Almighty power of God, which shows itself in resurrection and in re-creation would never have come to us in this way, had we not sinned. And in order to get the full meaning of what this implies we must go down still one step more, and come to acknowledge, that in the hand of God sin becomes the means to heighten, and make more clear, our inner perception of the holiness of God.

Of course they who in their unconverted state still walk in the way of sin, are here left out of count. We only speak in this connection of the redeemed, of those who have found

eternal life itself in knowing God. And how did the history of sin in their case run? How runs it now? Two classes of persons should here be kept apart. Those who broke out into sin in an offensive way, and the others who remained within the bounds of an ordinary sinful existence. Mary of Magdala and Salome do not stand in one line. Peter, who thrice denied his Master, passed through an entirely different inward struggle from John, who remained faithful to his Savior. The spiritual experiences of the two differ in this respect, that the sinner who went far astray can sometimes in his conversion arouse the jealousy of the sinner who remained within bounds. The inner tumult of the first is far greater, his struggle in the transition far more heroic. His glorying in grace, when at last the burden of his guilt falls from his shoulders, is much more abundant. The prodigal who returns has something, which the son, who remained at home, lacks.

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He who deems however that the calm, ordinary sinner can not drain the cup of grace to the bottom, if we may so express it, is mistaken. Even he who is guilty of the heinous sins of drunkenness, immorality or dishonesty, runs the great risk of counting these extravagant dissipations as his real, actual sin, and of ignoring the sinful nature back of them. It is repeatedly seen, that such sinners who have been converted from their former evil practices, entirely get away from them, while for the rest they continue in sin, without making any advances in sanctification of heart and life. On the contrary they who have continued unblameable before the eyes of men, have after their conversion, a much keener eye, for the refined, hidden sins of the heart, and as fruit of their faith they unfold a much richer Christian life. The convert from gross sins frequently counts all his life long with the weight of pounds alone, while the quiet convert weighs with the assay-balance.

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This is not true of all. Alas, there are not a few who turn the fact itself that they remained free from great sins, into a cloak in which they make a fine appearance, and with their ordinary sins of pride and quiet selfishness go on to life's end, without ever putting up a serious fight against them. But if we take the redeemed in the narrower sense, the tenderness of conscience with respect to sin even goes so far, that they distrust their own examination of heart, and always end with the prayer that God will also make known to them their secret sins, and forgive them. For when the heart does not condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows all things, even those that hide in the innermost recesses of the soul.

But in whatever way and measure the inner struggle against sin awakens, it always begins with a troubled conscience. And that which disturbs us in this is always the voice of God upbraiding us for sin. This is partly the case with people of the world whose conscience at first is never entirely extinguished. But with them the voice of God in the conscience is not recognized. They take it either as a troublesome resistance on the part of their spiritual nature against the things which their carnal nature craves. So they sear the conscience in

order to go freely on in sin. Or, they take it as an impulse of their better self, and dream that they train themselves in virtuous living. This results in a good deal of social respectability and praise-worthy self-control. But it bears no fruit for eternal life, inasmuch as they claim the honor of it for themselves, and withdraw themselves from God, with whom they refuse to reckon.



The operation of the conscience is altogether different with the redeemed. With them the first effect of the troubled conscience is, that they start back; that they become angry with the sin which they have committed; that for all the world they wish that they had never done it, and that now they stand embarrassed and ashamed before God. This gives rise to prayer. Amidst the cares and labors of the day they are aware that God opposes their sin, but there is much diversion in general intercourse with people and in work, and so they easily get away from the sense of it. In distinction however from the people of the world, they still pray. And at the close of day when before sleep they are about to bend their knees before God, they feel disturbed, they shrink from prayer, they are conscious that something lies in between their heart and God, and they scarcely dare to appear before his face.

And then comes the moment of decision. If they shrink back and omit to pray, the conscience takes the soporific drink. And unless God intervenes, they are lost. [Psalm 32](#) describes what follows: "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring." But David did not faint. He struggled on. However deeply ashamed he was of himself, he bent his knees before God. Verse 5 of this same Psalm contains the record. "I said I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord." And so: I acknowledged my sin unto thee. . . . And thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." When thus the soul holds on, and before God on bended knee mourns sin, the blessing is sure to follow. "For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found. Floods of great waters may come. But they shall not come nigh unto him."



And in this contrition of soul there is a recognition of the holiness of God with an intensity such as has never been experienced before. It is no longer a holiness of God which was reasoned out and inferred from the given commandments; neither is it a holiness which loses itself in vague admiration of its own purity. It is the Holy One who in our conscience presses himself upon us, and who upbraiding our sins by his holiness, makes us to test and to taste the same in the bitterness of our self-reproach and penitence. The holiness of God then presents itself in the light which of necessity is formed by the striking contrast with the shadow of our sin. It reveals itself as a power, which quick and quickening has antagonized the death of our sin. In its absolute judgment of a definite, concrete sin, it assumes a definite, concrete form. And after it is understood by us in this definite, concrete form, it lights up as an immeasurable realm of holiness, over against the dark background of our sinful nature, from which the particular sin sprang. This holiness does not hover, as it were, over us. But

it cleaves unto us. And thus convicted of sin, and under sentence of death, our soul comes into direct contact, and immediate touch with the holy God. It brings us living and striking knowledge of him, with whom we have to do. The sin was terrible. But God used it for this end: that through it we should come to a better understanding of his holiness.



"WHEN GOD SHALL JUDGE THE SECRETS OF MEN."

They who conscientiously devote a portion of their time to God, and try to know him, are few. Prayer, church-attendance and good works can be practiced without actual engagement with God. In many prayers the soul fails of appearing before God, and of having God appear to the soul. Many people go to church and come home again, without having met the Lord, or having been met by him. Even though during sermon time the mind was engaged with Divine things, by itself, this was not being busy with God. And as to good works, it needs scarcely be said, that we can fill up an entire day with them, without so much as devoting one thought to him, who inspired us to do them. , there is little, actual business done with the Living God.

Thus far we only had in mind confessing, believing Christians, who practice prayer, who live for their church, and do good works. Think now of the unchurched multitudes, who are not worldly in any bad sense, but rather cultivate seriousness of thought, who honor virtue and admire higher ideals. And what do we find even with the noblest and best of them, of a being busy with God? And of those who live only for business, and after that for pleasure, it must be confessed with shame, that there are no dealings with God at all. Add to this the people who are outspokenly wicked and godless in society at large, and others again who are indifferent to all higher interests, and we see, that the number of those who give but a small part of their time to fellowship with God is very, very small.

It must also be felt, if we may so express it, that in his love for the world, all this must be very painful to God. For God so loved the world, that he gave it his only-begotten Son. He imparted unto it susceptibility to know him, and to love him in return. Only a small part of this world bears the Christian name. And in this small part, that has been baptized, even there there are but very few, who day by day turn their soul and mind to him, and enter into his secret communion. All the rest pass by on the other side. They are filled with other things. And the knowledge of his Name and Being is scorned by them.

But according to the Scripture, this is certain, that soon or late the moment comes for every one, in which God shall compel him, to deal exclusively, and with nothing else than, with himself alone. He has appointed a day for this. And for whatever man this day breaks, in it he shall have to appear before God, and God shall overtake him with his Majesty, and shall take such possession of him, that he shall not be able to think of anything save God. That day is the day of judgment.

In the representation of this day of judgment art has done much harm. As art it could not do otherwise than work with the representation. For this it borrowed its material and image from an earthly court of justice, with the millions and the millions that have ever lived on earth as defendants before God's holy tribunal. It could not do this otherwise, and this has been done in a masterful way by more than one pencil or pen. It should not be for-

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gotten however, that it is the outward representation of what is chiefly of a spiritual significance. And the spiritual act in judgment can not be pictured. So that when infidelity came in, which denies the judgment, it made use of the outward representation, by which to turn the matter itself into ridicule, and to show its impossibility. Where would there be room for these millions and millions of people to stand? How much time would it take to give each individual a hearing, even to the particulars of every word and thought? It is said to be a day, and for every family it would require more than a year.

Our confession struck a truer note, when in view of the spiritual nature of the judgment, it spoke of it as the opening of the books of conscience. With this understanding of it, the judgment is a review, in one clear vision, of the whole life; an immediate sight of totals, where before we only reckoned with the unpaid accounts of each moment. The judgment is a settling of accounts. What we owe God, and what is our due for deeds done either good or evil, are recorded side by side. This is the teaching of Scripture. For we must all appear, "says the apostle," before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10). And every accountant knows what accounting here means, and what it implies, that in the judgment, God shall give us his bill in toto, accompanied with explanations, so that we shall be convinced in the conscience that the account is correct and just. We shall have the total result, the entire resumption of our life, from childhood on, shown unto us with such certainty, as to exclude every suggestion of doubt.

In our automatic counting-machines, the cipher of whatever is put in, appears at once in sight. The addition takes place of itself. This is the image of our life. And he who throughout all of life has refused to notice the cipher, that showed itself each day, will in the judgment day suddenly see the total amount, in which nothing has been forgotten, and against which nothing can be said. There will be an opportunity to verify it, but this will do no good. A mistake in this account is unthinkable. And with the sudden clearing of the light of the conscience which will illumine all of life, there will nothing rest, save the acknowledgement that God is just.

This is nothing to him, who believed and fell asleep in Jesus. The end will reveal to him also a terror-striking shortage, but on the opposite side of the page will appear the atonement by Christ, which covers everything. His judge is his Savior. And liberated from the curse, he enters into eternal blessedness.

But this opening of the book of the conscience will be terrible for those who died without Christ. Conversion will then be too late. There can be no more hiding in Christ. No more part can be obtained in the atonement. There is nothing of good to balance the immeasurable guilt. And the sinner must faint under the weight of a sentence, that is read to him in his own conscience. And this will be the eternal pain in his inmost self, of the worm, that restlessly gnaws, without ever dying; and of the heat in his conscience of the fire, that shall



never be extinguished. There is no need of any torture from without, to be added unto this. The fire itself within is the eternal punishment, and this inner consumption of self will be as a cancer, that shall eat into all his being, and corrupt his entire existence. Even as cancer on the outside occasions no pain, but that which eats into the vitals within, so will the punishment begin from the conscience and go through all his existence.

This will be "the knowledge of God" on the part of those, who here on earth, have not willed to know the grace of God. This knowledge of Divine grace is twofold. On one side, here on earth, through faith, it is a knowledge of God that saves. "This is eternal life that they may know Thee, the only true God." But on the other side there is a knowledge of God, which only comes after death, in the judgment, but which for this very reason brings no eternal life, but eternal death. In the earth it was lightly asserted, that there was no God, or that nothing of him was known, or that there was no need to concern oneself about him. But after death one stands before this disregarded God, feels the terror of his all-pervading presence, and is no longer able, try what he may, to escape from him. For this is not the end of the judgment, that immediately after it, life can be continued in the old forgetfulness, as though there were no God. No, the self-destroying impression received of God, at the moment of the actual judgment, continues, and is never effaced again. It is recorded of devils that they well know that God is, and that they tremble. And all who in this life have evaded God, will come in the judgment, and after it, to the terrible discovery, that they have been mistaken. They will see with their own eyes, that God really exists and they also will tremble.

Behind the veil of visible things in this life, and back of the mists of our earthly limitations, one can cover himself with the pretence that God is not seen, and thus persuade himself that there is no God because willfully he does not see him. But all this ends with death. Then this veil will be rent from the top to the bottom, these mists will lift themselves, every pretence will fall away, and the majesty of the Lord God will appear, and disclose itself in all its glory.

The knowledge of God, which was not desired in life, will then come of itself, and deluge the lost. But it will be a repulsive knowledge, which will not draw them toward God, but will make them recoil from before his terribleness. And wherever they may look, there will be nothing behind which to hide from the sight of the majesty of God. It then becomes the heat of a sun which does not cherish, but sears. The Scripture calls it hell, and so it is, but only by what God through his sacred presence makes it. If God could be done away, or if one could withdraw himself from the Eternal, or hide from before his Face, hell would be ended. But this is impossible. God's holy presence will not cease to deluge the lost, and that is eternal death. It is well with him, therefore, who in this life has sought the knowledge of God in Christ. After death this knowledge will be for him the drinking in of Divine sympathy. But woe to him who shall only learn to know God in the judgment. For him this knowledge will be nothing but horror.

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"DYING HE WORSHIPPED."

In connection with the knowledge of what lies beyond the grave the moment of dying is deeply significant. The way in which we see others die, and in which we die ourselves, contributes to our knowledge of God. In this hour many things that stood between God and the soul fall away. We then stand on the threshold of the unseen life, and the words of the Psalmist: "Our feet stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem," are applicable to the entering in through the gates of the new Jerusalem.

Let us take dying in this connection in its real true sense. Dying is an act. In our natural birth we are passive. Life then only begins. But when God has privileged us to reach the years of maturity, and the end has come, the servants and handmaidens of the Lord should not be dragged out by death against their will, but of themselves they should face it with a will. And by the way in which they do this, they should reveal the fruit of their labors of faith. The first Christians sang hymns of praise as they carried out their dead. And St. Paul said: "For me to die is gain, for to be with Christ is by far the best." Thus dying was the last struggle, but not of one who defends his life against the waylayer. It was much rather the struggle of the hero, who bravely went ahead, in order jubilantly to come to God.

Indeed, we may not court death. It is our bounden duty to guard our life unto the end. Suicide is no dying, but self-destruction. Dying is an exhibition of courage. Suicide is cowardice. It is failure. It is lack of daring to continue the battle of life. It is desertion from the ranks. But though until the end, as long as there is hope and chance, nothing must be left untried to continue God's service on earth until he issues forth the call,--when it comes, the smile of sacred joy is more in place than the heaving of a sigh. He who believes has always confessed that he does not belong here, but that his home is above. Dying must make this real. In dying the seal must be put upon all our life of faith. Dying is nothing to a child of God save the entrance into an eternal life. And this it can not be, unless it is an act. We must not be overtaken, lifted up and carried off. We must hear the call, and answer in reply: "Behold, here I am, Lord," and then bravely enter the valley of the shadow of death and go through it, knowing that the Lord awaits our coming, and that by his hand he leads us through this darkness to the light.

Let it be said at once that such ideal dying is rare. The woes and sorrows of death often rob dying of its ideal, exalted and sacred character. A state of coma not infrequently prevents conscious and willing dying as an act of the soul. It even happens, alas, that a narcotic potion is administered, whereby dying is degenerated into a sleeping of oneself away. As long however as the person himself is irresponsible in this matter, let not such an impossibility of dying manfully in the faith on the part of a child of God be turned into reproach. In this

matter also God is sovereign. As a matter of fact, the Lord frequently withholds heroic dying in the full consciousness of faith.

Care however should be taken not to condone too much along this line. The Scripture always avoids sentimentalism. It rarely pictures a deathbed scene. In fact it only outlines the death of Christ on Golgotha, and that of Jacob. Of the latter we are told that when he felt the end draw near, he strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed, and leaning upon the top of his staff, worshipped, and blessed his sons ([Heb. 11:21](#)).

Jacob strengthened himself, that is to say, he did not allow himself to be overcome by weakness and regret, but struggled against it, took hold of himself, and gathered together the last of his waning strength, in order that in dying he might glorify his God. He had no thought of caring for himself, of being concerned about his own spiritual estate, or about breathing forth his latest breath. And when he blesses his sons, it is no family affair, but an holy prophesying that through his sons, as founders of the tribes of Israel, the kingdom of God should come and flourish, and the Messiah would arise. "Until Shiloh come!" this was the zenith of his prophecy. He blesses his sons, but in and through them his prophecy points to the coming of the Kingdom of heaven. Hence the Epistle to the Hebrews describes this as his greatest act of faith. "By faith, Jacob when he was dying, blessed his sons and worshipped" ([Heb. 11:21](#)).

We do not deny that in dying, darkness can overtake the soul. Satan can be let loose to harrass our latest hour. But as a rule, we may say that life is given us for the purpose of making sure our faith, and that in dying the results of this assurance must be shown to the glory of the Lord. And therefore we should not allow ourselves in dying passively to be overcome by weakness and grief. In the article of death the will, the courage and the elasticity of faith must still struggle against the weakness of the flesh. In this holy moment, the spirit, and not the flesh should conquer. Such was the case with Jacob. He strengthened himself in order to be able to die in a godly manner. Had he not done so, in all probability he too might have passed away in a semiconscious state. But this he did not do. His mighty spirit shook itself awake. In dying he glorified God. In doing this he left a shining example for every Christian to imitate.

There is a meeting with God in such dying, which enriches Divine knowledge, both in the one who is about to depart and in those who watch at the bedside. It is generally reported, as a most desirable way of dying, that one quietly and peaceably fell asleep. This almost always means that without giving any further signs of life, the patient passed away in an unconscious state of mind. This may very well be the case with unbelievers also. Of those who die without Christ it is continually said, that they died equally quietly and calmly; even perhaps with less perturbation of mind, than many a child of God that is harrassed by anxiety and doubt. Nothing of a serious nature was said to them. They themselves made no reference to anything. The physician assured them that there was no need of alarm. And so the patient passed

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quietly away, without having known any terror of death. And others, seeing this, were impressed that there is really nothing to dying; it was all so quiet and gentle. Then came flowers to cover the bier. Visits of condolence are no longer paid. In this way nothing connected with death is spoken of. And when the funeral is over, ordinary matters form the topic of conversation, but not the things that are eternal. And thus the mighty lesson of dying is lost. Death ceases to be preacher of deeper seriousness. And the Lord of life and of death is not remembered.

We, Christians, should not encourage this evil practice. And yet, we do it, when imitating the way of the world we say of such dead that they "peaceably passed away." Not calmly and peacefully, but fighting and conquering in the Savior, should be the dying bed in the Christian family. He who has not the heart for this, but is careful to spare the patient all serious and disquieting thought, is not merciful, but through unbelief he is cruel.

In dying Jacob has worshipped. On the death bed one can pray. One can pray for help in the last struggle. Intercession can be made for those that are to be left behind, and for the Kingdom of God. By itself such prayer is beautiful. On one's deathbed to appear before the face of God. This last prayer on earth, when every veil drops away, and the latest supplication is addressed to God, who awaits us in the courts of everlasting light. Such prayer teaches those, who stand by, to pray. Such prayer exerts an overwhelming, fascinating influence.

But Jacob did more. In dying he worshipped. In dying he felt impelled to offer unto God the sacrifice of Worship, and to render unto him praise and thanksgiving and honor; to lose himself in the greatness and majesty, in the grace and mercy of God; and thus to offer him the fruit of the lips, better than he had been able to do in life. Such solemn worship on the deathbed is the summary of the worship which we have offered unto God in life; except that now it is felt more deeply, more intensely, immediately preceding the moment, in which among angels and saints above, we shall bring God the honor of his Name. All the knowledge of God that has been acquired before concentrates itself in such deathbed worship, and in that moment it is wonderfully illumined, enriched and deepened. Now the dying saint knows God more clearly than he ever did before. He almost sees God face to face.

This worship also bears fruit in behalf of those who watch and minister at the bedside. At a deathbed, love is strongly aroused. The beginnings of mourning already struggle in the heart. This makes it more receptive than ever, and the impression which it receives at such a time is overwhelming. Ordinarily it is taken for granted that one believes. But frequently no indications of it are seen. The contrary rather is suggested by narrow-mindedness and sin. But when the moment of dying has come, and children see it of their father, a husband of his beloved wife, that in this affecting hour the faith does not fail, but is maintained; that at the gate of eternity its language becomes more animated and forceful, and it seems that one hears an utterance of the soul after God, then the prayer of worship from the lips of the



dying brings you as it were in the very presence of God, and makes you feel that he is nearer at hand than you ever knew before.

Much dying would be far different than it now is, had life been different; if in dying, faith would waken up more fully; and if God's child would understand that even in dying he has to fulfil a duty, which he owes to God and to his fellowmen. Then dying would be far more than now a preaching of sacred reality, and the results of it would be effective in life to the honor of God.

"GIVE YOURSELF TO FASTING AND PRAYER."

It is a contradiction in terms, that while members of the churches of the Reformation profess to live according to the precepts of Holy Writ, they do not fast. It is certainly a Scriptural rule of life, not only in the Old, but also in the New Testament. Christ himself fasted forty days and forty nights. St. Paul exhorts the children of God, that they give themselves not only to prayer but also to fasting. What is possibly stronger still, Christ has said, that there is a kind of evil spirits that "goeth not out but by prayer and fasting" ([Matt. 17:21](#)).

In the days of Jesus' ministry on earth the question arose: "Why do the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not." Though it may be inferred from this that in those days the disciples did not observe the Jewish fasts, Jesus settles the question by saying: "When the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, then shall they fast" ([Mark 2:18-20](#)). History shows that from the beginning the Church of Christ has practiced fasting. We learn from [Acts 13:2](#) that at Antioch, where the followers of Jesus were first called Christians, as they fasted and prayed, the Holy Ghost gave them a revelation. It is well known that in Roman, Greek and Nestorian communions fasting is observed. It is also known that in Reformation times, days of prayer went hand in hand with fasting. Is it not therefore in contradiction with the significance which Scripture and history attach to fastings, that among us fasting is almost altogether abandoned. It is still our habit, as it was in the days of Hosea, to say: "Our God, we Israel, know thee" (8:2). But when Scripture shows that the Knowledge of God is greatly advanced by prayer, and prayer by fasting, is there not something lacking, when we, who say that we know God, do not fast?



The answer is given in [Is. 58:6](#). In the days of Isaiah there was much fasting observed in Judah, but by his prophet Jehovah declared that he would not accept this kind of fasting. "Is it such a fast that I have chosen; a day for a man to afflict his soul? to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? . . . "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, . . . to deal thy bread to the hungry, . . . when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily."

This striking protest against dead formalism has justly aroused among us a sense of aversion to formal fasting. As a form, as a mere bodily exercise, and as an exhibition before the world, fasting does not sanctify. Indeed it can work profanation. Hence Jesus' warning in the Sermon on the Mount: "But thou, when thou fastest, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance . . . but anoint thine head, and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men

to fast, but unto thy Father, which is in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly."

As strongly, however, as our blessed Lord denounces formal, outward fasting, he commends fasting of the right sort, and declares that it has its reward of grace with God. We are only safe therefore, when on one hand we oppose dead formalism in fasting, and on the other hand bring into practice the true fasting, which has been appointed of God. And as we look back upon the past, and look around us in the churches, we must observe that dead, formal fasting has assiduously been abandoned, and that real, religious, and Divinely appointed fasting also has almost utterly died out.

This leads to spiritual loss. We want eternal life. "This is eternal life, that they might know thee, the only true God." Nothing advances one in this knowledge of the only true God like prayer. And prayer becomes more fervent and tender by fasting. Can we escape therefore the fatal conclusion that by the disuse of fasting our prayers become less fervent, and that we consequently suffer loss in this ever ripening knowledge of God, which is eternal life?

If this applies to ourselves and to our families, does it not equally apply to our churches? And when every time again we observe in our churches, that there are evil spirits at large, which can not be driven out except by fasting and prayer, is it too much to say, that the disuse of fasting is one cause, among others, that these spirits continue to harrass the life of the church?

Should fasting, as a rule, on a given day of the week be introduced again? By itself there would be nothing against this. But it is to be feared that before long it would end in formalism again. [Isaiah 58](#) and [I Cor. 7:5](#) show that fasting, in the spiritual sense, has a much broader basis than a temporary abstinence from food. It aims to put an end to the dominion of the body over the soul, and to restore the soul's dominion over the body. You know yourself that everything that feeds and pleases the body has a tendency to repress the clearness and elasticity of the life of the soul. The side of our life that is turned toward the world rarely operates in harmony with the side of our life that is turned toward God. When you are alone you feel as a rule closer to God than when you are in company. In the banqueting hall you are farther away from God than in your bedchamber. In the midst of the cares to increase your wealth you enjoy less of God's presence than at the times when you give of your money to the poor. You are closer to God when you feed the hungry than when, with your family or guests, you feast on choice foods and drinks. In brief, experience confirms again and again, that the less enjoyment you take in the world, the more intimate is your thought of God. The more you get apart from the cares and the joys of the world, the closer becomes your walk with God.

Do not infer from this, that in order to know God, you must withdraw entirely from the world. This is what the Stylists thought, the recluses and contemplative monks. This is



wrong, because "fasting and prayer" is indeed one of the means by which to find God, but there are many other means to this same end, which only present themselves in the midst of the busy life. We treated these means in former meditations. We will come back to them later on. But it must be a rule of our life, not to leave untried a single means, by which to grow in knowledge of the only true God, and that therefore we have to serve God as much in the midst of the world, and in the enjoyment of his blessings in our families and surroundings, as in our practice of "fasting and prayer." For it can not be denied, that it is helpful and beneficial, purposely, from time to time, to break away from the overwhelming dominion of the body and the world, and thereby make ourselves more susceptible to the influences from above. To this end one will be more impressed with the need of fasting and retirement at set times. Another will only come to it in moments of anxiety and deepening seriousness. Let every one with respect to this be sure in his own conscience. It may depend on temperament and circumstances. Let no one judge his brother.

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But the practice itself has a right of being introduced into the habits of life. Our first interest is eternal life. This can only be tasted in an ever deeper knowledge of God. This in turn is fed by secret prayer. And secret prayer has need, that in the face of the offensive dominion of the body and the environments, the dominion of the soul be strengthened by fasting rightly understood. That sobriety in food and drink is an aid in this direction, appears from the difficulty to pray, which you find upon your return from a banquet-hall. But this is merely the beginning of real fasting. It is not only abundance of food and drink, but extravagance as well in ornaments and clothes, in diversions and satisfactions of the senses, and in financial cares, voluntary or involuntary, that harmfully affect your approach to God. Fasting, therefore, as an aid to sanctify prayer and to make it more fervent, is by no means alone the depriving of the body of food and drink, but the withdrawal of self by generosity from the dominion of money, by sobriety and simplicity of life to liberate oneself from the power of self-indulgence, and certainly also by seclusion to escape the mastery of environment.

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This is what the Lord declared, when he extended fasting to loosening the bands of wickedness, and to feeding the hungry. From time to time the soul must set itself free, cast away all bands and become entirely itself. Then the gates lift up their heads, then the door of eternity is opened, and God makes his approach to us, and our soul its approach to God, and the knowledge of God, which is eternal life, blossoms in the sanctuary of the heart.

"NO PRAYER COULD PASS THROUGH."

When a child wants to ask his father for something, he first seeks him, and only when he has found him, can he ask for what he wants. To state his request before his father is found is folly on the part of the child. Is not this an instruction in prayer?

He who as a child of God would pray to his Father in heaven, and in faith ask something from him, must first make his approach to God. He must first seek the Divine Presence. And only when he has found the Lord, can he ask for what he wants. This is little thought of in prayer. We frequently observe that in our prayers, and in those of others, there is more speaking in the air, than prayer and address to the living God. Can it be denied that in extemporary prayer before others, and even in public worship, there is more argumentation and reasoning, than real appeal to the most High, who is clothed with Majesty.

Less can be said about secret prayer. Each man knows only his own prayer, and what others may tell him of theirs. But though we confine ourselves to this, the complaints uttered in a brother's ear about the barrenness of prayer, are such, as to justify the fear, that the recital of words begins, before the soul has consciously entered the presence of God. Frequent and long prayers encourage this habit. The eyes close, the hands are folded, and one begins certain known formal prayers, which though not irreverent, are out of harmony with the very deep reverence which is God's due.

The Scripture repeatedly shows that not every prayer counts as such with God. It speaks of moments in which our prayers are hindered. It makes us hear the word of the Lord: "When ye make many prayers, I will not hear" ([Is. 1:15](#)); and it records the complaint of the prophet: "that no prayer passed through unto God" ([Lam. 3:44](#)). Then heaven is as brass; there is no opening and no disclosing; there is no access and no entrance, and no spirit of prayer and supplication.

In Zion there was "an oracle of God's holiness." When a godly Jew wandered in the mountains, or dwelt by the Jordan, he turned himself in prayer toward this oracle ([Ps. 28:2](#)). When Israel was in exile, they prayed with their faces toward Zion. As an after effect of this habit we still find in many countries, that people do not pray at home, but in churches. Such churches are open all day, and in the solemn stillness of such stately edifices one kneels down, unobserved and unknown, in the expectation that in these impressive places the presence of the Lord will make itself felt more effectively.

This is unquestionably a great privilege for those who live in crowded cities. He who has a room at home, where he can lock the door, in order to be alone with God, has no need of it. But the great masses of people are not so fortunate. At home they are almost never



alone, it is almost never quiet, and seclusion which is so helpful to prayer, can almost never be found.

Apart also from this difficulty, it must not be forgotten, that in Israel God himself had appointed such an oracle of his holiness, and had directed the souls of the faithful toward it. It was a means of cultivating real prayer. It everytime reminded the godly Jew that in order to pray he must first look to God with the eye of the soul, and that before prayer, connection must be made between the soul and God. To pray without first finding God, and knowing that one speaks to him, is really a caricature of prayer. If we would pray we should know, that at that very moment God attends to the voice of our prayer; that he inclines his ear to our prayer; and that he listens to the voice of our supplication. And this spiritual perception can not be awake in the soul, unless, before prayer, we consciously place ourselves in the Divine Presence. God's child always prays in Jesus' name. He must do this, because irreconciled and unredeemed, he would find no listening ear with God. But even prayer in Jesus' name becomes a word without meaning, when one does not first place himself before the face of the Holy One, and feels that of himself there is no approach to God, and that he only appears before God in Christ.



In this connection the difficulty is God's omnipresence. The very perception of faith that God is not bound to either time or place, but that he is everywhere present accounts for the fact, that one inclines to speak without first concentrating his thoughts upon God, placing him before the eyes, and seeking his presence until it is found.

In his Word God teaches us otherwise. For though the Scripture reveals to us in most glorious terms the omnipresence of God, in behalf of prayer it can only mean, that wherever we are, we are always and everywhere able to find God. But it reveals with equal emphasis that in what ever place we are, we have to do with the living God, who besets us behind and before, who compasses our path and our lying down, and who is acquainted with all our ways (Ps. 139:5, 2). In addition to this it always points us upward. We must lift up our soul in prayer. Our prayerful thoughts must direct themselves to the heavens, where is a throne of grace, glorious with Divine Majesty. It is the palace above whither our prayers ascend. It is the living, personal God who inclines himself to us and toward Whom our praying soul must turn.

The imagination can lend no help in this, for God is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must worship in spirit and in truth. But he who knows God as his Father who is in heaven, also knows that in prayer he has no dealings with a force that extends and spreads itself everywhere, but with his covenant God, his Lord and King, and that he can not rest content until, in order to pray, he has resumed his secret walk with God and has obtained anew communion with his Redeemer. Before the days of telegraph and telephone this seemed far more mysterious than now. From experience we know that there is communion between people at immeasurable distances, which is supported by nothing but a weak metal thread.



And even this thread has been ignored. There is now a telegraphic communication without thread, which in its wondrous working has become a beautiful image of prayer. So-called telepathy also comes to our aid. The authenticated facts that persons at far distances can have fellowship of soul with soul and communication of thoughts, is an indication, that our soul can have like fellowship with God, because, when the human soul is able to do this, the means of spiritual fellowship are infinitely much greater with God.

The point is that with respect to prayer we must regard the indispensableness of this fellowship, and that we must not pray, until we have obtained this connection and fellowship with, and approach to, God. When Jeremiah complains that his prayer did not pass through, because God had covered himself with a cloud, he shows that he had sought this fellowship, and that he had perceived his inability to obtain connection. As when one stands before the telephone, and rings up central, and gets no hearing because the wire is broken, so he who prays stands at the gate of heaven, and calls upon God for a hearing, and seeks connection of fellowship, but gets no sign of life in return. This but shows, that real prayer can not begin until a hearing is obtained, and connection has been established, and we know that God has disclosed his face to us. If this fails, prayer is hindered. The fault lies with us, either because of sin, or because our thoughts wander, or because we are engaged with worldly concerns, or because the heart is not rightly attuned, or because of the superficiality and externality of the condition of the soul.

This does not disturb the man who prays from sheer habit. He prays anyhow, whether he has any feeling or perception of connection or not, and even though he is aware that his prayer does not pass through. He has said his prayers, and that is the end of it. But the truly godly man at prayer does not behave like this. If he feels that there is an hindrance, if he is aware that there is a cloud between himself and God, he turns in upon himself, he humbles himself before God and seeks cleansing in the blood of his Savior. And then connection follows, the gates of heaven swing open to him, and in the end his prayer passes through and ascends before the face of the Holy One.

This is the sanctifying power of the conscientious practice of prayer. At first there is no prayer. But one does not rise from his knees until prayer comes and access to the throne of grace has been obtained. And in this very struggle, sin is broken and grace in Christ is restored.



"TO WHOMSOEVER THE SON WILL REVEAL HIM"

When we read in [Romans 1:20](#) that ""The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made," and in [Matthew 11:27](#) that "no one knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him," these two passages seemingly contradict each other, but not in fact. Every man can know God in all sorts of ways. This was not only so in Paradise, but still continues so in this fallen world, even in those parts that are under the curse of heathendom. The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament sheweth his handiwork, Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor country, there is no people known, even unto the world's end, which does not hear the voice of the heavens. And not only does nature, which pulsates with life, pour forth speech for every one who does not purposely stop his ear; but there is a speech of God in the conscience, that goes forth to every people and nation. It is not recorded of the first created human pair in Paradise, but of the heathen in the corrupted age of the Caesars that they "shew the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another" ([Rom. 2:15](#)). The form in which the knowledge of God and of his Will expresses itself, may be idolatrous and oftentimes offensive, but the impulse from which it proceeds, is never anything else, then the mistaken interpretation of the speech of God in nature and in the conscience. This is the seed of religion of which Calvin bore witness, the increased knowledge of God and the given knowledge of God, which was ever confessed by our fathers. This was not confessed for the sake of glorifying man, who fell, but contrariwise, to render the sinner inexcusable before God. Fallen humanity as such, and every individual sinner in the same, stands deeply guilty before God, because he whose eye is fully open, and whose conscience reacts properly, perceives the eternal power and Godhead of the Lord Jehovah in himself, and everywhere around him in nature and in history. Such being the case, how are we to understand the words of Christ, that no one knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him?



It does not say, that no one can have any knowledge of God save through the Son, but that no one knoweth the Father, except he to whom the Son has revealed him. Of Satan and his angels it is clearly stated that they know God and tremble. This could not be otherwise. Satan's fall was nothing else than rebellion against God, evil lust to dethrone the Almighty and to put himself in his place. And how could this have been thinkable, unless he had known the existence and omnipotence of God? But every one understands at once that although Satan knows God, he has never known the Father. He who knows the Father is

comforted and reconciled. Satan, on the contrary, whenever he thinks of God, trembles. The knowledge of the Father maketh rich, gives peace and eternal rest. The knowledge which Satan has of God makes him tremble. This is the difference between Satan and a great sinner on earth. While the criminal can take a sleeping draught to quiet his conscience and to forget God, Satan can not do this. This sleeping draught of sin is impossible for him. His perception of God's Almighty presence speaks to him loudly from moment to moment, and therefore he trembles. From this the miserable estate of the lost in the eternal fire is equally clear. The ungodly in the earth can put their conscience to sleep and as a rule live free from anxiety in the midst of sin. There are those whose consciences are so seared, that only now and then, in moments of intense commotion, they feel the wrath of God and for the rest of the time live on in their sin, without any disturbing fear of God, just because they close their eyes and stop their ears. But when once this life is ended, and they go into eternity, this too will end. Then their eyes will fully open, so that they will never be able to close them again, and their ears will be unstopped, so that they will never be able to stop them again. And with open eye and ear eternally to be subject to the omnipotence of God will be their miserable destiny.

If no one can know the Father save as the Son reveals him unto us, it is evident, that this does not imply the general knowledge of God, which is within human reach everywhere, but the knowledge of God's everlasting compassion, which the sinner can not share, until reconciled in Christ he has become a child of God, and has learned to know God as his Father, and himself as this heavenly Father's child.

There is no mention here of a doctrine, which is committed to memory or of a revelation that has been given in so many words, which we are to make our own, but of a knowledge which spiritual experience of personal redemption and reconciliation imparts to us. This certainly implies a revelation to the understanding. "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true" ([I John 5:20](#)). All revelation begins with the Word. When the Christ appeared, he went through the land preaching the gospel of the Kingdom. The gospel itself is a glad tiding of salvation which is to come, and of redemption which is announced. But this preaching, this glad evangel, these words of the gospel are not enough. These can be learned by rote. These can be committed to memory, but they can not bring us the knowledge of the Father. This glad evangel by itself, even though we accept it in its entirety, and without hesitation, never brings us further than to say "Lord, Lord!" It is with this as in the days of Hosea, (8:2) when all the people said: "Lord, we thy Israel, know thee" even while the anger of the Lord was kindled against them to the point of destruction, just because they knew not God. Even if therefore this doctrine, this message, this word of the gospel was carried into the world first by the apostles, and after that by preaching, and by the Scripture, by itself it can not impart the knowledge of

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the Father. This knowledge only comes, when the glorified Christ through the Holy Spirit imparts unto us the riches of his reconciliation, when he seeks us out as sinners, and makes us children of God. Only when Christ has made us children of God, does the knowledge of the Father become our blessed and glorious possession.



But again, Christ does not come to us for the first time in the work of redemption. He is the Eternal Word, which was before all things with God and was God. All nature, with the revelation of God which it contains is created by him. He is the Word. No speech goes forth from nature without him. Without the Eternal Word nature would be dead and dumb, and would have nothing to say to us. And not only has nature been created by the Eternal Word, and endowed with a language of its own, but we ourselves, in the midst of nature, would not have come into this world, but for Christ. The whole scope of our human nature is from him. We too have been created by him. Our whole spiritual disposition, and our capacity to overhear and understand nature, have been implanted in us by him. The same is true of our moral being. Christ has given us our conscience. He is himself the conscience of mankind. The fellowship of our hearts with the moral world order, our perceptions of good and evil, of right and wrong, of what fills one with horror and inspires one through beauty, of selfishness and love, of light and darkness--these have all come to us from the Eternal Word.

Hence it can not be said either that we know God apart from Christ, or that only in and by Christ this known God is revealed to us as our Father. For the broad foundation of the knowledge of God, on which the knowledge of the Father is built, comes to us from the Eternal Word. The knowledge of the Father is not a flower, that has been wafted down from the heavenly regions, and has been tied by Christ to the withered stem of human nature; but the withered state of our sinful nature has been revived by him with a new life, and the knowledge of the Father has been engrafted upon the knowledge of God that comes to us through nature, and through the conscience, by virtue of our creation from the Eternal Word. Hence these are not two kinds of knowledge, without an inner relation, standing externally side by side and joined together. But it is one knowledge of God, which comes to us from the Eternal Word, which arises in us through the instrumentality of nature and of the conscience, and which in and through the redemptive work of the Messiah is elevated and carried up to the knowledge of the Father.



It is a detriment to the faith, therefore, which avenges itself bitterly, when he who is converted rests content with the work of redemption, as though it comprises the sole glory of Christ, and abandons the knowledge of God from nature and the conscience to the world. He who, reconciled in Christ, kneels as God's child before his Heavenly Father, must let the light that has appeared to him in Christ, operate reflexively upon the revelation of God in nature and upon the revelation of God in human nature, both of which have their origin in Christ. St. John begins his Gospel by pointing out the relation which Christ sustains to the

creation of the world, to the creation of our own nature, and to the creation of our own person. And this is the result. Thanks to our reconciliation in Christ the voice of God in nature and the voice of God in our conscience obtain a different sound. They increase in clearness and in significance. And by the opened ear they are heard with a clarity which blends the life of grace with the life of nature in glorious harmony and turns the whole world, and all history including our own lives, into one Mighty revelation of the Father, whom we worship in the face of his Son.



"I AM CONTINUALLY WITH THEE."

We may sit for hours by the side of a person and hold no fellowship with him. In long railway journeys we may spend several days in the company of others, and not so much as learn their names, or know anything about them. On the other hand we may be miles apart from a friend, and be continually engaged with him, so that we scarcely think of anything but of him, and in spirit enjoy closest fellowship with his spirit. It may sound strangely, but such is the fact. A mother who has lost her darling child was never so closely united in soul with the soul of her child as during the first hours after death, when the little one went far away from her.

Fellowship of soul with soul may be greatly aided by personal presence, facial expression and mutual exchange of thoughts, but is not dependent upon them. In close fellowship of soul with soul we crave personal presence. Human nature consists of soul and body, and is only fully satisfied when fellowship of soul with soul is accompanied by physical presence. In the realm of glory, communion with God's saints will only be made perfect by the sight of one another in the glorified body. Fellowship among the redeemed in the Fatherhouse above, bears a provisional character until the resurrection, and awaits perfection in the return of Jesus. But however deeply significant personal presence and sight may be, presence of soul with soul does not depend on it. As God created us we are able, though separated in the body, to have close fellowship one with the other, either by writing, telephone or telegraphy, and also apart from all this, in a purely spiritual way in feeling, perceptions, thoughts and imagination. Personal presence alone does not afford human fellowship; for this is always fellowship of spirit with spirit, of soul with soul, of heart, with heart. And the question whether we live near by a person or far away from him is not answered by distance or proximity but only and alone by spiritual nearness or estrangement. When parting from a loved one for a long term of years, even also at the last farewell before dying, we can assure him: "I shall continually be with you." And many a mother with reference to her child, and many a widow with reference to her late husband, have literally fulfilled it. The child, the husband were gone from the earth, but fellowship continued, unseen, awaiting the re-union.

When Asaph sings in [Ps. 73:23](#) "Nevertheless I am continually with Thee" it can only be taken in the sense of this spiritual fellowship. Locally we are never separated from God. We can not be anywhere and God not be near. He besets us behind and before. Whither shall we go from his Spirit, whither shall we flee from his presence. We can not escape the presence of God. "If I make my bed in hell," sings David, [Ps. 139](#) "behold Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me," God is never away from us. He can

not be away from us, neither can we be away from Him. He is the Omnipresent One. And his almighty power is operative every moment in every pulse-beat of the blood, in every quiver of the nerves, and in every breath we draw.

But this Divine Omnipresence does not constitute fellowship of our spirit with the Spirit of God. Two things are necessary for this. First that God makes his approach to our spirit and reveals to us the tokens of his holy presence within; and again, that our spirit opens itself to the Spirit of God, allows him to come in, goes out toward him, and in seeking him will not rest until it finds him. The approach of the Spirit of God to our spirit may impart a mere superficial impression, and no more. In this sense there is scarcely anyone who at sometime or other in his life has not been aware of a certain impulse from God in the soul. This has been perceived in the midst of sin. It is different, however, when the Lord God discloses himself to us, makes himself known, taking up his abode in the soul, and announces himself as the secret friend of the heart. Then alone the secret walk with God becomes possible, and He is sovereign to grant his fellowship to the soul or to withhold it. Let him who received it, therefore, take thought, that thereby he was granted a privilege above all other privileges, a royal, heavenly and Divine grace of highest worth. And that we take this blessedness at this high worth will be evident from the fact, whether we in turn unlock our heart to the Eternal, and, not once in a while, but continuously, seek to enjoy this inward, secret fellowship with God.



In the song of Asaph in hand the word "continually" must be taken in its literal sense; not from time to time; not once in a while; but continuously all the time without ceasing. He had enjoyed the blessedness of fellowship with God, but at intervals, from time to time. For a while he lived "near unto God," and for a while he was away from God, and thereby his soul had erred. He felt that he had wandered off, and that he had been at the point of becoming unfaithful to God's children. From this maelstrom he only found deliverance when he returned to the sanctuary of God and opened his soul again to Divine fellowship. This bitter experience of soul led him to change his course. Not as had been his habit, to seek fellowship with God in the midst of all sorts of distractions, and then to wander away again from him, but from now on, continually, all the time, without resting and without ceasing to be with God. (Dutch version: "I will then continually be with Thee"). Not from now on to be absorbed in holy meditation in order through the imagination, representation and deep mysticism to lose himself in fellowship with the Divine Being. For though, provided it is applied with utmost care, such losing of oneself in spiritual vision of the Infinite, as result of private prayer, can have a value of its own. It is not what continually being "near unto God" implies. It can not mean this because in holy, mystical meditation the other operations of our spirit are arrested, with this result, that we stand helpless in the face of our work in the world, so that nothing can come of doing God's will, while on the contrary, close fellowship with God must become actual in the full and vigorous revelation of our life.



It must permeate and give color to our feeling, perceptions, sensations, thoughts, imagination, purposes, acts and words. It must not stand as a foreign factor by the side of our life, but be the glow that casts its sheen upon our whole existence. This can not be so with fellowship of man with man, but only with the fellowship with God, because in and from and to God are the issues of all holy and of all creaturely utterances of life.

Asaph did not aim therefore at inactive meditation, but at a fundamental tone, a fundamental temper of mind and heart, which continually lifts itself in praise and directs itself in prayer, to God. An ejaculatory prayer is not enough. It proceeds only occasionally from the soul. While the requirement is, that at all times our expectation in everything be from God, and that our thanks are continually his due; to let God inspire us and so to deal with our faithful Father that it would at no time affect us strangely if He were to appear to us. Even as we have our self ever with us, and bring it into every interest of life, so we should allow the thought of God, the lifting up of the soul to God, the faith on, and the love for, God unceasingly to operate in and with everything . . . This prevents estrangement, and straying away, and accustoms the soul to be continually "near unto God." This is shown most forcibly by the fact that he who so lives is at once aware of an aching void within, the moment he wanders away from God, which allows him no rest till fellowship with God is restored.



"I HIDE ME WITH THEE."

The hen allows her chickens to run about freely within her sight until danger threatens, and then at once with raised wings, she clucks her brood towards herself, and does not rest until the last little one has crowded itself beneath her wings, and animal-mother faithfulness covers all the young innocents. But then the chickens do not hide themselves yet with the mother hen. They only do this when, seeing the approach of danger, of themselves, and of their own initiative, they flee to the mother hen in order to seek protection beneath her wings.

The "Jerusalem, Jerusalem," which Jesus declaimed against Zion was doubly upbraiding in its touching pathos, because it reproached Israel either for not surmising danger, or in case it did, for seeking defense and cover with men and not with God. In time of danger the people should have called upon God, and should have poured out their supplication for help and deliverance unto the God of their fathers, and as soon as the waters in the flood of destruction that came upon the people began to rise, without waiting for an answer to their cry, they should have sought refuge with God. The people did not do this. They trusted in their own strength and underestimated the danger. And then instead of the people calling upon God, God called upon the people, saying "O Israel, flee unto Me, and let Me be your shield." In this way God called, not once but "many times." And Israel heard that calling and clucking of its God, but hardened the heart, and would not. And then the abandonment became a judgment: "How often would I have gathered thee, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not; behold, your house is left unto you desolate." And at this judgment Israel did not weep with shame, and self-reproach, but planted the cross of Golgotha; and he who wept over his people, was the Lord.

We are here confronted with all sorts of spiritual conditions. One will be in danger, but as it threatens he neither knows God, nor is known of him. Yet in the face of shipwreck he will cry: "O God, help me," though his voice is lost in the storm. While another in the face of danger will brave it without a thought of God. Still another in time of stress will hear the warning call of God, but will not heed it. But there will also be those who, in the hour of grave need, of themselves will flee to God, will call upon him and hear his call, and who, before the soul is delivered, find themselves safely hidden with their God, shadowed by his wings and covered by his faithfulness. And these are they from whose soul in truth the call of confidence goes forth: "I hide me Lord with thee." (Ps. 143:9 marg. reading).

Hiding with God is not dwelling in his tent, or knowing the secret grace of the hidden walk. Hiding never indicates a fixed condition, but always something transient. We seek shelter from a thunderstorm, in order presently, when the sun shines again, to step out from

our hiding-place, and continue on our way. Little chickens hide with the mother hen, when a water-rat is around; but when it is gone, they run out again. And the soul of him who knows God, hides with his Father, as long as trouble lasts; but when it is overpassed, there is no more need of hiding. Hiding in God is not the ordinary, but the extraordinary condition of a single moment "Until these calamities be overpast" (Ps. 57:1), or as said in Is. 26:20, "Until the indignation be overpast."

But even he who fears God, does not hide with him in everytime of need. Trouble and care are upon us all the days of our life. The cross must be taken up each day anew. But as a rule the child of God calmly pursues his way in the assured confidence of Divine protection. He knows that God fights for him, that God is his shadow, that as his good shepherd he leads him, and that when too violent an assault threatens, God covers him with his shield. He then dwells with God, and God does not leave him to himself. All this is the daily, ordinary activity of faith, the operation of God's faithfulness, and of the trust of his child.

But hiding it still something else. It is something connected with the hour of terror; when the water has risen to the lips, when dark dread has suddenly overtaken the soul, when there is no way of escape, when dark night settles on the heart, when faith no longer trusts itself. Then there is an heroic taking hold of self, and as in the moment of danger the child runs to mother, and hides himself in her dress, so does the soul fly to God, crowds close up to him and hides with him. And in doing this the soul has no thought of anything, nor time for making plans, save only and alone to hide with God, to be safe with him, to find deliverance with him.

If despair of faith were possible, hiding might be said to be the act of despair. But though there never is despair in faith, in great anxiety of mind the child of God may despair of himself, of help and deliverance from without, of the working of the ordinary powers and gifts which at other times are at command, and now gives up every further attempt to resist because he feels that the fight is too unequal, that the opposing force is too strong and overwhelming, that he can not stand before it, and dares not run any more futile risks, and therefore throws pike and shield aside, and helplessly takes refuge with God with the cry: "O God, fight thou for me," and now hides with God. After the chickens have crept under the wings of the mother hen, the hawk that was after the chickens no longer sees them, but only the angry mother hen. When the child takes refuge with mother, and hides itself in her dress, the assailant has no longer to do with an helpless child, but with the mother who, like a lioness, fights for it. And when a child of God hides with God the battle is no longer one between him and the world, but between the world and God. He who hides with God commits his cause to God. He withdraws himself from it. All his support and hope is the righteousness of his Lord. And only when this has openly been shown, he comes out from his hiding again in order to finish his course.

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Hiding with God therefore is no ordinary act of the soul. It only takes place amid circumstances of utmost need and danger. Only when David's spirit was overwhelmed within him, and he was forced to exclaim: "My heart within me is desolate" (143:4), so that he lay "in darkness as those that have long been dead," was the cry for help forced from his heart, whereby he struck the key-note and found the word, which only in moments of like stress the soldiers of the cross have echoed and re-echoed from their own over-burdened spirit.

There is also a hiding with God in moments of anxiety and need, which are occasioned by ordinary events in life. For though as a rule believers are not called upon, like David, to fight the battle of the Lord, something of that battle announces itself in every family life, and in every individual career. The instances in worldly lives of great perturbation of mind, which lead to despair and suicide, are almost without number. And it is noteworthy that what brings the worldly minded through despair to suicide, drives the believer to hide himself with God. The man of the world and the child of God both give up. But while the worldly man seeks surcease in self-destruction, just to get away from his troubles the hope of eternal life dawns on the soul of the believer, and he also seeks to do away with self, but by expecting nothing more from his own strength and powers, and by resigning everything into the hand of God. Even as he who is incurably ill, suffers dreadfully, is no more able to endure it, and expects no more help from medicine, yet holds out unto death, because he can hide with God. So there can be despair in the family on account of consuming grief, bitter sin, endless adversities, and lack of bread. There can also be a grievance though scorn and slander, so deep and cruel, that restoration of honor is no more possible, and life becomes a burden. The cause of God may be involved in all this, but as a rule it is not, and all this dreadful darkness looms up from common life. But though the battle for God may have nothing to do with this, it is bound to have a part in this, because these grievous troubles make their wave-beats shake the faith in the heart of God's child. And then it can not help but become a battle of faith. A combat between the power of the world and that which reveals the faith. Fear would strike faith dumb, but faith will cry out for help against it.

And in all such cases faith first struggles against it, then tries to conjure the storm, then battles as long as it can. But when finally it is utterly disabled, and feels itself at the point of defeat, it performs the last heroic act which makes it triumph: it lets go, it gives up, in order to commit its all unto the Lord, and then the tempest-tossed and uncomforted soul hides with God, and God binds up his sorrow.



"THOU DOST NOT HEAR ME."

True prayer calls for an answer from God. But not all prayer is genuine. There is a great difference between formal prayer of the lips and earnest outpouring of soul in supplication. Formal prayer however should not be underestimated. It implies a power that maintains prayer. And though it carries, a spark from above may suddenly come down into this dead formalism and ignite the flame of true prayer in it. But though it is unfair to say that he who prays in this mere, formal way, had better not pray at all, it remains true that cold and heartless prayer is infected prayer, in behalf of which the man of ardent prayer invokes the cleansing power of the atonement.

If we would examine the true character of prayer, we must distinguish it from the form, and direct the attention to real supplication of the soul; and then he who prays, awaits an answer; such as in olden times was given in a revelation, in a word spoken in the soul, in a vision, or appearance of an angel; and in our times in the hearing of our prayer, in an unexpected meeting, or in a motion worked by the Holy Ghost within. He who prays in a godly manner always awaits an answer; not only when he asks for something, but also when he worships, ascribes praise, or gives thanks. In these holy exercises he does not merely aim at reciting words in honor of God's name and majesty but he asks God, whom he worships, to accept his praises and thanksgivings. The scripture speaks of them as offerings, and calls them: "the calves of the lips" ([Hosea 14:2](#)), or "the fruit of the lips" ([Is.57:19](#)) by which to indicate clearly the significance of an offering which such prayer implies. From the account of the first fratricide we learn that there is an offering which God accepts and one which he rejects. And nowhere has it been more clearly shown than in Cain's anger and wrath, that with every offering the human heart awaits an answer from God.



But it does not always come. And amid the sorrows of heart and the distresses of soul nothing is more grievous than this lack of an answer from the Lord. Hear the complaint of Job (30:20): "I cry unto thee, and thou dost not hear me; I stand up, and thou regardest me not." This is expressed still more strongly in [Ps. 22](#), where the Messiah exclaims: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me! my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season also I take no rest." Or as it reads in [Micah 3:7](#): "Then shall the seers be ashamed . . . for there is no answer of God."

The failure of obtaining an answer from God is by no means always the fault of the worshipper. With the Messiah at least this is unthinkable. Every one knows from experience that at one time he was heard in spite of an accusing conscience, and that at another time, when his prayer had been earnest and sincere, no answer came. In many instances, the hearing failed, because prayer was a sin in our lips. Withholding of an answer, on the part

of God, can frequently be explained from the sinful mood of the heart during prayer. But sin on the part of a worshipper is not the only cause of the failure to obtain an hearing of prayer. The most devout saints in Israel complained again and again that their prayer was not heard, which was a source of deep grief to their hearts; and their grief was proof that their prayers had been earnest and sincere. The Lama Sabachthani from the cross shows the height which this sorrow of the human heart can climb, and Golgotha makes it plain, more strongly than anything else, that the withholding of an answer, on the part of God, can be intentional.

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The question in dispute on Carmel was an answer from above. Both Elijah and the priests of Baal acknowledged that if God is alive, and man prays to Him, a sign of life must proceed from the side of God, as an answer to prayer. The priests sought this answer with Baal, and Elijah sought it with Jehovah. From morning even until noon the cry arose from a thousand mouths; "O Baal, answer us," and they cut themselves with knives and lancets, because no answer came. Then Elijah also prayed and God answered by fire. The question at stake was, whether the God who was invoked was able to answer. A God who is not, and who is not alive, *can not* answer. Jehovah, who is alive in glory *could* answer, and the fearful answer descended in fire from heaven.

But ability to answer is not enough. God must also be willing to answer; and the *Sabachthani* is the most striking instance of the awful truth, that at times God is intentionally unwilling, and that he does not withhold his answer by chance or by mistake, but in accordance with his counsel and plan. Even when his child continues to call he refuses to hear; even when the saintliest worshipper pours out his soul before him; even when his own well-beloved Son cries unto Him from the cross. This is the comfort of the cry from the cross for every soul that cries and gets no answer. Otherwise the silence of God might bring the soul to despair. But when it appears that even the prayer of God's own Son remained unanswered, why should a sinful suppliant complain or despair, when he, too, is numbered with the Son of God.

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Is this non-compliance on the part of God mere arbitrariness? Far from it. Such an idea is unthinkable in God. Even this Divine withholding of an answer to our prayer is outflow of the love-life wherewith God compasses the soul of his child. In our prayer-life there is danger that we seek a gift from God rather than God himself. Prayer is almost always invocation of God's help, of his assistance; of his saving and blessing grace; but apart from ourselves, our own interests and conditions of need, prayer seldom aims first of all to have dealings with God himself. The "Our Father" teaches the way. It instructs us first to pray for the hallowing of God's name, for the coming of his Kingdom, for the doing of his Will, and then it goes on to the prayer for our daily bread, for forgiveness of our sins and for our deliverance from the Evil. But this is the misery of our spiritual estate, that even in prayer we rarely stand on the sacred height of the "Our Father."

This wounds the tender love-life between God and the soul. Prayer for provision in personal need is natural, but it always springs from love of self. God must lend help and assistance and deliverance. And so it comes to appear at times that God is and exists merely for our sakes, for our benefit, to deliver us from trouble. But love is different. Love for God in prayer is, that first of all we are concerned with the things that glorify God's name, God's honor and God's power. If it be true that love alone maketh rich and exalteth the soul, it is grace, and nothing but seeking grace, when by temporary withholdings of answers to our prayers God initiates us more fully into the life of love, represses egoism in our prayers, and in our prayer-life also quickens love.



Hence when an answer to prayer tarries, let not the soul grow faint. Apart from the fact that an answer is not immediately necessary, and that it is frequently shown later on that in his own time God granted the request, there is no reason why, when God withholds an answer, we need to despair. When saints in Old- and New-Testament times were tried along this line, and our blessed Savior endured it in the dark hour of death upon the cross, why then should we be spared? The very restraint on the part of God, when the soul cries out to him, may be the token, that he loves the soul more than we ourselves; that he wants to raise the life of the soul and the life of prayer to higher vantage grounds; that he desires to initiate us into the deeper ways of love; and that by not answering our prayer he prepares us for a more glorious future, when we shall pray more sincerely, supplicate more earnestly, and receive a far more abundant answer. Even among us it is frequently seen that a temporal withdrawal from those whom we love is the means to quicken tenderer love. How much the more is this true of him, who himself is love and who by putting a cloud between us and his Majesty, leads us up to the higher and far richer enjoyments of love.



"HIS WAYS ARE EVERLASTING"

With the passing of another year another boundary-line in life is drawn. A new year is brought into the course of time. It was 1903, and so it continued for months and weeks and days. It became 1904, and involuntarily we ask what it shall bring us. Whether the year will outlive us or whether we shall outlive it. This of itself on the threshold of the new year makes us to look up to our Father who is in heaven, and ask little but trust much, to lay the hand on the mouth and as a weaned child quietly to wait what He will bring upon us, and upon our beloveds.

The goings of the age are his, declares the prophet ([Hab. 3:6](#) Dutch Version.) God counts and reckons with centuries, as on the dial of the clock it is done with hours and minutes. We are the little, needy ones who count with the tenth part of a penny. God bathes himself as it were in the great eternities. There is no comparison between our and God's reckoning of time. With God it is the ever-flowing fountain of the eternal; with us the dripping of the moments is heard in the ticking of the clock. While waiting for it, five single minutes seem sometimes unbearably long.

This vast difference between us and God should never be lost from sight. It is so wide that we can not possibly explain the connection between our time and God's eternity, though we know that there must be such a relation, and that there is. When we die in Christ we shall enter upon an eternity of everlasting joys, but even this shall never be to us the eternity of God. Though we shall live eternally, we have had a beginning, but God never. "Before the mountains were brought forth, ([Ps. 90](#)) from everlasting to everlasting thou art God." And this never applies to man. But, however incalculably vast the difference may be, between us who live by hours, and God who disposes of the goings of the ages, it is grace, that God divides for us the portion of life, which we spend between the cradle and the grave, into parts of years and days, and that he subdivides these parts into hours and minutes whereby our otherwise short life obtains breadth, extension of duration and richness of scope, which makes us bathe ourselves in the little pond of our brief years as in an ocean.

We did not invent time, and its division into years and days; these are ours by God's appointment. "And the evening and the morning were the first day," is the creative word that appointed this order and division of time for us, before man had appeared on earth. Sun and moon, the rotation of the earth, and the pulsebeat of the blood in our veins, have been made with the view of solving human life into minutes and seconds. And by this wondrous means, wonderful in simplicity of appointment. Divine grace and mercy have



created for us, and about us, a wealth of life in the past, now in the present, and presently in the future, whereby our short life appears to be almost endlessly long and great. Even the single year that is past seemed so long, that only a few of its significant days are clearly remembered, and the new year just begun makes an impression as though it could never end.

Our God moreover, whose are the goings of the age, has not only beautifully divided human life, and thereby mightily enlarged it to our idea, but he also pervades it continually with his faithfulness and Fatherly care. From week to week, and from day to day his mercy and love are over us, new every morning and scintillating with new brightness every evening. From hour to hour he goeth before us on the way. In the subdivisions of the hours into minutes and seconds the pulsebeat of the blood in the heart is his work, and he notices every desire of the heart, that goeth out after him. He is the Father of the everlasting ages, who from sheer grace divides, for the sake of enrichment, the life of his child even into smallest parts, and pervades each division and subdivision with his grace to keep us and to protect us.

If God has so divided our life and entered it with his grace, we should reach out from this time divided life after the goings of the age, and elevate ourselves to the levels of the eternal. In [Revelation 10:6](#) we read that the angel who stood upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, and swore by Him that liveth for ever and ever . . . that there should be time no longer. Time is a form of existence given us by grace, but it is unreal; eternity alone is real, Our destiny lies in eternity and only from the viewpoint of eternity can human existence, life and destiny be understood. Whatever the year of life may be, it is never understood from itself. Before God, all of human life, with all its years, forms one plan, one end, one whole. This plan, of our life did not begin at birth but traces its lines back to the life of parents and grandparents. In the forward direction this plan does not end with death, but extends across death and grave into the ages of eternity. It may even be said that although we might live 70 or 80 years, this part of life, lived on the earth shrinks into almost nothing by the side of the tens of thousands of years that await us in eternity. All of earthly life is nothing but riding down the line to the first station, where the real journey through the tablelands of eternity begins.

Not to see this plainly and clearly, is the main cause of discouragement which frequently overtakes people in their passage through this brief, earthly life. For a year of life can never be understood by itself, and must be viewed in connection with life in the hereafter, because it is so and not otherwise before God, and can not be explained in any other way. He who moulds and forms and prepares us for eternity is the Lord. In his works upon the heart, in his forming of the person, as well as in his preparing of the spirit within us for eternity, the goings of the age are also his. The standard here is not what would give us pleasure and love for a moment; but what governs his appointments of our life is what we are to become in the course of centuries. On this long way he leads us now through dark and deep places,

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and again through sunshine on the mountains of his holiness, but his plan and appointment always accompanies us. And not what would smile on us this year, but what *must* happen with us, for the accomplishment of his plan regarding us, determines what the year will bring. And why it must be so and not otherwise we can not understand now, but we will in the hereafter. He who forgets this has no peace. He who with all his soul enters into the eternal activity of God, rests, whatever comes, in the Father's faithfulness.

If within the narrow confines of time we reckon by the day and the week, and the heart turns bitter every time things go wrong and bring nothing but disappointment, we become the prey of uneasiness and gloom. Then complaint becomes unceasing, and the habit of seeing all things black overwhelms us. Then there is no heroism of faith, no inspiration to face destiny and no joy in God. Thousands and thousands spend all their days in cold indifference or in hopeless endeavor. They are but a play-ball before the wind of the day and sink far below the dignity of man. Does not the prophet say, [Eccles. 3:11](#) that God hath set eternity in the heart? This but means that God has given us power from amid the whirling time-flakes all around us to lift ourselves up to the sure levels of the eternal.

With eternity set in the heart let every child of God bravely face the newly-opening year. He knows that the God whom he worships owns the goings of the age, and therefore disposes and appoints human life purely in accordance with the claims of eternity. He prays that he may have peace and joy, for the heart craves happiness. But if the year must bring him periods when God puts him into the smelting-furnace, or adds finer cuttings to the diamond of the soul, though his eyes may glisten with tears, he will nobly bear up in the strength of faith; for he knows it is necessary for his good; that it can not be otherwise; and that if it were otherwise, his life would forever be a failure. It is hard to undergo a painful operation, but the patient willingly submits, and pays large sums of money to the operator, because he knows this drastic treatment alone could save him. This states the case of God's child before his Father who is in heaven. Not he, but God alone must know, what is indispensable and necessary for him this year, and what in view of his permanent formation it must bring him. And in case it appears that this year such a Divine operation is necessary for him, he will not murmur, neither will he complain, but he will submit himself willingly to God, yea, though the waves of sorrow should rise ever so high, he will rejoice in God, knowing that everything God doeth, must needs be done, for the sake of God's honor and his own highest good.



"PRAISE HIM WITH STRINGED INSTRUMENTS AND ORGANS."

The Scripture is most urgent in pressing and driving the soul to God. It enjoins the supreme command of sobriety and purity. It urges us not to walk proudly but humbly. It is no less inexorable in its warnings that we guard ourselves in every way against the killing power of money, and that we sanctify our wealth by large charities. But nothing of all this can compare with the unsparing compulsion with which the Holy Ghost in God's word relentlessly drives us to worship, to seek Divine fellowship, to have the soul appear before God.



The Scripture places itself at a standpoint that is even more exalted than this. According to its claim it is not enough that believers make great the name of Him, whose property is majesty and power in the most absolute sense. All men must glorify God. Even this does not draw the circle by far of what must praise the name of the Lord. Together with man the Scripture includes in this circle all heavenly hosts. "Praise the Lord, all ye his hosts, ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure" (Ps. 103:21). All Cherubs, archangels and Seraphim. And from the heavens the circle descends to include within its bounds inanimate creation. Not only must everything that hath breath praise the Lord. "All his works in all places of his dominion" must magnify his praise. "Praise ye him, sun and moon; praise him all ye stars of light. Praise the Lord, ye snow and vapours; stormy wind fulfilling his word." (Ps. 148). Mountains and hills, cedar trees on Lebanon, beasts and all cattle, creeping things and the hosts of birds that sing among the branches, must all make great the name of the Lord, must all pour forth abundant speech. There must be no people and no tongue where their voice of praise is not heard. " Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth."

Thus, as man, we are called to praise the Lord, in the midst of a creation from which a voice goes forth, which invites us to praise God, and returns an echo to our song of praise that resounds among the spheres. It is no dead, silent creation, stricken with dumbness, but a living creation, that utters speech. And he whose ear is attuned to understand this language of nature, hears the harmonious flow of praise and adoration, which it pours forth in perfect accord with the adoring language of his heart. And between these impulses of the heart, and undulations of sound in the creation, the Scripture has laid a tie in the emotional sphere of the world of sounds, in the wealth of music, in life's treasure of sanctified song. And psalm after psalm calls on us not only to hear the voice of the Lord in creation, and with our voice to glorify our God, but also to praise him with organs and stringed instruments (Ps. 150:4), with lute and harp, with high sounding cymbals and joyful noise.



Organs and stringed instruments therefore are not secondary, but indispensable factors in worship, a means ordered of God for fuller enjoyment in his praise and adoration; that through the world of music, too, the soul may come closer to God. Grant that ascription of praise in the house of prayer, consisting of unaccompanied voices, can be solemn and impressive, even then this human singing is music, and improves in merit and effect when it is developed and cultivated by art. Joyful noises from throat and harp both are part of the harmony which God has put into the wondrous world about us, and which now by the throat, and now by playing on organ or harp, is raised and set in harmonious action with the world of the heart. And whether we strike metal, or cause strings to vibrate, or by our breath drive sound from flute or trumpet, it is always an impulse in the soul which interprets itself in a vocal utterance of the world of sound, which in all spheres surrounds us. Neither singer nor harpist creates the world of music. God created it. It was there before the first man heard the first joyful note of birds. It lies enfolded in the air which is susceptible to vibration and undulation everywhere. And it is given us by voice, by vibration of throat or by hand, to set this wondrous world in motion. And when this is done through the instrument, by throat or hand, it seems that the undulation, the motion, the inward song of the heart flows out in it, catches an echo from it, is carried along, is relaxed, and enriched, by it. Enriched in no small part by the fact that others beside ourselves at the same moment undergo the same emotions, experience like sensations in the soul, so that our praise and worship, through song and organ-play, flow together with theirs into one mighty stream of adoration.

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And because these vibrations and undulations of music react upon us as a power from without, and lose themselves in the infinite, it seems that this splendor of harmony, when song is accompanied by stringed instruments, brings us into fellowship with God himself, as praise and worship from earth extends itself through the heavens, to the spheres where angels play the harps of gold, and where everything merges into one grand symphony of worship around God's throne.

God has wonderfully adapted the human throat and vocal chords to the world of harmonies, and no joyful noise on earth excels that of the human voice. It is a gift, unequally divided. In southern lands people are endowed with finer voices than in colder regions. In the same country the difference is wide between the discordant sounds of the street and the rhythmic, cultivated voice of the artist singer. But with whatever difference, in disposition the human voice is a joyful noise of heavenly origin; and it shall only be heard in all its purity, and wealth of expression in the realm of glory before the throne of God.

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By itself, however, the human voice leaves a gap for which God supplied an equally wonderful complement in the instrument. A piece of brass, a tightly-stretched hide, a horn from an animal's head, even a reed cut by the riverside are seemingly insignificant, and yet wonderful means in their effect ordained of God to support the human voice, to unite them

in chorus and to bring the human heart to co-operate and to harmonize with the world of sounds that surrounds us.

But even this is not free from sin. The art of music is mainly employed for the sake of man and not for God. It seeks no higher calling than to please the ear, to move the heart with untrue emotions, and to feast upon a wealth of enjoyment that is devoid of higher tendencies. This sin was less evident with the Masters than with a godless public, that uses purely for its own pleasure the master creations which, composed for the glory of God, inspire holy motives. This accounts for the distaste among devout believers for secularized music. And this is fair. Even music is not innocent. Vitiating music is a power that degrades. It counts its victims by hecatombs. But it is not fair that on account of its abuse, vocal and instrumental music should be eliminated from the services of the sanctuary. Far better offset abuse by the sanctified use of voice and stringed instrument. The revival of sacred music is always a sign of a higher activity of life. Christian people who do not sing and play for the glory of God wrong themselves.



"IN SALEM IN HIS TABERNACLE."

Salem is the abbreviated form for Jerusalem. "In Salem in his tabernacle" means in its first, literal sense, that the tabernacle which was made in the wilderness, and had been moved from place to place, had finally been brought to the top of Mount Zion, so that God's dwelling place was within the walls of Jerusalem.

This sounds strangely to us. Involuntarily we ask: How can God be omnipresent and at the same time dwell in a given city, on a certain mountain top, in a tabernacle or temple? If in the old dispensation God had his tabernacle in Salem, and his dwelling-place in Zion, was not Israel more privileged than we? Have we then retrograded instead of advanced? Is the Gospel, which has no knowledge of Jerusalem on earth, poorer than the ritual of shadows that could point to the place of God's presence? Especially when we read in the Psalms of "praise" that "waiteth in Zion," and of a "doorkeeper" in the house of the Lord, clearness of insight is greatly to be desired. Though in early youth we may sing or recite these sentences thoughtlessly, with the growth of years we demand clearer understanding. This does not come by the study of history. It all depends upon personal, intentional fellowship with the living God, which is the heart of all religion, upon the urgent desire of the soul to be ever more and more in constant touch with God. But here we always face an antithesis which we can never solve, before which all science stands helpless; even the antithesis between the infinity of God and the finiteness of every creature.

The attempt to bridge this gap has been tried in two ways. It has been vainly tried by man, and it has been brought about by God. In vain it has been tried by man in the way of the heathen, who have reduced the infinity of the Almighty to the finite form of an image. The result was idolatry which killed the spirit, and which ended in the petrification of all religion. But it has been brought about by God, who has swept away all polytheism and idolatry by originally confining his service to one place, by clearing his temple on Zion of every image of himself, and by maintaining the spiritual character of his worship; and who, when the dispensation of shadows had fulfilled its calling, gave us his temple in the incarnated Word, and on Pentecost extended this temple to his whole church, which is the Israel of the new Covenant. Along this wondrous, Divine way the end has been reached, that now, without weakening in the least, the Divine Infinity or Omnipresence, the children of God know that they have to seek access to God in Christ; that they can enjoy his fellowship in the communion of saints; and that they see their hearts more and more fashioned by the Holy Ghost into a dwelling place of God.



The clear representation, which this brings us, is, that the child of God, amid whatever darkness or distress, is nowhere burdened with the oppressive thought that God is far off and that his presence can not be found in prayer. Wherever he kneels down he knows that God is there; that he is close at hand; that he listens to the prayer; that he sees and understands his child, and knows his way in every particular; and that no heart-string can vibrate either with sorrow or with joy, but God knows in advance what sound it would emit. "There is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou compassed my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways" (Ps. 139:4,3). While on the other hand also God's child is constantly under the mighty impression of the majesty and supremacy of the Lord. In his descent to us the glory and the holiness of the Lord may never be lost from sight. To this end the Lord has made it known, that the same God who is ever close by every one of us, has his throne in the heavens, that there alone he unveils his glorious majesty, and is for no moment lost in the smallness, insignificance and finiteness of our human life. Life above and life on earth are distinctly separated, and not here, but only when we shall have passed through the gate of death, shall our eye see him in the fulness of his glory, in the Jerusalem, that is above.



The transition lies between these two. The transition in Christ, the transition in the communion of saints, the transition by the indwelling of the Spirit in our hearts; and this is the tabernacle in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion, his presence with the Israel of God. It goes on over and back. Christ in the flesh set in the heavens, the Spirit descending into our hearts, and as well in Christ as in the Holy Ghost God Himself is worshipped by us.

This is the mystery. The son of man, who is one of us, who is our brother, who is closely related to us, and who in our nature has gone into heaven, does not stand by the side of God, but is himself God. The closest possible fellowship between God and man is thereby realized. On the other hand, while Christ is for all, the Holy Spirit descends and makes his dwelling in the heart of every child of God separately. Thus he founds a Salem in the hidden recesses of the soul, where God himself indwells, where his Divine life inspires us, and where it becomes the source of all our holier and higher emotions, sensations and impulses. And these two operate upon, and complement, one another. So that there is no fellowship with Christ apart from the Holy Ghost, and on the other hand there is no indwelling of the Holy Ghost save on the ground of our fellowship with God in Christ. Our nature in Christ dwelling in the heavens, and the Holy Ghost indwelling in our heart on earth. Thus God himself has laid the bridge of holy living, with one pier anchored in the heavens, and with the other resting in the center of our own human heart.



Even these two points of support, however, are in need of union. This they find in the communion of saints. Everyone knows for himself how his fellowship with God is strengthened when he is in touch with saints in the earth, and how on the other hand this fellowship suffers loss, when he has no other human contact than that of people of the world.

The deep joy of the sacrament of the Lord's supper springs from the focus of this fellowship. The holy supper bears witness to him of the glory of Christ, but only in the congregation, not without it. Hence no higher and holier institution could have been given to men, than when "in the night in which he was betrayed" Christ brake the bread and poured the wine, and called the Holy Supper into being. This is the centrum; here all lines become one, along which fellowship is established between the soul and God.

Nothing therefore is more heinous, than the sinful doing of those who by quarrelling and by passionate contention for the right of particular views cause this fellowship of God's saints to weaken and to grow faint. Our Savior gave us a new commandment, even that we love one another. This new love, which he commanded, is the tenderest love that is thinkable on earth, since it is in the flood-tide of this new love, that God will draw near unto us, and lift us up to himself. And what does he do, who, failing to understand this new love, abuses the church and this holy fellowship of love for the sake of propagating his own particular views, but break down Salem, destroy the tabernacle of the Lord, and as far as he is able obstruct fellowship with God?



"THE NIGHT IS FAR SPENT."

After conversion we are in an intermediate state until death. The night is far spent, the day is at hand, but it is not yet noon. That only comes when the glory of Christ shall break in upon all spheres. Until that hour we are ever approaching the day in its fulness, though in fact we walk in twilight. It is light, but that light is dim. Even after conversion we continue therefore provisionally in a certain kind of sleep, and the convert can only gradually escape its after-effects. Such was the case in the days of St. Paul, when the change was far greater for the convert than now. Speaking for himself and for the converts at Rome the Apostle emphatically declares: "It is now (i. e., so and so many years after their conversion)--it is now high time to awake out of this sleep (which was still upon us) for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." And then he adds: "The night is far spent, the day is at hand" ([Rom. 13:11, 12](#)).

This detracts nothing from the incontrovertible truth, that he who came to conversion today, and tomorrow falls asleep in Jesus, is sure of everlasting salvation. But it does say, that he who after conversion is given yet many years of life upon earth, passes from the mists into ever clearer light, gets farther away from the night, and is conscious of the ever closer approach of the light of day. In nature there is no sudden disappearance of night, in order to give place with equal suddenness to the day and the noontide sun. There are transitions in nature from darkness into dawn and from dawn into broad daylight. Transitions which are of longer duration in some parts of the world, than in others, but which occur everywhere. And so it is in the spiritual life. The new convert does not become holy in his purposes, tendencies and manner of life, all at once. From "being alienated from the life of God" he does not at once come into full fellowship with God. Where it was night in the soul, the sun does not immediately after conversion stand at the zenith. Here also are transitions. Beginning with a first ray of light; a first parting of clouds; a first breaking up of mists until a glow from higher spheres strikes the eye of the soul. And then it goes farther and farther. From grace to grace. More quickly with one, and with another more slowly. First a waking out of the sleep of error and sin. Then a shaking of oneself loose from this sleep. Afterward a waking up. And presently a going out into the light. And in this transition we have the incessantly moving power of the Christian life. Not to continue standing where we stand, but going on, and going on ever further. It is first a star that rises out of Jacob; presently the sun of salvation is at the horizon; and at length the sun, which sheds clear light on those that wandered about in darkness. It is all one course of triumph and victory for those to whom the lack of such light would mean eternal night, but it is a growing light, that ever rises higher, and at every moment becomes brighter; and Christian life would be worthless



in this world, if the eye of the soul, as it gradually becomes accustomed to stronger light of grace, did not obtain thereby an ever clearer insight into the riches of God's mercy.

This brings a threefold growth. Growth in inner strength; growth in the more effective exhibition of the powers of the kingdom; and growth in fellowship with God, which is the heart of all religion. There is growth in inner strength through the fuller strength imparted from the heavenly kingdom. The night is far spent, and light shines ever more clearly in the soul. God shows this favor in the personal life. Increasing brightness in our personal skies. Less night and more day in which ever more and ever clearer light is sown on our pathway. As an effect of this inner growth, there is greater exhibition of power. He who must travel in the early dawn makes little headway, but when clearer daylight illumines the way he quickens his pace. Hence the exhortation of the apostle: "Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the whole armor of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day." For as long as light and darkness strive for mastery in the soul, there is continual hesitancy and slipping of the foot. But with more light there comes more moral courage. We become more animated, we become more bold in holy undertakings, and more light shines out from us upon others. Instead of tottering, the step becomes firm; instead of work half-done, labors are finished and made perfect. Nor is this all. For however far we may be developed along moral lines, development in piety is more significant, and the rich gain which the clearer inshining of heavenly light brings, is the growing tenderness of our fellowship with God.

Dark night prevails in the human heart at large through the oppression of error and sin. God truly is, and he truly is close by, but though mankind may feel its way if haply it may find him, it is not aware of him, it does not see him, and discovers nothing of his holy presence. Thick darkness compasses it about and makes it feel oppressed, and the sense of uncertainty, and of anxiety, as a serpent of suspicion, creeps into the heart. This thick darkness is the explanation of all idolatry and of all heathen oppression. And therefore Simeon rejoices in Christ as in "a light," so great, so beautiful, which having come down from the throne of heaven, lightens the darkened vision of the Gentiles. The densest darkness of the peoples is that they know not God, that endless night excludes them from God, that no ray of heavenly light illumines their pathway, and that, without God in the world, they hasten on to judgment.

Every convert therefore is called a child of light. He does not merely walk in the light, but from it he is born a child of God. Light in the soul from above, even though but a single ray is perceived, is inward wealth. It is peace in lieu of distress, rest in lieu of care, trust in lieu of despair, courage in lieu of inward faintness. This light shines on his way, it makes him know his own heart and the heart of his fellowmen, it brings wisdom in place of self-conceit, and ennobles all human existence. But highest and holiest of all, this light discloses to him more and more the way of access to God; it lifts the ban that separated and excluded

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him from God; and now by degrees begins the tender, blessed life which enters upon the secret walk with God, which makes him aware of God at every step of life's way, as his Father who loves him, and as his Shepherd who leads him. This fellowship and walk with God, this dwelling in the house of the Lord, is not always the same that it provisionally was, but it advances, it makes progress, gains in intimacy, warmth and clearness. Not only is the night, that hid God from the inner eye, far spent, but he gets farther and farther away from it. The transition is continuous from night into clearer day, until at length there is fellowship with God, which the world neither knows nor understands, but which to him is highest reality, the source, the ever free-flowing fountain of the strength of his life.

Many Christian people, alas, after conversion love to remain in slumber, and consequently lose the joy of this closer communion with God. They are the sick ones among the brethren, from whom no virtue can go out. There are others, however, God be praised, who know nothing of standing still, who enter ever more deeply into the secret of the infinite, and now waken every morning with God, labor all day long with God, and lay themselves down at night to sleep with God. And they are the salt of the earth, and of God's church among the saints, and they keep the church from desecration and from languishing away in death.



"WITHOUT GOD IN THE WORLD."

Not only with individuals, but in broad and influential circles denial of God breaks forth, stalks abroad, and puts every mask aside. This was different even twenty years ago. Individual atheists openly boasted of infidelity, and thereby aroused aversion, which with many turned into abhorrence. Many people were done with religion in any form, but to be taken for atheists was considered an insult. They were not atheists. They had broken with traditional views of Divine things, but the eye of their soul was open to the eternal, so they said, and their heart still went out after the unknown Infinite.

Now another step is taken. Even the appearance of godliness can be laid aside. Atheists have discovered that especially among cultivated classes they are represented by more people than they had dared to surmise. They observe that when they confess their denial of God, public opinion takes it calmly, and at times hails it as an evidence of honesty. Even among the faithful we have become so accustomed to the growing numbers of those who deny God that we are scarcely aware of the trembling which it occasioned in better days.

This is significant. When a child for the first time hears his father or mother evilly spoken of, he resents it. But when in the course of ten years he has grown accustomed to such talk, and can listen to it calmly, he has suffered moral loss. This applies to a nation with respect to its sovereign. When violation of royal dignity first begins, indignation will be general. But when this violation is continued, and royal defects form the topic of daily public talk, people cease to be affected by it. Respect for what is high becomes outworn. And in the same way a people has lost something of the gold of its wings, when in its best circles it has become so accustomed to the language of atheism, that it raises no more protest among them. Especially along this line evil communications corrupt good manners. Here a poison works unobservedly that extinguishes higher aspirations and unnerves the elasticity of confession.

"Without God in the world" is not the most dangerous form of atheism. Many are atheists from sheer indifference. They care for nothing. Others are atheists, because in their career of sinful pleasure they will not brook trouble from their consciences. Others again are atheists, because in their own wisdom they are too proud to bow before God. But each of these three groups maintains discreet silence about God, rather than that from enmity it would seriously oppose the faith. They live "without God in the world" but they are no fanatics, who strive to banish God from the world. When it comes to this, spiritual infatuation reaches its highest degree, and every prospect of recovery is cut off.

That this atheistic fanaticism obtains public hearing from time to time, and that tracts, bearing the most shameful titles, are broadcast through the land, to slander faith in God and to make it appear ridiculous, is most dangerous for the life of a nation. For it betrays

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the presence of a poison in national life that is bound to work harm and to break national elasticity. Even among the heathen, slander of the gods was made punishable; and almost every nation that was great at first and then went down, shows in history this sad process, that it began with wealth; that wealth produced moral decay; that moral decay led to religious indifference; that then in more cultivated circles people lived "without God in the world;" and that at length fanaticism broke out against all religion, whereby at last the people became wholly degenerate and were overtaken by disgraceful ruin.

In the days of St. Paul like conditions of ungodliness prevailed in Ephesus, and of the converts there to Christ it is said that at one time they themselves were without hope and without God in the world ([Eph. 2:12](#)). And this states painfully what we see all about us. With differences in degree many live year after year who think no more of God, and speak no more about him; no more religious books are found in their homes; they never pray, and their children grow up without religion. Baptism is no more known. They marry outside of the church. They bury their dead as we bury a dog. Their lives without God in the world, as such, are perfect.

But most people have not gone such lengths. At marriage they can not dispense with the solemnity of the church service. Many have their children baptized. In times of serious illness they still call upon God. Some do not consider religion superfluous in the education of children, and allow their servants time to attend church. But apart from these minor exceptions they live for the rest altogether in the world without God. And the worst of it is that they can live in this manner year after year, and not feel unhappy about it. The sense of need of communion with a higher life is almost wholly lost from their hearts, and they do not miss life with God. Living in the world without God has become their second nature. When it is over, all is done. No more voice in the soul speaks of desire after higher things. From one pleasure they go to another, and however little religion we would measure out to them, it would not satisfy them, but prove a burden. The same tenor of mind and heart which was abroad for two thousand years in the declining world of the pagan Roman Empire has made itself master of these present-day out-and-out people of the world. They still strive for higher things. They are lovers of art. They are zealous in works of philanthropy. They labor for general culture as they understand it. At times they dote with ideals that awaken the poetic talent in them. But far from being led thereby to worship, this higher, more ideal life is the ground from which they explain the superfluity of religion. Religion may do for the lower classes of society. They have outgrown it. To live without God in the world they consider a means by which to secure high places of honor in the life of this world.

Love alone can save the world from these conditions. At Ephesus there were people who at one time lived without God in the world, but who by hundreds were turned to God, not by reproaches and uncharitable criticisms, but by the love where with the apostles approached them. In this apostolic love the reality of life in the world with God was luminous. This

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thawed out hearts and captured them. This reality is not devoid of creed. There is no greater witness for the truth and the facts of the Gospel than St. Paul. This reality of life with God is not without forms. Preaching, Baptism and Holy Communion stand ever in the foreground. But the power behind the creed and the service of forms was the work of the Holy Ghost, his indwelling in the heart, and life in constant fellowship with God. If then the church of God would raise a barrier in the way of increasing atheism of our times, let her hold fast to her confession, and honor the sacred services of the sanctuary. But above all things else, let her guard the essence that is behind these forms, and cultivate with young and old the supreme reality of life with God.

This requires effort. We must live in the world. God only calls us out of the world at death. And almost everything in the world draws us away from God. Not only wealth and temptation, but also the incessant activity of life, labor that is strenuous, multiplicity of interests, much trouble and sorrow. Among confessing christians there are all too many, therefore, who count themselves christians and can live for hours and for days at times without a thought of God, who are distracted in mind even in their prayer, and who are scarcely aware of what it means to be "near unto God" and with him to live in constant fellowship of the Spirit. This lack can not be made good by sound creeds, nor by constant bearing witness. Life with God in the world can not be replaced by much activity and good works. The lamp can not burn unless it is continually fed with oil. Not in us, but in God alone is the power and the might, that can break unbelief in the world. And in this conflict we can only be instruments in the hand of the Lord, when his power inwardly animates us, when his Spirit inwardly impels us, and when "to be near unto God" and in the midst of the world to live with God, has become our second, our regenerated nature.



"I WILL WALK AMONG YOU."

Vital fellowship with God can not merely be personal. It must also be collective. Whatever touches merely the world of our own heart is personal. And whatever we go through with others, who are connected with us by fixed ties, is collective. There is a collective life of the family, of the church, of callings and professions, and of nations. And that there is vital fellowship with God in the secret places of the soul, is not enough. In the family also, in the church and in social life fellowship with God must be a power. And it must be expressed in this: that God walks with us and we with God. Not only the first, but also the second. It is not enough that personally and collectively we have blessed experiences of continuous outgoings of the soul after God. This can always be the practice of communion with God from afar. Walking together the highway of life demands on the contrary that we go to God, that God comes to us, that the holy meeting is mutual, and that hand in hand with God we continue the journey of life. When it has come to this with us personally, we are in a christian way. When it has come to this in our family, we have a Christian home. When this is the case in our church, we enjoy a church life, which is not merely Christian in name but in fact. And when in social or state circles we have the same experience with those who are of like calling or conviction with ourselves, then here also the Christian banner not merely has been raised, but the cause for which, together, we suffer and strive is truly Christian.

To Moses and Israel the Lord expressed this as follows: "I will walk among you" ([Lev. 26:12](#)). In the case of Abraham it is only said personally, that he walked with God. But with Moses there is mention of collective fellowship of God with his people. Hence it does not say: "I will be with you, as shepherd of my people," but far better: "I will walk in the midst of you" (Dutch version). The Lord going forth with his people, and at every step of the way the people being conscious of his nearness and of their fellowship with God.

This can be fellowship from both sides, a walking together of the way in holy love. But it can also be a walking together in sin on the part of man and in indignation on the part of God. "If . . . ye will walk contrary unto me" said the Lord, "then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins" (vs. 23, 24) . Contrariness is what we call antipathy. We can walk with a man who is antipathetic to us, whose presence is not agreeable, and whose company is not desired. He who feels and observes that God walks with him on the way, and still inclines unto sin, feels constrained by the presence of the Lord. Even as a child, that is bent upon mischief, does not dare to do it, as long as father or mother is close by, but takes his chance the moment father or mother is gone, so a Christian man does not dare to carry his sinful design into execution, so long as he feels that God is near. If only he could outrun God. But this is impossible. He can close his eyes

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so as not to see God, but even then the Lord continues to reveal his presence in the conscience. This gives rise to the unholy strife of willingness to sin, and of inability to do it, because God stands in the way. And if sin is not abandoned, contrariness to God springs up in the heart, even the deeply-sinful antipathy to the nearness of God. And since there is nothing that so angers God, as the desire, the tendency of the heart, not to seek, but to be delivered from, God, the favor of God to usward turns into holy antipathy. Thus the pathway of life is walked with God in enmity and in bitterness, and the Holy Spirit is grieved.

This does not happen with a child of the world. He does not walk with God. He walks alone. He perceives nothing, feels nothing, sees nothing of the nearness of God. Hence he can not fall into sin in this way. His sin bears another character.

But if we belong to the company of the redeemed, if we walk with people in whose midst the Lord walks, all sinful living must be stopped, or else, if it is yet continued, the terrible sin of contrariness, of antipathy to God will spring up in the heart. The inner life of the soul will be corrupted, and presently all of the after-life on earth. And the ill-omened deception is, that this contrariness, this antipathy only shows itself, at the point of some special sin. This gives rise to these monstrous conditions, that in all other ways a man may seek after God, may be zealous in Divine service, may maintain devout habits of prayer, but as often as this particular sin comes in question, may lose at once all self-control, and perceiving that God continues to walk with him, may feel no longer comforted by this blessed nearness, but merely hindered thereby in his sin. And if the sin is still persisted in, the most terrible contrariness follows, even the dreadful contrariness of God.

The case is not the same with sin that is committed from lack of strength. For then when tempted, the heart will seek refuge with God. We are well aware at such times that Satan plans to undo us, and we hold ourselves fast by God for protection against evil. And we may stumble, but even in the act of it, refuge will be taken with the unseen Companion who walks at our side. He will be invoked for forgiveness and help. And he who knoweth whereof we are made, will show mercy and keep us from self-destruction. Of course we must be fully bent upon following God whithersoever he leadeth, and choose no paths of our own with the expectation that God will follow us. The goings of God, both past and present, are altogether such as lead to the kingdom of heaven, and result in making his Name great.

What then are the goings of our life? What is our aim in life? Whither doth our pathway lead? As children of God we pray every day: "Hallowed be Thy Name, Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will be Done;" and if this three-fold prayer is not a mere form of words, but the compass of our life, our goings will be identical with the goings of God. Then we and God walk the same way, in the same direction, with the same end in view. He in infinite greatness, and we in the insignificant littleness of our quickly-passing life. But as individual drops we move along in the wave-beat of the ocean of God. All of life then moves itself in the direction of

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the mighty appointment of God, and in this way we can walk with God, the whiles he walks with us, and from both sides it is continued in the bond of holy love.

But this is almost only possible in collective fellowship. One only has ever trodden the wine press alone. Every other hero of the faith has been upborne by the example, sympathy and fellowship of what is called the people of God. This is a sacred appellation, which no single group may arbitrarily appropriate to itself, and which is only real where God himself walks in the midst of those who share his favor. We are at once aware in family, in church and in society, whether purposes and endeavors coincide with the goings of God, or whether they are mere exhibits of outward forms of piety. These mere outward forms do not satisfy, they lend no support, they do not bear one up. Rest is only found when it is perceived that the presence of the Lord is a spiritual reality in the family, in the church, and in society, and that God himself walks in the midst of them.

Then it is not enough that God walks with us and that we walk with him, but we feel that the same is true of the wife, the husband, the children, the brother or sister, the preacher, church officials, societies and associations. We know it of one another. We make the nearness of God clearer and more real to one another. We are not silent about it. We enjoy it together. Collectively we receive from him the sacred impulse with united forces to continue in his goings, and to hold his name high. The Lord is then not only close to the heart, but he is in the midst of us. He is the common center of all our interests and the tie that binds us together. It is then not merely a pious frame of mind but a godly life, a consecrated purpose, and zealous co-operation from which that holy activity is born, which in every department of life overcomes the world and makes virtues to go out, which are not from us, but which flame out in us from him who walks in the midst of us, because he is the source of our light, of our strength and of the inspiration of our life.



"THAT THOU MAYEST CLEAVE UNTO HIM."

Sin nowhere makes more rapid advances than in religion. Religion is the service of the Triune God. It is the highest and best that enriches the human heart. But the best is always the first that is exposed to corruption.

Outside of Europe and America the Almighty created and supports a thousand million persons who continually die and are replaced, but who in this coming and going are utter strangers to the secret of salvation. Missions have done something, but what are they compared with the thousand millions of Asia and Africa, and the united forces of Islam and Heathendom? These millions, especially in Asia, are by nature very susceptible to religious impressions, much more so in fact than most of the nations of Europe. But they choose their own way, and are dead to all true knowledge of the way of the Lord. And as often as God from his Throne looks down upon those millions in Asia and Africa, there is never an echo among them of the songs of worship and praise of the heavenly hosts. They kneel down before all sorts of things, but they never worship the Triune God.

Compared with this darkness of night in Asia and Africa, in Europe and America it is light. There is scarcely a village in these parts of the world, in which the sacrament of Baptism is not administered, where there is no church of Christ, large or small, and where there are not some deeply spiritual souls that live very "near unto God." This makes no secret of the fact however that in thickly-populated centers and even in larger villages the great majority of people are either dead to the service of the Lord, or merely adhere to it outwardly, and attach no single trace of spiritual reality to it. When this lack of religion began to assume ever larger and more unequal proportions, a gigantic effort was put forth to purify Divine service, to reform and to transform it, which at first worked admirably. But now look at the Geneva of Calvin, the Saxony of Luther, or at the Hague of William the Silent, and confess whether we do not face new disappointments, and whether the half of the population of these places is not estranged again from true religion. By means of the Reville and of the spread of infidelity Christian revival ensued, which fortunately is making progress, but even in the circles that have been revived, we feel troubled again at the coldness, formalism and manifest lack of sacred fire. Even when we confine ourselves to the narrowest circle of the families that is still devoted to the service of the Lord, and examine to what degree of heat the spiritual arose and maintained itself in it, we are constantly disappointed, and we ask again and again whether that is all that is felt for, and consecrated to, our faithful God and Father. And when at last we look at our own family, and closer still confine ourselves to our own heart, and ask ourselves what the inner life for and with God is, in home and heart,

and what it ought to be for this faithful Father, who is not moved to ask in despair, whether constant, inward, tender, ever-in-grace increasing piety has not become impossible for us?

This question can only in part be answered in the affirmative. Sin works effects which enervate and weaken, so that even in the most godly circles true religion is most of the time at low ebb, and only in rare moments of spiritual tension does it rise to the fullness of flood-tide. The result is disheartening. God looks down upon this world morning by morning and evening by evening, and continues his Fatherly care over his fourteen hundred million of children of men, but only here and there does the psalm of worship and pure love arise before him from a tender, devout heart.

But age upon age God continues in everlasting love to entice us by his Word, to call us and to draw us to this full, true and unshakable religion, which finds its terse expression in the supreme command that we shall cleave unto the Lord our God ([Deut. 30:20](#)). It is the image of the child at mother's breast, who literally cleaves to her, and hangs on her, fosters himself in the warmth of the mother-life, feeds himself at the fountain of mother's breast, and cries when he feels himself separated from mother. And this supreme command, that we must depend on God, and cleave to him, protests in the name of the Triune God against all mechanical religion, and against every endeavor to reduce it to mere formalism. It does not exclude thinking on God, but declares that intellectual activity with God is not religion. It includes the confession of God, but denies the right to assert that religion consists of confession. It posits the claim of an holy life, and of abounding in good works, but deprives us of the illusion that true piety can ever be satisfied with this. It certainly demands high esteem for outward forms of Divine service, but resists the error which identifies forms with the essence of religion itself. It is inconceivable apart from zeal for God's kingdom, but it declares that though all of life is spent for God, apart from love, we are mere sounding brass or tinkling cymbals. It tolerates no boast of true religion apart from personal fellowship with God in the secret intimacy of communion. And even when we can thank him for the grace, that at times in earnest prayer this heavenly fellowship with God in Christ was food for the soul, it still declares, that this occasional seeking after and visiting with God is not yet all of true religion, because true religion demands, that without break or interruption we shall cleave unto God, and hang as it were on God. Such dependence upon God implies, that moment by moment, we feel God's presence in the heart, and that with all the powers of our soul we hold ourselves fast by God.

But holiest saints confess, that such inward spirituality is impossible in this life. The heart is not attuned to it, and life round about us is not adapted to it. Simple honesty demands that this be openly and candidly confessed, provided it be accompanied with self-accusation and shamefacedness. Attainment of this highest good has been tried. In every age there have been those who for the sake of cleaving solely unto God have renounced life in the world,

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and have withdrawn themselves to cell or hermitage. But though they could banish the world from the cloister, they took their hearts with them, and it was the heart itself that obstructed the way to closer fellowship with God. This was possible in Paradise, and has become such again in the congregation of the saints made perfect above. But it is not within reach here on earth. We may not withdraw ourselves from life. We have here a calling to fulfil, and to do service for our God. We can not separate ourselves from the heart. It is ever with us. But God knoweth what we are made of. He remembereth that we are dust. And he covers our guilt, of not reaching the unreachable, in gracious forgiveness.



Only we are not to rest content with this. We must not resign ourselves to this. We must hold the imperfection of our religion ever clearly before our eyes. We must enter complaint against ourselves, which will itself become the stimulus to seek from day to day, and from week to week, after closer fellowship with God. And here is the difference between superficial and true religion. The superficial worshipper understands that he can never attain unto such an unbroken cleaving to God, and so he continues his life calmly and peacefully, without ever finding the secret walk with God. All deeper and truer piety on the other hand is grieved, that this fellowship of soul with the faithful, loving Father is continually broken. Whenever it perceives that it has lost its hold on God, it trembles. It rebukes itself and courageously strives to restore the broken communion, until in the end, the moments of life spent with God increase, and the moments of separation from God decrease.

To cleave unto the Lord with all the heart and soul and consciousness is then at first a heavenly joy which may be tasted only once in a whole month. Gradually it becomes a communion of soul without which no week passes. By degrees it becomes an elevation of soul which repeats itself almost daily. Going on this way, this happy joy in God returns several times a day, so that even by night, upon waking, the nearness of the Lord is consciously felt. And though even so, the highest still remains beyond our reach, cleaving unto God begins to occupy ever wider room in our lives. And not intimacy with God in solitude, but intimacy with God in the midst of our busy lives becomes the booty of the soul. Then it is no more a singing after Asaph: "It is good for me to be near unto God," but it becomes a singing like Asaph from blessed experience of heart.



"SAMUEL DID NOT YET KNOW THE LORD."

When it is asked of a person whether we know him, the meaning can be twofold. Casually, it may mean whether we would know him if we met him. With respect to his character it may mean whether we understand him. He, who on the eve of your departure for Java, entrusts an important document to your care, for some one living there, merely intends by the question whether you know him, to prevent our handing the same to the wrong person. When, however, some one consults his father about a business scheme with some man, the father's question in reply: "Do you know him," will mean: Are you sure that he is honorable, reliable and trustworthy as to his business ability?

This two-fold significance of knowing anyone personally must be reckoned with in Scripture and in knowledge of God. To know is always fundamentally an observation of difference. He who is not conversant with botany, only sees trees and shrubs; while he who observes the difference between oak and beech trees, oleander and rhododendron, jasmine and snowball, begonia and heliotrope, recognizes what he sees and rejoices in the wealth of it. The same is true among people. In the business street of a foreign city we see nothing but people who pass us by without speaking, while in our home town every one is familiar to us, and we even know the name sometimes of the smallest child. But this goes no further than the difference between A and B. We know people from one another. We know the difference between them. We do not mistake them in passing. Their appearance is familiar. We know them at first sight. But if we mean that closer and more intimate knowledge which enables us to form some idea of a man's character, inner life, endeavors and aims, another difference is at stake. Not the difference in clothing, facial features and outward appearance, but the distinct knowledge of a man's bearing, utterances and feelings. Such knowledge becomes a testing; an entering into the inward existence of such a person.

Where it is told of Samuel that he did not yet know the Lord ([I Sam. 3:7](#)), it means exclusively this first outward knowledge; and not the deeper knowledge of the Divine Being, which only springs from secret communion. By night Samuel heard himself called by name. He heard it as clearly and plainly as though Eli had called him. But he did not yet know the difference between a call by name from God and a call by name from a man. Three times therefore he went to Eli, saying: "Thou didst call me." And only when Eli assured him, that he had not called him, and at last told him that it might be a call from God, a new light arose upon Samuel, and in that voice he recognized the voice of God. The voice is a wonderful mystery. Every person has his own voice. Even in the dark we recognize father, husband or brother at once by the voice. The wonder is equally great that as each man and child has a voice of his own, we are able to distinguish between them. And so has the Lord a voice of



his own and it is for us to recognize the voice of God in distinction from the voice of man. He who does not understand this difference, does not know the Lord as yet. He who understands it, knows the Lord. This provisionally outward knowledge of God leads of itself to the more intimate fellowship of the Lord, whereby gradually the full, rich knowledge of the perfection of God is attained, which is eternal life.

In this knowledge of God there is a twofold dispensation. The first in Old and New Testament was the portion of patriarchs, prophets and apostles. They received a special revelation from God. God spake with them in dreams, visions and appearances, but also by internal address in their hearts or by external address to their ears. Of course this might have been continued, so that we, everyone personally for himself, might have heard the voice of God. But it has not pleased God so to do. It has seemed good to him first to give his revelation personally to prophets and apostles, with audible voice or by visible appearance, and lastly in the incarnated Word.

Afterward, however, this has changed. Revelation given up to that time has been collected in the Scripture, and therein it has become the common good of all believers, the permanent, enduring treasure of the whole church of Christ. This does not mean to say that now there is no more secret fellowship with God, nor that God can not give anyone now personal leading and direction; but nothing more is added to revelation. To revealed truth nothing more is added. And sentimental mysticism which dreams that this is yet possible, has not been able these nineteen centuries to add a single line to the Scripture.

The method of knowing the Lord has thereby become different for us from what it was for Samuel. For us the Word is the voice of God. We do no longer hear ourselves called by name. We receive no more by audible voices new light from above. Nevertheless the same difference goes on in our behalf. The Scripture speaks to every man, but with this difference, that one does not hear God's voice in it, because he does not know God, while another in reading Scripture hears God's voice from the same, because grace has brought him to the knowledge of God.

This is hard to understand. You, who have been permitted to grasp the mystery of the Word, and day by day are subject of the blessed, mystical operation of the same, and thereby have come to fixed, unshakable faith, you are amazed that in many families the Bible has been laid aside; that he who still reads it, finds nothing special in it; and that you are bitterly resisted, when you maintain that everyone is duty-bound to subject himself to that Word. And yet nothing is more simple. They who have broken with the Scripture, do not know the Lord, They do not recognize his voice, and do not perceive, that in the Scripture Almighty God calls to them and addresses them. This makes the separation; this digs the abyss; this divides in the same country one part of the population from the other. This causes bitterness, because they who do not know the Lord, and do not hear his address nor his voice in the Scripture, are baptized members of the Church of Christ; they not only want to be called



Christian, but pride themselves on the fact that they honor Christianity as a purely moral power; so that they stand on higher vantage ground and are more enlightened, than narrow adherents of barren creeds.

This leads to ever sharper distinction between people and people. They who do not know the Lord, who do not hear his Voice, and reject his Word, are not able to put themselves in the place of their fellow-countrymen, who delight themselves in the knowledge of the Lord, who refresh themselves in listening to his voice and who have in his Word the fixed ground of their faith. While on the other hand they who know the Lord, may bear witness to the same, may openly confess it, and defend the ordinances of God; but they are not able to impart their faith to others, and to open the inner ear of their fellowmen to the holy mysticism of our God.

There is a difference here. Among those who do not know the Lord, there are enemies of God who have stopped their ears to every voice of God; but there are also seeking, wandering spirits, who envy you your faith, and who would thank you if you might be the means in God's hand to bring them to it. Of the first, Jesus said: "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine" ([Matt. 7:6](#)). Nothing can be done with them but to resist them; to suffer their scorn, and to show them the power of faith. But of the others Jesus said: "He who is not against me, is for me." On them the service of seeking love must be expended.

They are the spiritually sick, who wait for spiritual nursing of a twofold character. First that we shall treat them every one according to the nature of his spiritual malady. John the Baptist had a proper word for everyone that came to him, and Jesus administered appropriate medicine to every spiritual invalid. This implies the condemnation of those who deal with all unbelievers alike, and who thereby show that they know neither their way nor their time. And secondly this spiritual nursing posits the no less imperious claim that as believers we shall spare them offense. Nothing is more repulsive and more continuously offensive to those who have not faith, than the unspirituality of believers, their formal profession without moral and spiritual fruit, their zeal without an holy background, their bold assertions without corresponding seriousness of life. They are inclined to accept the sacred mysteries, provided they but discover that sacred power goes out from you. When they see no such power; and perceive that fruit remains wanting; that there is no higher seriousness of life; when they hear on the contrary, of hypocrites who behind fair exteriors prove themselves inferior in character to unbelievers, they are offended, and this keeps them back from Christ.

Such was the case in the days of Samuel, when Hophni and Phineas transgressed in holy things, and Eli lacked moral courage to make serious protest. Such is the case now when he who calls himself a believer appears to be at heart a child of the world. Then the struggle becomes very fierce. O, that the children of God might understand their sacred calling, to confess their faith heroically, but above all else, by means of their family life, of their social



activities, and of their seriousness of purpose; in brief, in all of life, to be preachers of Jesus Christ.

"THEY MAKE HIM A WELL."

In countries like ours, where water abounds, it is difficult to form an adequate idea of thirst. Hence words of Scripture like "thirsting after righteousness," or "thirsting after the living God," are ordinarily taken in far too weak a sense. On a hot day, after a long walk, or in times of feverish emotion, we may reach out eagerly after a cup of cold water, but this is by no means yet the thirst that overtakes people in mountainous districts, when not metaphorically, but actually, the tongue cleaves to the roof of the mouth, the last drop of saliva is dried up, and the swollen throat with difficulty allows the breath to pass through. With such a thirst it becomes a serious, and ever more anxious longing for moisture, and passionate craving for water; and he alone who so understands it, fathoms the depth of the longing after God's presence, which is so often expressed by the congregation in worship of song or reading of the Psalter, without real appreciation of the panting of the hart after water brooks. In like manner, who knows anything now, of "thirsting after righteousness" such as a St. Paul, a Luther or a Calvin knew it? Even when the cup filled with righteousness is placed before us, much is made of the fact that more than one stretches out a heavy hand for it, and slightly moistens the lips with it. But thirsting after it, calling for it, inability to longer go without it, a weeping after God, where do we see it? There are still those who thirst, but has not their number diminished? And is not this very lack of real thirsting after God and after righteousness the banal danger of our times?



This is occasioned by sin. Sin is the cause that, unless God shows mercy, the stimulus of this thirst scarcely operates. At times it requires special grace strongly to revive it again. Such grace operated in the days of the apostles, and again in the days of the Reformation. In these times this thirst operates, O, so weakly; and O, among so few; and even with these, so faintly. Let us be grateful to God, if at any time in our own heart we perceive something of this real thirsting after the living God. Thousands upon thousands live and die, without ever having known anything about it. How great then is the grace that has been shown to us!

Prophets and Psalmists, Jesus and apostles lived in a mountainous country. This accounts for the frequent references in Scripture to water and thirst. "With Thee is the fountain of life." "All my springs are in Thee." "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the Waters." "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst." Such is also the striking saying, regarding the valley of mulberries in [Psalm 84](#). Mulberries ripen most lusciously in hottest, sunniest spots. Thus the valley of mulberries is the image of those conditions in life, when everything in us languishes, makes us apprehensive, and chokes us with grief. When the heat of day and the heat of battle make us pant for air and breath, when we



can do nothing more, and fear overtakes us, lest, unless God helps us, we shall faint by the way.

There is certainly abundance of water in mountainous districts which flows down from the snowfields and leaps down in murmuring brooks. But it is unequally divided. At one time it threatens to drag one down in its wild course; while again one travels a barren path for hours, without finding a single drop. And then there is but one relief, which is a tiny stream that trickles down the mountain side. The traveler refreshes himself with this, and as he goes on again, his burning thirst is quenched. Hence in the valley of mulberries the Psalmist speaks of two forms of relief. One is that in the midst of scorching heat one comes unexpectedly to such a little stream. The other is that rainclouds gather overhead, which cast broad shadows, and so afford the traveler protection from the heat of the sun. Thus it is in the valley in the midst of the mountains, and metaphorically for God's child in the midst of troubles. When, languishing and hardpressed he can do nothing more. God is a fountain to him, and it is God who stretches out broadly the rain-clouds over him, which cover him with their shade. "When they pass through the valley of mulberry trees, they make him a well; yea, the raincloud shall cover them with blessings" ([Psalm 84:6](#). Dutch version. *vide* R. V.).



Thus to worship, in the living God and in his Christ, the Fountain of life, has become our comforting manner of metaphorical speech. And in order to grasp the rich significance of this metaphor, one should see for himself what, in mountain villages, the village fountain or well is. In these villages, which are mostly very small, there is generally only one well, one fountain, in the midst of the village. From this single fountain every villager drinks. In the morning and at sundown every person comes to this well, to fill his pitcher with water, and carry home the precious supply. Horses and cattle are driven thither to drink from this same well. Soiled clothes are carried there, in order, after being washed clean, to be taken back home. This makes the village well the center of the entire village life. Everyone gathers around it. At that well people meet one another. There they converse together. There the common life is lived. And thus the whole community feels that this single well is indeed the fountain of life, for the entire village. If in such a place the Psalm is sung, that God is the fountain of life, everyone understands it, the delightful imagery appeals to them all, and the pregnant thought enters into every soul, that without God we would perish in our miseries from thirst, and that God alone is the center, in whom all they who fear his Name are one, and together live one life.



This has been brought closer yet in Christ. In Christ the Fountain of life has been borne into human life and into human nature. There are no two fountains of life, one in God and the other in Christ, but it is the one Fountain of Divine life, which springs up in the Father, has come close to us in the Son, and by the Holy Ghost flows into our heart. When therefore Christ is not surely worshipped as God, and knees are not bent before him as God, Chris-

tianity is gone. This One Christ is the Fountain of life for the entire, large village, if we may so express it, of the Church of the Lord on earth. No one has the water of life in his own home, but every morning and every evening every child of God must go out to this one fountain, which is in Christ, to fill the pitcher of his soul against the long day and the long night. This Fountain never disappoints. It always flows. Water of life is there to be found every moment with fresh supplies. There is never a shortage of it for anyone. There is abundance for all. And though our eye does not see it, invisibly throughout the whole world every true believer's thirst is quenched from this one Fountain.

Thereby this one Fountain of life in Christ is and remains the center for the life of all people and the fellowship for all hearts. All sorts of distances and separations in society and churches hold us apart; but spiritually and unseen, all that are born of God, gather together day by day at this One Fountain of life. And it is the one Christ who from his abundance quenches the thirst of all. And from being really one in Christ, and from this real life from this one Fountain, in spite of differences, believers on earth derive each day anew, the power of unity by which to realize and to work out the kingdom of heaven on the earth.

But it must be an act of faith. It says: "They make of him a well." It does not go of itself. Thousands upon thousands, alas, come and go, without ever having known, admired, and quenched their thirst from, this Fountain. The act of faith alone brings one into fellowship with this Fountain. Christ wants to be accepted. By faith we must make him our Well. It is with this also as it is in the mountain village. Sometimes there lives a rich man in such a village. He has dug a well in his own yard for himself. He has no need, therefore, mornings and evenings to go to the village well. But the others, the poor people, have no such well of their own. Hence it also applies here: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they go out after the Fountain of life, hence theirs is the kingdom of God.



"BY MY GOD I LEAP OVER A WALL."

When God had created the first human pair, no dangers threatened them in Paradise. Neither the elements of nature, nor wild animals, nor climate, nor any disease, exposed them to any risks. All Paradise was with them. It was altogether pleasure without burden. At one point only they were in danger. That was their spiritual estate. In this they were vulnerable. If the soul fell down they were gone; unless God saved them, they were gone forever.

The curse, which came upon the earth immediately after they had fallen, showed at once that pandemonium had been let loose against them, and that the whole creation, as it were, had entered into conclave to destroy them. When we think how absolutely helpless these two people stood, almost without clothing and entirely unfortified, in the face of these unloosed and raving forces of world and nature, we feel at once that absolutely nothing would have come of them, and that they would have met death at once, if only in maw of lion or tiger, had not from the side of God secret, wondrous grace watched over them.

How human life saves itself now need not be asked. We now face the evil and destructive forces of nature strongly fortified in every way, and it is an exception when a flood surprises, a hurricane destroys, an epidemic works havoc, or wild animals carry off human victims. But of all the means of resistance, which are at our disposal, Adam and Eve had none, and they were but with each other. This makes it so wonderful that our race was not at once destroyed, that it maintained itself, that it increased and obtained the upper hand. For many centuries indeed after Paradise had disappeared, man was forced to wage war to the death with the wild forces of destruction, and to this day the names of a Nimrod and of a Hercules are alive in the memory of nations, as of heroes who knew how to restrain the monster of destruction. Most people live upon their common strength. Weaklings live beneath themselves. But there have always been a few, who have excelled themselves. And later generations have honored these heroes as men, who have achieved the superhuman, and who by efforts born from almost superhuman inspiration have left behind a blessing for the entire human race. When difficulty faced them as a wall, and others remained standing before it, they knew how to get over it, and make a way for those who followed after.

When the fight with the monster of elements and forces of nature had so far led to victory, that with much caution and watchfulness, normal human life became possible to a certain extent. Satan set up men against themselves, and an entirely new struggle was born, even of man against man. The evil game of Cain and Abel. To despoil each other of goods, to aim at one another's life, to subject as slave another to oneself. Now pandemonium no longer of nature, but of human evil broke loose in the bosom of humanity itself. The misery



that has overtaken our race by this second conflict is nameless. First lust of robbery and murder among each other of man against man, of house against house. And from this, war of nation against nation, of people against people. And then, again, heroes have arisen. Men who excelled others and themselves. A Samson and David, a Prince William and Prince Maurice. Heroes, who, under high inspiration have broken resistance and have delivered their people. Again the Wall, against which every other man dashed his head, but over which they leaped. And thus came about deliverance of the people. And thus the names of these heroes are held in lasting honor. Not by our race as a whole, but by the people whose deliverance they have wrought.

Meanwhile a third struggle had begun. Not against nature, and not against the lust of robbery and murder of a fellowman, but the conflict between the kingdoms of the world and the kingdom of heaven. The grace of God descending, the light of God inshining, in order to bring the children of men to the inheritance of the children of God. And face to face with this, the power of Satan, sin and world, to destroy the cause of God in the earth. And again there have been heroes, who, excelling others and themselves, have stood their ground where others fainted. Again the wall, which inexorably foiled the many, but over which enthusiastically they leaped. A Noah, an Abraham, an Isaiah, presently the martyrs and the Apostles, and after them a Luther and a Calvin. Again this same high inspiration. The wall at last thrown down. And their names held in grateful remembrance, not by a single people, and not by the whole race, but by the generation of all the children of God. At the center of this conflict was the Lion from Judah's tribe; the supreme Leader and Finisher of the faith, the Son of God and the Son of Man, the vanquisher of death in his glorious resurrection. Here God in him, he himself God, and therefore the wall of sin and death forever demolished by him, and the way opened to everlasting peace.

Now consider our struggle. It is threefold. There is the struggle against the forces of nature in sickness and in threatening destruction; the struggle for existence and a living. The struggle against our fellowmen, when they do us wrong, slander us and threaten our rights and liberties. And thirdly the struggle against the powers of Satan, sin and the world, in behalf of God's glory, the cause of the Lord, and the soul's salvation. From the combination of these three powers that are arrayed against us spring all our woes and miseries, all our sorrows and anxieties. Man has a struggle on earth. It is not equally severe in every case, but it frequently appears that with some individuals it is a struggle against hellish powers. In the face of it one stands cowardly and powerless; larger numbers struggle with little more than ordinary effort; but there are always a few who face the fight with the uncommon courage of heroes and they triumph by faith. Again the wall; before which others falter but over which they know how to leap. They do it with their God and in his Name, and leave a blessing behind them for all their house and times.



What is the secret of the courage and power that overcomes in the case of these heroes and heroines? Of course they excelled themselves, that is to say, they knew how to apply a power of will, which really far outreached their own strength. This high power comes not from without, but from within; from their fixed heart, from their soul taking hold of itself, from the spirit that is in them. By comparison one perceives something of this high tension in the man who runs amuck, in the drunkard, in the insane, in the man who is carried away by his passion. Everyone runs out of the way of him who runs amuck, because it is known that no one can face him. He is thrown by a shot from a gun. Three officers of police are unable sometimes to overpower a subject of delirium tremens. It takes the straight-jacket at times to render insane people powerless, which shows what gigantic strength they are able to develop. And in a fit of passion many an excited person has withstood three men and thrown them. All these are exhibits of human misery, but in every one of them, there is gigantic development of strength, because a something within was able to cause such tension of spirit, and through their spirit of their muscles, as passes all measure.



But even as such muscular tension can spring from evil excitement and overexertion of the spirit, so by an inner tension of the Holy Spirit the soul can double its strength, yea, increase it threefold times. Not from human misery this time, but from sacred exaltation for the sake of resisting human woe. Then there is the wall again. The wall of injustice perpetrated against us, of trouble that overwhelms us, of sorrow that can not be borne, of opposition that threatens to undo us, of sin that aims at our descent into hell. A wall that must be demolished, or broken through, except we be lost. Then heroic courage must show itself. Not that of wild, ungovernable tension, but the pure, calm, persistent courage of the hero, who never gives in, and in God's strength overcomes. Then we make true for ourselves what the Psalmist sang (18:29): "By my God have I leaped over a wall." And "by my God" does not mean to say by the help of God, or by a Divine miracle, but it signifies: With God in my heart, through this highest inspiration, which the inworking of the Holy Ghost alone can bring about in my soul, I know that it is God's will, and that it must be done. And then it is, if you like, a miracle, for then you do and suffer that which far supersedes your own strength. But the wall yields, it breaks, and you leap over. And on the other side of it you kneel down to ascribe praise and honor to him who has enabled you to do the superhuman.



"MINE EYES ARE EVER TOWARD THE LORD."

In the *Te Deum* the church sings: "To Thee all angels cry aloud: . . . To Thee Cherubim and Seraphim: continually do cry. Holy, Holy, Holy: Lord God of Sabaoth; Heaven and earth are full of the Majesty of thy glory." Continually, i. e., without ceasing, without pauses, always the never-ending ascent of the hymn of praise from angelic choirs before God. This unbroken, continuous, unchanging and fixed permanency of things is the peculiar characteristic of the world before God's throne. In the house of the Father there is no time, but eternity, and therefore there is no breaking down of life in a night, no transition from morning to midday, but it remains eternal morning. There is no standing still and beginning again. No stopping and resuming. No intermezzo of rest or relaxation. But life, ever springing up and coming back to itself, without waste of power, and consequently without need of change. There is no more development, hence transition from one condition into another is unthinkable. No break or disturbance mars the fulness of the blessedness which is eternal, and therefore the word "continually" in the *Te Deum* expresses admirably the characteristic of the super-earthly, of what is devoted to God, even the kingdom of heaven.

It sounds paradoxical to us, when the apostle exhorts us to: "Pray without ceasing," or to: "Rejoice evermore," or to hear the Psalmist say: "I have set the Lord always before me" (Ps. 16:8), "Nevertheless I am continually with thee" (Ps. 73:23), "Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord" (Ps. 25:15), but in connection with this unbroken note of the higher life, he who is no stranger to the secret walk with God, feels the sacred stress of this "continually," "without ceasing," and "at all times." For "continually" sometimes means: "Now and then." A nurse in the hospital continually makes the round of her patients. But such is not the meaning here. When the Psalmist sings: "Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord," the word in Hebrew does not mean "now and then," but "always and without ceasing." It means to say: "The eyes of my soul are never turned away from God, but are always looking toward my Father who is in heaven." It means that in our secret walk with God we do not bring God down into time, but allow God to lift us up into the eternal. Secret fellowship with God is the foretaste of the heavenly. It is not a musical instrument from which tones are elicited from time to time, and meanwhile remains closed, but a self-playing organ that but waits for our ears to hear its heavenly melodies.

Do not say, that prayer without ceasing, always to be blessed in God, always to be looking unto the Lord, to set him always before you, and to fix your eyes ever upon him, is simply impossible, because from the nature of the case, human life, surroundings, business cares and daily duties forbid it. For in this sense both David and Paul knew well that life is not ceaseless devotion and the world no monastery cell. But it was not meant this way by



either Psalmist or Apostle. There are moments when on our knees we are alone with God and pray. There are moments when we retire to some secluded spot, in order to lose ourselves in thinking on God. There are moments when we shake ourselves free from every care and consideration of this life, in order to engage ourselves solely and alone with the things of the hidden life. It must be confessed that for first beginners this is about the only form in which they can imagine prayer, fellowship with God, and looking unto him, to be possible. Life to them is still divided into two parts. A life without God, broadly extending itself in the world, and alongside of this and apart from the world an exceedingly limited life with God. They have grasped something of the kingdom of heaven, but the life of the world is still the real life to them, and as an oasis in the wilderness of this worldly life, there are moments in which they devote themselves to God. And as long as such is the case, of course, prayer without ceasing, rejoicing evermore, and continual abiding with God, is impossible. For then there is no indwelling in God, but dwelling in the world, in order to go out from it now and then for a few moments of interview with God. Then prayer is brief. Thought of God is momentary. Presently it ends. Eyes open again to the world, in the life of which the rest of the day is spent. Such is the existence of him who out of every twenty-four hours of the day spends eight in bed, more than fifteen in the world, and altogether scarcely half an hour with God. He has often tried to retire half an hour for prayer and sacred meditation, but life is too busy, it rushes on relentlessly, and even in moments of seclusion thoughts wander too far afield for serious concentration on holy things. And under the spell of disappointment the effort is all too readily abandoned.

Continuous, unbroken, unceasing fellowship with God does not depend upon thought, and can not be reached by the will, but springs of itself from the inner motion of the heart. If the body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, as we believe, so that God dwells in us, God's nearness to us and our nearness to him takes place of itself, whether we think of it or not. God, the Holy Ghost, does not come into the heart, presently to leave it again. There is indwelling. There is a coming once, in order to abide with us forever. And even when we do not pray, or know not how to pray as we ought, God, the Holy Ghost, prays in us with unutterable groanings. The mother keeps watch by the bedside of her new-born babe, even though the babe has no sense of it whatever. Hence the question only is, whether the inner disposition of the heart attains gradually that sanctification, that opening up to Divine things, whereby we begin to feel and to perceive what goes on in the secret chambers of our heart.

At first we live outside of the heart, and isolated, it floats as a drop of oil on the waters of life. But gradually there comes a disclosing. We begin to live a little more with and in our own heart. And when we enter our heart sufficiently deeply, we find there God, the Holy Ghost, who has compassion on us. This of itself brings us to a life of two phases; one outward and the other inward. But though at first these two are strangers to one another, they gradually approach each other, mingle together and permeate each other, until the

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point is reached when the inner life lends its glow to all the outward existence, and when, not the clearly conscious, but the fellowship which is apprehended with the tentacles of the soul, progresses more and more unceasingly.

This is at first pure, sacred mysticism, and nothing more. But it does not keep itself at this. Unconsciously, the eye of the soul begins slowly to discover the clear reality that God dwells not only in the heart, but that in the outward life on every side he is the omnipresent, the all-directing, Almighty and the all-provident Worker. And so we begin to have an eye for God, who in all things, and by and through all things, presses upon us. The note which arises from the depths of the heart is echoed by all of the life in which we fulfil our calling. That which formerly drew us away from God in that life and threw us back upon ourselves, now begins with wondrous allurements to draw us more and more closely to God. And not by reasoning, not with outspoken thought, but in the immediate sensation of the life of the soul itself God begins both inwardly and outwardly to open the eye to his Majesty. It is true, sin works interruptions again. But sin never rouses hatred against itself more strongly in the heart than when again and again it throws distractive discord into the harmony of the Psalm of life. And to break with sin, and to lose self again in worship and blessed fellowship becomes of itself the rising impulse of the heart.



"**THY OVERSIGHT HATH PRESERVED MY SPIRIT.**"

The spirit within us is that by which we live. It is at the same time our breath of life and our spiritual inner self. The spirit is what we are above and besides the body. It is that which has been breathed into the "unformed lump" to make us man, to make us live as man, to make us a person among the children of men. "To yield up the spirit," as a rule, is nothing but to die, to breathe out the breath of life. When on the other hand the apostle says, that no man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him ([I Cor. 2:11](#)), the word "spirit" indicates our conscious ego, our spiritual existence as man, our inner personality.

Although this seems to be something entirely different, in Holy Writ the breath of life, the spirit which we yield up in dying is never separated from our spiritual existence. Both our life and our person are expressed by "spirit," and both are called "our soul." When the Psalmist cried: "Lord, deliver my soul," or rejoices: "Thou, Lord, hast delivered my soul from death," it refers in [Psalm 116](#) to the saving of life, to deliverance from danger, and not to spiritual redemption. But our inner spiritual existence is also called our soul. "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God" ([Psalm 42](#)). In verse 4: "I remember these things and pour out my soul in me." Again: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me." The Scripture makes no distinction between our life and our spirit. In God's word our life and our spiritual existence are one. In Paradise God forms man from the dust of the earth. But the material form is not man. He only comes into being when God breathes life into it. Then there is life, then there is human life; and there is no human life except as utterance of the life of a soul; and there is no life of a soul apart from an ego, a person, a spiritual being that hides in our heart. Any man can sully this spiritual existence in himself, can sin it away, corrupt it, but he can not shake it off, nor lay it aside. Death does not annihilate it. It abides, it continues to exist, even with the lost in the place of perdition.

Man's spirit is his real self. All the rest is but the house, the tabernacle, as the Apostle calls it. The real, essential man is the spirit that dwells in this tabernacle. The spirit in us is our ego, our person, including our disposition, character, consciousness, feeling, will powers, gifts and talents; in brief, everything that forms our inner existence, constituting a particular being, bearing a particular stamp, and expressing itself in a particular character. In Scripture it is always the same antithesis. In Paradise it is the form which is made of dust and the spirit which God breathes into it. In [Psalm 139](#) it is the unformed substance which, as a



piece of embroidery, is curiously wrought, and in addition to this the ego that was made in secret. And in [Job 10:9-12](#): "Thou hast made me as the clay; Thou hast poured me out as milk, and curdled me like cheese. Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh, and hast fenced (crocheted) me with bones and sinews," and over and above all this "Thou hast given me life," i. e., my spirit. What is visible, and tangible, comes first, and into this enters the invisible, that which exists in the secret places of the heart, and that is our spirit. And God does not abandon the spirit within us to itself. It remains in his hand. It is ever under his care. He watches over it. He has the supervision of it. And regarding this Job declares: "Thy oversight hath preserved my spirit" ([Job 10:12](#) Dutch version. See Marg. read. R. V.)

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At first we know nothing of this Divine oversight of our spirit. The infant in the cradle is utterly unconscious of mother's care. The sick man in his slumber is not aware of the nurse at his bedside. Only when in later years the eye of the soul is opened to the supervision and faithfulness of God, we become slowly conscious of this Divine oversight of our spirit. Provisionally it is the discovery of the heavenly Father's supervision with respect to our outward life, and then only on special occasions, when, for instance, we have been delivered from sudden danger. We are under the impression that life goes on of itself, and that only in particular instances God considers and looks after us. For many years prayer and thanksgiving assume a warmer and more personal character only in moments of special need or anxiety. The larger part of life is spent before the calm and blessed feeling of assurance takes hold of us, that by day and by night, in ordinary and in extraordinary circumstances we are watched over, cared for and looked after by God.

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We also come to discover that the inner life of our soul is in God's hand. That he has charge of it That his care is constantly at work in it. That he has continual oversight of it. This discovery arises first in the conscience. He who has oversight not only takes care but also looks out, examines, estimates values, exercises authority and power, praises or blames. This aspect of God's oversight of us is the first that comes to our notice. As a rule this happens after a wrong has been done, when we are painfully conscious of Divine displeasure. Then we learn that God has the oversight of us, that he regards the least significant of our acts, and that in everything he exercises care over our entire person, over what we do and leave undone, over our inclinations and desires, over our thoughts and words, yea, even over the impulses of our imagination.

And when it has come to this, we know two things. First, that God has the supervision of our lot in life, of our adversity and prosperity, of everything that happens to us, and that there is a line drawn through our life which binds our present to our past, and leads the present into the future. We then know that we are creatures of God, that we are his possession, his property; that he disposes of us and not we of ourselves; that the plan of our life has been drawn by God; and that the course of life is in full accord with it. But, secondly, we also

know, that in our inner life we are not our own lord and master, but that our moral existence as man is constantly under the supervision of this selfsame God, who judges us at the bar of our own conscience, as often as we go contrary to his holy will.

And from these two there arises gradually the still higher sense, that "God's oversight of our spirit" bears not only an admonishing and a judicial character, but also that of faithful care, which we learn to adore in our lot in life. The soul perceives that God not merely spies our inner existence in order to estimate it, but that he is continually active in it, that he constantly cultivates it, and ceaselessly devotes his care to it. The apostle delineates this in the image of an husbandman who guards the crops that grow in the field which he has cultivated and sown. Thus our soul is as a garden of the Lord, in which his plantings germinate and bloom, which he fosters by his sun, which he waters with his dew, which he weeds and protects, and in which he causes fruit to ripen.

We train the soul ourselves. Good and evil influences affect us equally from the world of men and spirits. But the constant activity of God in the soul bears a far more significant character. Though we do not observe it, God always has access to our hearts. Even in our sleep he comes to us, in order to operate upon our inner life. He prepares in us the powers which we presently shall need. He disposes and orders in us the powers which must be applied to a given end. He is even now busy in preparing in us what is to show itself in us ten or more years after. In the inner life of the soul nothing escapes him; sensations, tendencies, rising feelings, everything is under his holy supervision. He revives in us what is ready to languish. He bends straight in us what threatens to become crooked. And as a mother cares for her babe in outward things, so does our faithful Father provide against every difficulty and every need of our soul.

This is a work of God, which began in his council, which was reckoned within our ancestors, which from the cradle has been accomplished in us, and never ceases all the days and nights of our lives. A work of God upon the soul, which goes on when we are alone, and when we mingle with the multitudes; which does not desist while we are at work, and which, with a firm hand, is directed to what God has determined by himself to make of us now and forever. Our own plan regarding our development and the formation of character, as a rule does not extend further than this brief life, but "God's supervision of our spirit" extends to all eternities, while it prepares in us here, what will only unfold itself on the other side of the grave.

This "oversight of God" is both guardianship and training. It is the work of the Supreme Artist, in preparing from the life of your soul an ornament for the house of the Father above. This activity of God upon and in the soul, this Divine oversight of our spirit can be resisted, whereby the Holy Spirit is grieved. But as workers together with God we can do our part. This is the aim of the sacred impulse of childship, ever seeking strength in the humble prayer of [Psalm 138](#):

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"Forsake not what Thy hand began,
O, Source of Life,
Grant Thy assistance."

"EVERY ONE WHICH SEETH THE SON."

The one thing of all others among men is to believe on Christ. The Scripture announces in every way that God has given his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. To this is added with equal emphasis that he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him (St. [John 3:16, 36](#)). When asked what the great work is, which we have to do in obedience to God, Jesus answered: The work of God which ye have to do, is, to believe in me. Faith in Christ shall once bring about the division in eternity, and this same faith leads to decision here on earth. Not a certain general religiousness, not personal pious inclination, and not a general faith on God, but solely and very definitely faith in Jesus, in its presence or absence, determines eternal destiny, and decides the question already here below whether one belongs to the flock of the Good Shepherd, or whether he stands outside of it.

The whole Gospel hinges on this faith. The entire Revelation of God--read it in Heb. XI--from the days of Paradise was directed to this faith in Christ. The sola fide, through faith alone, is still in another sense than that in which Luther used it, the fundamental thesis of all higher human life. There are also all sorts of other marks and signs and utterances of soul and relationships among men which indicate another tendency in our life, or which can impart another tendency to it. And all this can have worth and significance, but only in a small circle, for a limited time and in a given measure. Sympathy, inclination, preference, affection, all blossom with silvery blossoms, but never dominate all of life, do not change the ground of existence, and have no all-deciding and ever-abiding results. Faith in the Son of God stands far above everything else that flourishes in the world and acts as a uniting and inspiring factor among men. All other things are in part, lack the deep fulness of life, and are as the grass that flourishes, and when the wind passes over it, withers. What alone remains as foundation of the inner life, what gives the tone to life and forever guarantees life in endless unfolding, is faith in the only begotten Son of the Father, or as it was said in the prison at Philippi: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." This is the all-embracing, all-permeating, and in itself complete and perfect happiness, that endures unto the eternal morning.



We need not consider here what this faith is, how it operates, wherein it consists. It is a mystery which the church of Christ has tried again and again to express in words, but which she has never been able to state in all its fulness and in so many words, so as to exclude all misunderstanding. When the church outlined faith too distinctly it led to cold and barren intellectualism without spiritual fervor; when she entered more deeply into the mystery of the hidden life of the heart, she frequently crowned a scorching mysticism, which presently

volatilized in excitement. But the sum and substance of it always was, that a lost world, an undone human heart, cried out for deliverance, and that age upon age all human ingenuity, heroism, and tender compassion had tried to provide it, but in vain, until at length God brought it. He imparted it, not in the form of a gift, but in a most holy person; who was not one taken from among us but one who came down from heaven; and not as an angel, which as God's servant and our helper stands outside of both Divine and human natures, but as one sent from heaven and come down to us as the only begotten Son of the Father, who having entered into our nature, brought God himself to our view. "Philip, he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayeth thou then, show us the Father" ([John 14:9](#)).

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And therefore faith in Christ can never be anything else than the highest, the one and only thing. When God gives himself in Christ to the world, and enters so fully into our human life that this Son takes our nature upon himself, that the Word becomes flesh, which angels hail as Immanuel, God with us, the absolute and in itself complete revelation of Divine compassion has come to us. Hence it can neither go higher nor farther, since the end of what is eternally complete in itself has been reached. Nothing therefore transcends faith in Christ. Nothing can be placed by the side of it. There is nothing with which it can be compared. It transcends all human thought. It can neither be substituted nor excelled by anything else. Faith in Christ brings salvation, or there is none; without Christ there is no salvation for the lost world or for the heart that in itself is lost.

For the rising of this star of faith in the life of the soul Jesus demands an act on the part of the soul. Not, as is self-evident, that any action of the soul can ever create faith in Christ, produce it, imprint and implant it. The seed of faith is a Divine sowing. Faith in Jesus is as much a gift as Christ himself is. Faith is a work of Divine compassion, wrought by the Holy Ghost. But all faith in Christ has this peculiarity and necessity, that it must be taken up into the consciousness, and that therefore it enters into the consciousness with irresistible power. Faith enters in as a sensation, as an impelling force, as an inspiring principle, and as a power which governs and changes all of life. And in behalf of our consciousness faith is bound to obtain a content, a form, an appearance. It brings also emotions with it, even unspeakable emotions of uncommon power. But above and outside of all this, it also has an intellectual content, which needs to be understood, a content which fills itself with what we know from the sacred Revelation, of the person of the Son of God, of his life on earth, of his works, of his words, of his sitting at God's right hand, and of his continued activity from heaven. This is what is learned by heart; there is memory work in it; memory of names, facts, conversations; memory of words and deeds, mortal sufferings and glorious resurrection. Only memory does not cherish faith. Ideas and faith are not essentially one. Learning ignites no glow in faith. And therefore Jesus declares, that in order to become ever clearer, stronger and more inspiring, the one thing faith needs is, that you see the Son of God. "Everyone which seeth the son, and believeth on him, has everlasting life" (St. [John 6:40](#)). This seeing of the Son of

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God alone brings the rapture of soul, which maintains the glow of faith and makes it to burn brightly.

The entire content of the memory must be reduced from the memory to the unity of the image of the Son of God. It must all be united and brought together, in order to portray this image in sacred purity to the eye of the soul. And where this image makes itself perfect in you, all inner pressure and sensation and all holy emotion must fuse with this image in you, that you may enjoy it. This living image of the Son of God must impress you, and attract you, must not let go of you, must engage you and bring you into sacred ecstasy. Not as a knowing after the flesh. It must be a spiritual vision, but always such that the name of Jesus passes over into the person of the Christ, and that from the person of Christ the inner Divine being takes hold of you and with magnetic power attracts you. No glorification of Jesus, as in the days of Feith and Van Alphen, which brings the words to the lips: "Oh, were Jesus still on earth, at once I'd hasten to him." That would be the descent from the high to the low. The spiritual vision, the soul's seeing of the Son of God stands incomparably higher than what the disciples have ever seen and handled in Jesus' person on earth.

The Apostle knows the Savior far better than the disciple has ever known him. The Ascension has not impoverished, but enriched us. And the seeing of the only begotten Son of the Father which nurses the faith, feeds and every time refreshes it again, is such conscious fellowship of soul with the Lord of glory, that in and through him, the Eternal Being himself is reached, and, spiritually seeing the son with the eyes of the soul, the child of God knows himself to be one with the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Hear the petition in the high priestly prayer: "Holy Father, I pray thee, that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (St. [John 17:21](#)).



"MY FOOT STANDETH IN AN EVEN PLACE."

"My foot standeth in an even place," has a threefold significance. It is the expression of satisfaction on the part of the Sunday-child. It is the cry of relief on the part of him who has struggled hard and bitterly to succeed. It is the calm utterance of higher peace on the part of him who believes.

The imagery of the Psalmist is clear. A road can bear a twofold character. It can be smooth and even as a skittle ground, or macadam streets in cities and towns; or it can be like what we find in mountainous districts, where steep descents and ascents are common and the unevenness of the path brings weariness. With us, a stretch of sandy or muddy road may retard travel, but in the main our roads are even from north to south, so that no image could be derived from them for the pathway of our life. A way may seem long to us, it may be lonely, or it may repel us by its filthiness, but all this does not offer the antithesis which level road and mountain path present.

The Scripture, on the other hand, originated in a mountainous country. The Psalmists have dwelt and wandered in the mountains. Of itself, therefore, their fertile minds would borrow images from life in the mountains by which to express the antitheses of life. And so the easy walk, with a light step, on a smooth, straight and even road suggested of itself to them the image of a life of which we would say, in the language of a sailor, that "everything went before the wind." On the other hand, the exertion, which makes even breathing difficult on the way where there is for hours together a steep, downward grade and then for hours again the grade is equally steep upward, presented quite as naturally the image of a traveler of whom the Dutch people would say again in terms of the sea: "He can scarcely keep his head above water." Hence in the expression: "My foot standeth in an even place," the self-sufficiency can assert itself of the man who has succeeded in everything he undertook, who has never known real adversity, and who, weaned from carking care, has never seen anything but sunshine on the pathway of his life.

These words, however, imply much more when they become the confession of a man who, disappointed every time, and foiled, saw all his efforts end in failure, but who kept on trying, would not give up, now fell and again climbed the steep mountain side, until at length the point was reached where the straight road through the highland stretched out itself before his feet, and prosperity began, imparting to him a happy existence under the fulfilment of his ideals.



But the phrase: "My foot standeth in an even place," attains its greatest fullness of meaning when it becomes the expression of that assurance of faith, which with spiritual elasticity, knows how to overcome every difficulty of life on earth, and now proclaims with Habakkuk (3:17): "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; and there shall be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

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Let the "Sunday-child," as the man is called who has never known reverses, be on his guard. A life without cares, without troubles, without sorrows and disappointments, easily spoils one. Optimism undoubtedly cultivates a happy state of mind, but it lacks power to strengthen character, to practice elasticity and to stretch it, and to become richer in noble treasures of the mind. But this is not the worst of it. It is far worse that the "Sunday-child" is so prone to attribute his good fortune to himself and to think that they who vainly struggle, owe their misfortunes to their simplemindedness. He is the man who always has good insight, and a correct estimate of things. Others allowed the right moment to go by unimproved. He was always ready to act at the proper time. And so his self-esteem increases, which cultivates his pride, and chokes pity for the sorrows and adversities of others. Or, in case such a child of fortune is still somewhat religiously inclined, he is easily tempted to regard himself as a special favorite of God, whose pathway, by reason of this Divine preference, was always smooth, and he lives in the expectation that in the providence of God his lot in life will be prosperous to the end. And so it goes on with growing conceit in the idea of one's own superiority and of being a privileged character, until there comes a turn in life, and the sun goes hiding behind the clouds. Then everything collapses at once. Then there is no power of resistance. Then there is no disciplined strength. Then there is nothing to hold him up and to enable him to cope with his difficulties. And in the end he is lost in self-perplexity, having neither courage to live nor hope for the future.

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This is entirely different with a man who is beset with difficulties. Every new year of his life brought him new troubles in the face of which to maintain himself. With one it was the struggle for existence with honor both of himself and family, to be successful in his calling and to accomplish what he began. With another it was a struggle against slander and envy. With a third it was a struggle for the sake of his conviction, of his views, and of obtaining an entrance for his ideas. Again, it was an endless struggle with impaired health. And again it was sorrow; trouble because of a child that brought disappointment, or grievous affliction in the loss of a child or a beloved wife by death. And though there are cases where such troubled times give place to sunnier days, there are others where literally for many years it is one constant struggle with anxiety, with never-ending disappointment, with no outlook upon relief. This frequently brings the bitter result that gloomy melancholy settles upon the heart; that irascible thoughts acquire the upper hand; and that haunted by the idea that

every opportunity of life is lost, the struggle is abandoned, and emptied of will and courage, the days are pined away in ever deepening gloom.

But there have always been others who have persevered, who would not give up, who did not abandon hope, and who by great power of will reached the point, where they could breathe again, and opposition seemed broken. And thanks to the practice acquired in the struggle, they put forth a final, giant effort. And, indeed, they overcame. Now they were through. Now better days began. And with an inexpressible feeling of blessedness, as far as this earthly life can bring it, they exclaimed in a very different way: "God be praised, my foot standeth in an even place."

If this is already glorious, there is still a higher viewpoint. There are times when one can not row up against the stream of the ills of life. These can take hold of one's life so deeply as to continue with him unto the grave. Even he who is most grievously afflicted has no guarantee that better days will come. An outcome such as Job obtained, to no one is assured. It may please God to glorify the majestic grace of faith in a life, on which the sun of happiness has never shone. For poor Lazarus the hour of joy only came when he was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. We have no right to anything; and he who is no stranger to the knowledge of his sin will not demand from God happiness or deliverance out of trouble. He may pray for it and supplicate for it, but it always is: "Father, if this cup can not pass from me; not my will, but thine be done!"

But this is the glory, that wondrous faith not only reveals its power when suffering is turned into joy, but also, and even more, in suffering itself, and most of all when the sorrow accompanies us to the grave, and the cross casts its shadow across our path to the end. For this is the glory of faith, that it discloses another, a better way to us, a way on the heights of the mountain of God's holiness, which excels the ways of our earthly life, and dissolves all our sorrow, misery and affliction of soul in an higher vision. This way of faith passes not under the cloud which prevents the sun from shining on our path. He who travels this path has the clouds under him, and enjoys the free shining of the sun of grace. And then whether things in life succeed or fail, whether the struggle must be begun anew, or whether at last the struggle against what the world calls fate, is too much for him--in pleasure and distress, in sorrow and in joy, in prosperity and in adversity--the soul maintains its equipoise, the heart remains strong and fixed, and glorying in faith he says: Whatever be my lot, my foot standeth in an even place, which through faith, God has disclosed to me.



"AN ABUNDANT REFRESHING."

Life in the world above bears an entirely different aspect from life on earth. In the realm of glory is no sin, and consequently no redemption; no misery and therefore no deliverance. Neither can there be the transition from doubt to faith, from weakness to strength, from grief to comfort. In brief, all that by sin and misery brings constant changes, disturbance, transition, restoration and higher exaltation in our life on earth, is excluded from the life eternal.

This process of continuous change was foreign to life in Paradise, and when sin came in, Paradise was gone, and the curse overtook our earthly existence. Not as though deadly monotony prevailed in Paradise, or that in heaven the absence of all change about God's throne would occasion a somber pall to darken the life of the blessed. Without endless distinction no higher life is thinkable, and that richer unfolding of life before the throne of God shall once exceed and excel everything that we have known as higher development of life on earth or have dreamed of in poetic fancy.

But life in the hereafter can not be measured by the standards of this life. It is of a different sort. It bears a different character. It obeys a different law. It interests and charms the senses by an entirely different beauty, wealth and enjoyment. On this very account it always is to be an object of faith and hope, and does not lend itself to forecasting in this life. And though Scripture may employ images from the earthly by which to convey to us an impression of the heavenly, everyone feels that the fat full of marrow and unmixed wine of the marriage-feast of the Lamb serve exclusively to waken the sensation of festal joy, and are by no means intended to indicate wherein this heavenly delight shall consist. It hath not yet been revealed what we shall be. It is enough for us to know that it will be a life in endless joy and glory. But how this joy shall once disclose itself to us, and in what form it will present itself, faith leaves with God. And all that the souls of God's children can desire, in expectation of this glory, centers itself in the Father who is in heaven and his son Jesus Christ.

Here on earth sin characterizes all of life. It does this by no means merely in the sense, that sin is continuously committed night and day, and that sin occasions ruin, but rather in this sense that sin breaks human life, constantly removes its supports and makes them change, and makes the way of life not straight, but restlessly to go up and down; now through deep places, again across heights, now through light, then through darkness; now marked by laughter, then by the weeping of those who mourn. That there is pleasure and pain; joy and sorrow; that there is strength and health and again weakness and sickness; that there is birth and death; a carrying to baptism and a carrying out to the grave; that there is total exhaustion and revival of strength; that there is corruption of soul and conversion; that there

is temptation and allurements after Christ; in brief, that all of life reaches upwards and breaks into endless antitheses, springs from the one all-dominant fact of sin.

When it is once fixed in the mind that without sin there would be no misery, no sickness and no death in the earth, that it is sin which imprints its stamp of rupture and of healing upon our entire earthly life, it is exceedingly interesting for once to picture human existence from the viewpoint of this rupture. Without sin there would be no judges to pass sentence, no physicians to heal the sick, no clergy to preach God's Word, no works of mercy, no church of God in the earth. It must not be inferred from this, of course, that this broken life which has burst into all sorts of differences and antitheses, is the real life. Life in holy harmony and unbroken unity stands infinitely higher, and shall one day show itself to be our true, real human existence, even as it is this already for God's angels. But it does follow from this that our earthly life must be continuously tossed and shaken and move ever up and down; and that it becomes richer, more interesting and more significant in the measure in which we are exposed to stronger tossings, and the up and down movement of our existence assumes larger proportions. These tossings in life are unequal. With one they are far more serious and grievous than with another. There are those who are scarcely ever moved, and who in consequence know but little elevation of life. But there are others who are cast to the bottom of the deepest abyss of suffering, but who as a result can have most blessed walks on the mountains of God's holiness.

Of this latter class one is continually the speaker in the Psalms. This accounts on one hand for the calls from depths of misery and for the complaints that bands of death and hell strike terror to his soul, and on the other hand for the jubilant exultations on account of deliverance and redemption, which result in the grateful acknowledgment, that God has brought him into a very abundant refreshing (Ps. 66:12 Dutch version).

Refreshing means the renewal of strength. A fresh team before the wagon means one that comes from pasture in the fulness of strength. A fresh corps of troops means a battle array which had no part yet at the front but goes out in unimpaired vigor. So there is refreshing when you come out of a period of deadly weariness of soul, of utter loss of strength, of inner undermining, so that rejuvenated and renewed in strength of life you feel by the grace of God that you have been, as it were, given back to yourself, in order, as though nothing had ever been the matter with you, in full realization of Divine grace, with renewed courage to take up the battle of life again. This refreshing can bear a two-fold character. It can be a refreshing from spiritual fainting, but it can also be a refreshing from discouragement with your lot in life. You may have been near the valley of the shadow of death, and now you walk again in lovely sunlight, which illumines all of life. The feeling of oppression and distress which trouble, adversity, bereavement and suffering brings can weigh like a ton upon the heart, and almost crush it. Most people never learn what this means. They, too, drink their cup, but to most people by far this cup is not handed save by measure. They would have no



greatness of soul to endure it. But there have always been a few, against whose breast the waves of the bitter lot beat restlessly and unsparingly and almost so pitilessly, that only their inborn heroic nature protected them by God's grace from fainting. Such a period can be long protracted, and the continuance of trouble and suffering is namelessly exhausting and fatiguing; But when finally there is a surcease, and sunny days arrive, and the oil of gladness is given for mourning, it frequently pleases the Lord to impart to such a sufferer of the Job-type such unknown joy of life that the song of praise rises from the soul: "O, my God, Thou hast brought me an abundant refreshing."

It is more quiet, but still more blessed when this abundant refreshing overtakes us spiritually. Of course, this only overtakes him who exists spiritually, who inwardly leads a spiritual life and who can thirst after God as the hart thirsts after the water brooks. The many thousands who live in unconcern, without ever missing fellowship with God, stand entirely outside of this. But when you are aware of a spiritual life in the soul; when you know what it is to be initiated in the secret walk with God; when you have learned every morning and every evening to draw real strength from seeking and finding God; then life divides itself for you into two sharply contrasted sorts of days: days when rich in God, and living close to him, you feel the soul within you leap for joy; and other days, when the heavens seem like brass, and you are thrown back upon yourself, and nothing but darkness is perceived within, and like lost sheep you feel that you have wandered away from God. This may be the result of committed sin, but it can also be that God purposely leads you through darkness, to try your faith and to operate on you more deeply with unseen grace. So there may be days, and weeks, and sometimes months that God hides his face from you; that no star appears in the dark sky of the soul; and that, feeling yourself forsaken of God, you mourn within yourself with a sorrow which the world neither knows nor understands, but which cuts you sorely through the heart.

But this suffering is only for a time. In the forsakenness you were not forsaken, but God was operating on you with a grace, the fruit of which you would only recognize and enjoy later on. And when at length these days of spiritual darkness are ended, and light shines forth again, and God returns to reveal himself to you in the fullness of his grace, then for you also there is abundant refreshing. And then you perceive and confess that had not God led you through this depth of forsakenness, you would never have experienced such deep joy in your soul, as now became your portion. Only after having led you through this depth of darkness, was God able to bring you out to such abundant refreshing.



"FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH."

To go from strength to strength is to grow, to wax strong, to increase. It is not to remain what we are, and mostly retrograde. On the contrary it is to advance, to make progress, to become richer, fuller and more abundant in faith, in virtue of which to become richer in godliness and in fruits meet for repentance.

God shows this growth from strength to strength in plants. When the oak first starts to grow, it can be bent over with the hand, but when it obtains size and becomes a full-grown tree, it is able by its strength to resist the hurricane. The same is shown in animals. The young colt which at first is scarcely able to stand up becomes after a few years the strong horse, after whose power man estimates the power of steam, which laughs at the heavily laden wagon, and with rider in saddle leaps over wall and hedge.

But God shows this process more beautifully in our own child. First the helpless babe, which is fondled on the lap, and has to be carried on the arm. Then the struggle with the difficulties of learning to walk, until at last it succeeds when the ankles have become stronger. And so the growth goes on until full maturity is reached; and then there is strength for a hard run, the bold jump, the climb of a steep rock, the defiance of weariness and fatigue.

All this is material. The growth of oak and horse, and the growth of the child, with regard to the body. But this increase of strength is not confined to the material; from the visible it extends to the invisible. There is also development in the human spirit. Development by training of the artistic talent, which was latent at first, then made itself known, and gradually became capable of mightier utterance. But there is also development through training, education, and self-exertion on the part of the thinking spirit to furnish the store-house of memory ever more richly, to clarify the insight into the world round about, to grasp unity in multiplicity, to feel the relation between dull reality and high idealism, and thus to stand ever more strongly in spirit and might. Always growing, ever increasing, with the excelsior-flag around the shoulders climbing the mountain steeps.

This development from strength to strength becomes different, when we pass on from the invisible in art, and the invisible of the understanding, to the domain where character unfolds, and the moral man is formed and steeled. To obtain strength of will and gradually to steel this will power. To feel the waking up of the sense of honor and to see it come to an ever finer point. To see the bud of fidelity and honesty unfold and blossom ever more beautifully. To observe by the side of sense and love of truth the rise of hatred against falsehood. To become ever more deeply conscious of the sense of justice, to see the seriousness of life increase. O, it all presents the beautiful image of a going from strength to strength in



the inner personality. In body grows the man, in understanding the scholar, in character the person.

But even this does not express the meaning of going "from strength to strength" in the song of the Psalmist. In the child of God there is still another life; the life of Divine grace. In this life also there must be advance, growth and development. Here, too, the law must operate. Not to remain what we are, but to go on and to go further from strength to strength.

In the world of matter, growth has its measure, its limit. In the acorn it is assigned how high the oak which springs from it shall be able to lift itself. At first it sprouts, then grows and gains, but at last the limit, the measure is reached; and then the oak may expand in thickness of trunk and breadth of foliage, but there is no more gain in height. Such is the case with animal growth. From being little, it becomes large, expands and becomes full grown. In the course of a few years, however, sometimes after only a few months, or even weeks, the measure of the animal is exhausted, and its size remains what it is. The same applies to the human form. Far more slowly than animals man gradually reaches his growth in height. This takes sometimes twenty and more years. But at last the measure here, too, is complete. Then there follow changes, fuller strength, and expansion, but he gains no more in height. With old people not infrequently there is shrinking and diminution.

With the artist also there is a moment in his life when he has reached his zenith, and the fullness and richness of his expression of art rather decreases than gains. In the intellectual domain there may be a few whose minds at 70 or 80 years of age are still fresh and green, and even excel in depth and wealth of scope--but for by far the most the boundary line is here drawn, beyond which there is no more advance, and which indicates the end of development. Only in the domain of morals and of the unfolding of character this limit by itself can not be shown. Love and consecration can ever increase. Solidity of character can advance in strength even unto death. And this claim is imposed upon the child of God. No reaching of limit here on earth, but always a going further and further. Even until death a going from strength to strength.

But here our misery appears, which alas! obtrudes itself inexorably even upon the work of grace. Observe it with yourself, watch it with others. See it in a child of God, after an absence of ten or twenty years. For then you ought to see in him, and he in you, as with eyes, and handle with hands, the ripe fruit of this ten or twenty years' work of grace. And is it so? Can it be truly said, that a child of God, who was converted in early life, at 60 years of age is ten years farther advanced in grace than he was at 50? Do you feel and observe a doubling in the power of grace when you meet again at forty years of age him whom you lost from sight when he was thirty? Do parents, after the measure of their years, as a rule, stand so much higher? Is the oldest child in the family always farthest advanced in grace? Observe particularly certain defects in character, certain well-known weaknesses and little sins, that showed themselves unpleasantly in a child of God, ten or twenty years ago. Meeting such a

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brother or sister again after this interval of years, is the change marked as a rule, and is it observed with joy, that all these unpleasant sins and defects are gone without leaving any trace? Or is it not rather true that after twenty and more years you find all too often in your acquaintances and friends, yea, in your own children and parents the same limited grace, which you mourned in them before, and this gift of grace as intricately bound up with the same thorns and thistles as before? Moreover, when you consider yourself, and examine your own life before the face of God, are you not bound to confess with shame, that sometimes ten long years have advanced you no single step in spiritual growth, and that the old weeds still flourish with old-time luxuriance in the field of the heart within?

What is the ordinary course of things? Is it not that one becomes converted; that after conversion he concentrates his mind and soul on holy things, and in all sorts of ways acts differently than before, and that in doing this he becomes conscious of a rupture with his past and the beginnings of a new life. At first it is even too ideally strung, so that after a few brief years a calmer state ensues. And this stage of the life of grace in most cases becomes permanent. It remains what it is, but growth there is none. One feeds on what was gained as spiritual capital in that first period of grace. There is considerable increase in knowledge, as well as in spiritual experience and in spiritual wisdom, but there is no acquisition of higher strength. Sometimes even there is a relapse, which is not survived except with much difficulty. And so there is considerable satisfaction. There is no striving after higher things. And one remains what he came to be until death.

We do not say that this is the case with all. There are those, thank God, who burn as shining lights in the congregation, and who do not cease all the days of their lives to drink deeply from the cup of grace. But yet how different would the revelation of the kingdom of heaven be among the people, if all they who believe, who know themselves to be children of God, from the hour of conversion until the day of death, would cause the call of progress to be sounded in the soul. Who can say what it would be in the heart, in the home, in the church of God with every one of us if it were and ever continued to be, an uninterrupted going forward *from strength to strength!*



"BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART."

A truly sinless, pure heart is the precious possession in the eyes of a child of God which he always prays for, but which here on earth he never obtains. They who stand outside of the faith are not considered here. We fully grant that they value purity of heart. We do not deny that they strive after it. But what they mean by it is something else. For the child of God purity of heart is the means of seeing God. For the others it is rather the way by which not to fail of high moral character. And these two can not be mentioned in the same breath.

"Blessed are the pure in heart" is a word of Jesus, which was purposely spoken to the children of God, as [Matt. 5:8](#) clearly shows. For it immediately follows: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." And it is self-evident that the seven beatitudes together deal with the same class of persons. The peacemakers, the pure in heart, they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, they who are poor in spirit, and so much more, are always that people that puts itself under the guardian-care of Jesus and desire to enter into the kingdom of heaven which has come nigh.

Virtuous people, even moral idealists, are not considered here. Undoubtedly there is much in them that must be highly prized with respect to this earthly life. But this is not reckoned with now. They who have been initiated in the secret of salvation, they who have passed from the world into the kingdom of the Son of God's love, alone are here considered. Purity of heart which leads to seeing God is not anywhere conceivable save in a child of God.

This is not said without a tremor. It is exceedingly difficult to know who is, and who is not, a child of God. There are those who are, but who scarcely dare to confess it of themselves; and others appropriate it to themselves who exhibit little of its characteristics; while many more on the other hand make themselves known in a way that raises serious doubts whether their confessed "childship" is not "stolen goods." But apart from this, it is certain, that the most faithful children of God are continually engaged in bitter combat, because there is still so much impurity in their hearts, which every time again is a stain upon their lives. Even this is not all. It must be confessed that not infrequently two men or two women stand side by side in life, one of whom zealously works for Christ while the other rejects him, and that, when the test is applied of purity of heart and behavior, the confessor of Jesus is put to shame by the denier of Christ. This is grievous for the faith; and is to be mourned with tears. It must not, however, be ignored. David did not do so, neither did St. Paul. "The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" ([Rom. 7:19](#)). And in all ages this sore battle has been waged in the church of Christ. Hypocrites, false brethren, stand outside of this. They are not reckoned with here. Among true confessors, age on age,



the same complaint has been current. It is even worked out sometimes into a sinful system of the old and the new Adam, even as Maeterlinck is doing now from his viewpoint of unbelief. But however it may be experienced, interpreted or explained, the phenomenon shows itself every time: there is true, sincere confession, there is faith of the right sort, and with it there is a hopeless struggle with the impurity of the heart.

To be pure in heart moreover is mostly misunderstood, as though it referred exclusively to purity from sensual sin. The voluptuary is then called unclean, the man who drinks to excess, the epicure, the miser, the effeminate. And certainly these gross sins should first of all be abandoned. But he who is free from these excesses is, therefore, by no means yet pure in heart. Purity of heart embraces the entire life of the soul. Pride, arrogance, dishonest practice, anger, hate, falsehood, and so much more, including even ordinary vanity and self-sufficiency make the waters of the human heart muddy and unclean. Whatever does not belong in the heart renders it unclean. As a pond becomes unclean by what passersby throw into it, so the human heart is defiled by everything that God did not create in it, but which has entered into it from Satan or from the world. And the awful part of it is that already at birth so many germs of impurity were imparted unto it, which until death are never wholly lost. That we live in a world which strongly furthers the growth of these impurities. That we mingle with people, who, inwardly impure, accustom us, so long as it does not lead to gross excess, to make light of this impurity in ourselves, and of like impurity in them. This weakens our moral sense, our moral judgment, and makes us dream of a pure heart, the whiles in many points we remain impure of heart.

If Jesus had meant that they only go out free, who never caught their own heart in any impure thought, inclination or sensation again, this beatitude would drive the soul to despair. For no one is like this. The struggle with impure germs in the heart continues until death. We make advances, but only by applying an ever finer test; by detecting impurity in things which before did not even suggest the thought of sin to us. The more we advance in faith, the keener the eye of the soul becomes in the discovery of sin, and for this reason the more we shake ourselves free from sin, the sense of guilt does not diminish, but rather increases. The world does not understand this, when it hears an angel of love and mercy touchingly plead for forgiveness of guilt. But by itself there is nothing strange in this. They who have far advanced in godly living now discover sin in what before seemed to them perhaps even virtue. Jesus knew this, and therefore this can not have been meant. It does not say: Blessed are they who have a pure heart, a heart without sin, but: Blessed are they who are pure of heart.

In the heart the ego dwells, the person acts, the child of God thinks, ponders, decides and chooses. Hence there is a difference between what the self finds in the heart, and what it there orders and directs. And since no one dwells anywhere else than in a heart that is inwardly defiled, and from which all sorts of poisonous vapors arise, the question regarding

purity or impurity of heart is only decided by the question, whether these corrupting tendencies of the heart are regarded with deep hatred and fiery indignation, or whether there is sympathy with them, and they are granted indulgence by the Will and by the Mind. Frequent failure is not sufficient proof of impurity of heart. The question is whether impurity is resisted, whether it is striven against with all the spiritual power one has at his command, whether with the invocation of the help of God and of his Christ and of his angels, everything that threatens defeat is avoided, and the supplication is continued: "Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil."

This alone is the point. In the heart self must stand pure in battle array against the impurities that proceed from the heart. When the distinction is ignored between the self that believes, and the inequalities that prevail in the heart, you are lost. For then you identify yourself with these impurities. Then you sink away in the evil waters of your own heart and are drowned in your sinful inclinations.

If, on the other hand, in the inner chambers of your heart you are bold, heroic and determined in your stand of bitter hatred against your sinful inclinations, as against your mortal enemy, the heart may remain full of impurities until death, but you are pure of heart, and by God's grace you triumph again and again over the sin that attacks you in the heart. Then Satan is not your tempter, but God is your confederate. Then the struggle which is never given up brings you the closer to God, and in the midst of battle there are moments when with the vision of the eye of the soul, you see, as it were, your God.



"IN THE NIGHT I COMMUNED WITH MINE OWN HEART."

Sleep and prayer have this in common that both he who prays and he who sleeps closes his eyes, and retires from light into darkness. But they are not the same. He who prays will close his eyes, in order not to be distracted by what is seen around him. If possible he would stop his ears in order not to be distracted by noises from without. There is also prayer with others to which other considerations apply. But by itself one who prays seeks strength in retirement. This is expressed in what Jesus told his disciples: "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet and shut the door behind thee" ([Matth. 6:6](#)). And he set us the example, as often as he withdrew himself for prayer into the solitude of the wilderness, or into the loneliness of the mountains. Even in Gethsemane the Lord seeks solitude for his last agonized prayer, and leaves his disciples at a distance, that he might pray alone.

Insofar as this expresses a desire for rest and quiet in prayer, it agrees with what we seek in sleep. But with this the likeness ends. With prayer we withdraw from the world that in our fellowship with Almighty God we may be more fully awake to the higher order of things. In sleep, on the other hand, we retire from the world, in order to lose ourselves in unconsciousness and in forgetfulness of self. At least, such it is, when everything is normal. In Paradise it would always have been so. But in stern reality prayer and sleep are continually confused in a two-fold way. They are confused in such a way that prayer is overtaken by what belongs to sleep, and when we lie down to sleep the soul passes into the attitude of prayer. Not as though in prayer many actually fall asleep. That this happens sometimes when prayer is too long, is granted. This, however, is always exceptional. But what frequently happens is, that he who with others prays with him who leads in prayer, either allows his mind to be diverted or unconsciously lets it rest. And that the night, which was intended for sleep, frequently ends in prayer, see it in the case of Asaph, as in [Psalm 77](#) R. V. 2, 5, he complains: "My hand was stretched out in the night to my God in prayer. Thou, Lord, held mine eyes watching. In the night I communed with mine own heart; and my spirit made diligent search."

When we close our eyes for sleep, or for prayer, we go out from light, by excluding the same, into desired darkness. We do this with respect to sleep, that with our spirit we may sink back into the darkness of unconscious life; and with respect to prayer, that, shut out from light of day, we may seek in clearer consciousness the higher light which shines around the throne of God.

In nature, light is not disturbed by darkness, for darkness is there of itself, and it is only by increasing light that darkness is overcome. At first there was no light, but darkness. "The earth was without form and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep;" and in that

darkness light broke forth by the creative word of God. And when, later on, darkness again covers the earth, it does not obtrude upon light from without, but is there of itself, as soon as light withdraws itself. This is so in the world of matter, and spiritually it is not otherwise. There was darkness in nature, and so it remained until God created light; and so soon as God withdraws the light of sun, moon and stars, darkness returns.

So in the mind of a new-born child there is at first entire unconsciousness and ignorance. This continues until the light of the consciousness awakens in the soul, and gradually gains in clearness. But this clearness of the consciousness can fade again into darkness. This happens when one faints, or is hypnotized, in part also with the insane and the dotage of old age. The same happens moreover every night. Sleep is the passing of the light of our consciousness into the twilight of slumber, and finally into deep, sound sleep. At night the light of day without, and the light of self-consciousness within, set in darkness and unconsciousness. It may even be said that the more absolutely the light of the self-consciousness passed out, the better and more healthy was sleep. Not to know anything on waking of the seven hours we slept, is the most normal operation of nature.

In paradise, before he fell, the first man slept like this. So the young child still sleeps at mother's breast. So the weary day-laborer of little intelligence in part still sleeps. But such sleep is no longer the rule. Our sleep is all too frequently restless, either when physical causes of sickness or excesses disturb it, or when the mind is too excited to allow the self-consciousness to pass into entire forgetfulness. And so we come to dreams or to half or entire sleeplessness.

Dreamlife is a dark domain which has been investigated but little. It is enough that we know what anxiety and agony it can occasion; how in sinful imagination it can soil the consciousness; how prophecies and premonitions sometimes loom up in it; and also how God has used it more than once as a means by which to execute his holy Counsel.

Next to dreamlife, however, and more distressing, is the woe of a sleepless night, when cares keep the heart awake; when the mind is too much on a tension; when a task, which awaits us in the morning prevents us from sleep, or when sickness holds back the passionately longed-for sleep from our eyes. Sleeplessness is a part of human misery, which is foreign to younger years, but which in later years few escape.

As in good prayer the mind excludes itself from the world, but is the more clearly awake to the higher world of thought, so it can also be in the dream and in sleepless slumber. In sleep the mind should sink away in forgetfulness, but on the contrary it lives the more intensely in terrifying or in holy dreams. And in place of rest the mind finds in sleepless slumber only a greater tension and far more pressing and wearing activity. And the Lord is also in this. Asaph expressed it with fervent piety: "Thou holdest mine eyes watching."

This spiritual recognition, that it is not chance, but the Lord who holds our eyes waking, shows that dreamlife and sleepless slumber serve a purpose. By means of them the Lord in-

tends to do something; and when at night the heart communes with itself, and the spirit makes diligent search, this, too, is a part of our life for which we are responsible. Sin consists not only of words and deeds, but also in thoughts, also in what goes on in the mind. We are responsible even for our dreams. Not for what happens to us in our dreams, but for what we do in them. We do not all have the same dreams. Every one dreams according to the content of his imagination. And however little we may be lord and master over our dreams, every one feels, that in case our Savior has known a dreamlife, it can not have been otherwise than perfectly holy. In the night itself we can not make the dream different from what it is, but purifying our imagination and cleansing our thoughts will in time transport our dreams into sinless domains.

Our responsibility for what our mind does in sleepless hours of night is of necessity far greater. For in the darkness of night our spirit can invite the world, or it can meditate and ponder on holy things. It can also toss itself about in us without will and without aim. What our spirit then must do in the darkness, is to open the door to holy things and dwell in a higher world. Even when in the midst of sleep there is a quarter of an hour of wakefulness the mind can and should engage itself with God. The first thought on awaking must be again of God. "O God, Thou art my God: early in the morning will I seek Thee" (*Ps. 63:1* Dutch version). For him who so understands it, sleepless slumber is a spiritual gold mine.

In such sleepless nights many people have been wonderfully enriched in spiritual things. Here also is Divine mercy. Sleeplessness is occasioned by our misery, but this misery also God by his grace transposes into supreme mercifulness. In such nights God has remembered his own with such spiritual benefits that a night of sleep has sometimes seemed a loss. Divine work goes on through the hours of night in the souls of his elect in a way that glorifies his name.



"I WAIT FOR THEE ALL THE DAY LONG."

The Spirit, with the Father and the Son, maintains all power, and causes it to work not only in forest and wilderness on earth, but also in sun, moon and stars. Wherever there is a creature, the Spirit operates in it. Without the operation of the Spirit no force of nature is even thinkable. And this spirit, which thus operates in every creature, is none other than the Holy Spirit, who is to be adored in the Triune Being as the third most holy Person. But this is the difference: This Spirit is not known nor worshipped in his holiness, as the Holy Spirit, save among creatures who are themselves spiritual of nature, and who have become conscious of their spiritual character. Above, the angels of God; here on earth, the children of men.



A star in the firmament is brute matter and has no knowledge of holiness. A plant is without any sense of it. And though Scripture attributes a soul to an animal, and though it has certain intelligence and power of will, an animal is outside of the sphere in which the holiness of the Lord is acknowledged. The connecting sense of the holiness of the Lord is found here on earth in man alone. Not immediately upon birth. The infant in the cradle lives only after the flesh. It knows nothing as yet of holy sensations. Only as it develops and matures, this sense is gradually awakened. Even then it often takes many long years, before the higher moral sense of the holinesses of God awakens sufficiently for the conscience to react forcibly against the unholinesses of this world.

But even so, it is all as yet outside of the holy sphere of our Pentecost. The church alone knows the grace of Pentecost. It is the holy privilege of the ransomed of the Lord. The world does not know this grace and does not see it. It has not even the faintest idea of what this grace might be. For this very reason it should be strongly guarded against, that on the ground of this privilege, the church should imagine that the Spirit does not operate in this as yet unregenerated world, and that he is a total stranger at least to the forces of nature in the material, unconscious creation. This error is fundamental among those who are too mystical and over-spiritual. Hence it must every time be confessed again and brought to mind: The Spirit is in every creature. The Holy Spirit works in every creature of rational life. But the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, which the miracle of Pentecost brings, is only known and tasted in the church of Jesus Christ.



The working of the Spirit, the activity of the Holy Spirit, and the fellowship of this Holy Spirit must be collected in this mutual relation as in one bundle. Or else the child of God mercilessly abandons the unconverted world, in direct conflict with the prayer of the Lord: "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that (in the world) Thou shouldest keep them from the evil" (St. [John 17:15](#)).

And now the second point which should be carefully considered. On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was poured out for the first time and once for all, and he has been in the church ever since, never to leave her again, but to dwell in and with her forever more. But . . . and this is all too frequently forgotten. What is in the church is therefore by no means yet present in everyone that is counted in the church. The true church of the living God is the body of Christ, the mystical body of which he is the Head; and in this mystical body the Holy Spirit dwells, first in the Head, and from this Head, along all articulations, tissues and veins inspires every one who as a living member has been incorporated in this Body, and lives in connection with this Body. It is not an individual here and an individual there, who each by himself receives the Holy Ghost, and who now by uniting together constitute the Body of Christ. A body does not originate in such a way, that first there are the members, and that afterward these individual members are joined together into a body. The body is conceived and born with the crust and with the beginnings in it of every member that later on is to come out from it. Even the beard, which only covers the chin in later years, is not brought to it from without, but grows from a germ which the infant at birth brought with it. And in this body is the life. Not in one member by itself. An amputated leg is dead. Even an arm that is still joined to the body can be rendered as good as dead, and only becomes alive again when from the body the blood flows into it.

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And so it is with the Body of the Lord, which is the Congregation of the Saints. The head of that Body can not be touched. Christ is in glory. The Holy Spirit never departs from Him. And while Christ as the Head is inseparable from that Body, the Holy Spirit, the life of the Church, is always insured and guaranteed in that Sacred Head. However nearly life may be extinct at a given moment in the members of the Body, it flows with irresistible pressure from the Head to the members again. And even presently exercises that wonderfully assimilating power again which shows itself so gloriously in every reveille. Of course, this Body is not identical with the visible church. But the visible church also is not alive save by the Holy Ghost, who, flowing out from the Head of the invisible Body of the Lord, keeps the church alive so long as she does not cut the vital connection with the invisible Body.

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And this is the effect of this indwelling of the Holy Ghost in the church that he who is connected with this church in an organic, spiritual way, knows and tastes a fellowship with the Triune Being, such as is not possible outside of it. There is, indeed, a certain sense of the existence of God among the unconverted. Also a certain feeling of dependence upon a higher Power. The voice of conscience is also heard in their hearts. When advanced in years, they frequently think of what is to come after death. But not with all. Far from it. It can not be denied that the number of those who have no more concern about God than about their sin and about their future after death is steadily on the increase.

But this does not deny that in Christian as well as in heathen lands there are always many people who still hold a certain general religiousness in honor. But what these people

altogether miss is not the working of the conscience, but fellowship with the Holy Ghost. And fellowship with the Holy Ghost is, of course, nothing else than fellowship with God himself. Not the fellowship of the flock with the Shepherd, not outward submission to the appointments of God in our lot of life, not an all-sided dependence upon God, but fellowship with God in the sense of the immediate meeting of the Ego of God and the ego of the heart in the mysticism of grace.

We have heard of the holy Apostle, and in reading his Epistles we have a certain fellowship with the Man of Tarsus. But it would be something entirely different if we lived with St. Paul for a whole year. This difference applies here. You may have heard of God, of his wondrous deeds, of his virtues, of his powers, and God may still be a stranger to you. But fellowship with the Spirit allows the soul to meet God personally, to learn to know God personally, to associate with the Eternal Being personally, and even as a child with his father to hold converse with the Triune God.

This is what waiting on the Lord brings you. A friend meets friend and presently they part again. But a child waits for his father because he belongs with him and misses him when he is away. And so it is in this fellowship with God through the Holy Ghost. He who has come to know God personally as his Father and has been initiated in his secret fellowship, can not therefore always continue therein. The many activities of daily life do not allow it. The distractions of the world prevent it. We cut it off continually by sinful suggestions from our impure heart. And then the Lord frequently withdraws this fellowship from us in order to stimulate anew and make stronger the desire after it. But, and this is the characteristic, a child of God, who first enjoyed this fellowship, and lost it, misses it, he feels the need of it, and has no rest till it is found again; even on waking from sleep in the morning, the first impulse is to obtain this fellowship again.

Of two things one: either the child of God has this fellowship, or he longs for it, he prays for it, he waits for it all the day long (Ps. 25:5 Dutch version). In conversion it is a seeking for what was not as yet possessed. Afterward it is a seeking back what has been lost. And here also it applies: "He that seeks, shall find; he that knocks, it shall be opened unto him."



"O GOD, MY GOD."

The flower-bud of prayer unfolds slowly in the soul of a child. Not that there is no certain sacred inclination to pray in the heart at a very early age. But while the bud is early set, the question is when it will blossom. For many months the young child was present when mother prayed, but had no understanding of it, and not infrequently disturbed mother's prayer by crying. But at last the moment arrives when for the first time in prayer it undergoes a peculiar sensation and is impressed by what is holy. Tender mother piety tries to confirm this impression. And before long the child kneels down when mother kneels, and when he is put to bed the first efforts are made to teach him to pray himself. Then mother folds the little hands, closes the eyes and says a simple prayer. Ten, twelve words. And the dear little one brokenly repeats them after her.

Here the form is ahead of the reality. The impression of reverence and awe before the Divine Majesty is there. A young child loves that first prayer. But the Eternal has not yet revealed himself in a clearly conscious form to the heart.

Hence a young child learns prayer to Jesus more quickly than direct prayer to the Most High God. He does not express in his little prayer anything original. He only repeats something, and when he first weaves something into his prayer himself, it is not worship, but the request for something that employs his childish attention. It is all, however, a speaking into an unknown Holy sphere that is above or around his little bed. It is all along the line of a steady but slow development, and prayer from his own impulse to a God who is to be personally addressed, and who, at least in a limited way, is personally known, is little seen, as a rule, before the tenth year. There are exceptions with children of five, six or seven years of age, especially when they die young. Ordinarily, however, the fuller unfolding of the flower-bud into an own, personal and conscious prayer, does not come much before the twelfth year. Such is more apt to be the case, when back of the tenth and twelfth year there was a period of three or more unfavorable years, in which the child was obliged to sit still during long devotions, and when motherly tenderness of teaching prayer involuntarily turned into a purely formal compulsion of keeping eyes closed and hands folded.

What God himself performed in the child's soul during those early years the holy angels know, but we do not. Only in the end the result becomes evident to us. And this begins to show itself about the twelfth year. At that age it becomes evident whether a spiritual sense is awakened in the heart, or whether indifference, if not aversion to holy things has risen.



If a spiritual disposition of heart shows itself, it is about at this age that God himself takes mother's task in hand, and allures the lad or the young girl into a first personal prayer, which is born from an own impulse.

But from this on to the moment in which the soul cries out: "O God, my God," the way is long. Generally the kindly, tender brightness of childhood prayer is not a little darkened when the years of maturity are reached. From all sorts of books and conversations an entirely different world of thoughts has entered into the consciousness, which, compared with the poetry of the life of prayer, either appears bitterly prosaic, or if it glistens in a choice collection of ideals, which may encourage the cultivation of plans and intentions and expectations, it does not focus them in the worship of an Eternal, glorious Being.

These two currents, the current of the practical and ideal life in its multiplicity, and the unity of our life as it is focussed in prayer, antagonize one another, and in this antagonism sometimes prayer is forever lost. There are those, alas, who were spiritual in childhood, and who in adult years have entirely unlearned the art of prayer. It also happens that prayer continues to be made and increases in seriousness and depth, but that the world is not brought into alignment with it, and the life of the world remains unreconciled by the side of it, until the soul is more and more overcome by an oftentimes sickly mysticism or by an overexcited spiritualism. But in the ordinary way of piety this period of struggle is followed by a period of spiritual fixedness. The relation between the life of the soul and life in the world has then been regulated. The little boat no longer drifts with the caprice of wind and wave-beat. A rudder has been provided, a compass has been taken aboard, the lee-boards can be let down sideways. And thus the soul can direct its own course as it rides the waters of the sea of life. Heroic devotion to one's task in life goes hand in hand with an ever richer development of the life of prayer.

The sphere of the life of prayer and the sphere of one's calling in life begin more and more to cover one another. Moments of true prayer multiply themselves, by as much as in the work itself, the elevation of soul to God becomes more frequent, and ejaculatory prayer occurs more often, until at length a prayerful disposition of the soul becomes more and more habitual. On the other hand, secret prayer is more and more introduced into the daily task, and it is felt that prayer is not bound to single holy utterances, but that our whole existence with all its needs may be committed to God and may be sanctified in him. Thus prayer grows in significance and begins, to cast its benign shade over our entire life, and so increasingly becomes the strength of our life. "Fervent prayer is half the work," is first mechanically quoted, but afterwards becomes blessed experience. And the moment draws nigh when finally the "O God, my God" becomes the clear, pure expression of what the inner life of the soul experiences and enjoys in its innermost and holy emotions.

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If it should come to the lips too readily, this "O God my God" (Ps. 43:4) would be gross egotism, and covetous selfishness. A presumptuous claim of God for oneself. "My God" with no thought of others. This sin in prayer is wondrously overcome in the "Our Father." This always prays: Not give me, but give us our daily bread; not forgive me, but forgive us our debts; not deliver me, but deliver us from evil. We never stand before God alone, but always in the fellowship of love with all God's saints. Hence we must pray as a member of the Body of Christ, and not as one who stands by himself alone. But the "O God my God" does not antagonize this in any particular. It aims at something entirely different. It springs from the altogether different idea that God cares not merely for all his children, as a king watches over his million subjects, but that the King of Kings has this advantage over all the princes of the earth, that he knows all his children personally, that he understands them thoroughly, that he sustains a peculiar relation to each of them, that he has given each a calling of his own, that he has apportioned each a separate task, that he trains each for a particular destiny in eternity, and that therefore he not merely sustains a general relation to all, but that in addition to this, he stands in a particular relation with each of them. This relation is so personal, that it is never the same with any one else. He is Our Father, but as a father of seven children is the father of all, and yet distinguishes between them, and adapts himself to each one, according to his nature, disposition and character, so the Lord our God is Father of all, and yet Father in a special sense of each of us, in a special manner, drawing near to us in a mystical way, and revealing himself to us in mystical sensations which have a character of their own and bear an original stamp. He knows us and we are known of him, such as is not possible with another person who is differently constituted than ourselves. He is the "One Sun," which glistens differently in every dew-drop. Only this, the dewdrop does not know it. God's child can know it. And when this knowledge comes to him, he kneels down before "God his God."

Distinguish carefully. From God's side this peculiar relation, which is different with each of his children, existed from the moment of conception and of birth; yea, already before conception in the calling of the elect from eternity. The difference lies only on our side. Years of our life pass by when we indeed know God, and lead a prayer-life before his face, but only in a general sense, which is still weaned from the particular. We pray as others pray. We are one of God's children, but we are not yet discovered to ourselves as one such, in whom something special of the Father is expressed. But from the general gradually the particular separates itself. That which imparts to us a character of our own, which gives us our own calling and makes us to be a particular person, begins to enter into special fellowship with the Lord our God. And now it is the unsearchable riches of our God, that he, who created and elected every one of his children with a particular disposition and with a proper calling, will be and can be that special God to every one of them as belongs to their nature and condition. Not a general fulfilment for all alike, but for every one of them that special



fulfilment which he needs. Not only the most-special Providence, but also the most special self-revelation of his Divine Majesty in the mirror of the life of each soul. And when it comes to this, but also only then, there rises from the heart of itself spontaneously the jubilant exclamation of worship: "O God my God."



"THE LORD IS THY SHADE."

Not only the child, but also he who is older, would rather look at pictures and prints, than read; or in reading, at least, would like assistance for his representation. Hence the preference of our fathers for illustrated Bibles, and the new demand for books and periodicals with illustrations. For a long time there was little love for illustrated books, partly because the plates were poor and partly because the readers were overwise. But since we have become a little more natural, and photography and photo-engraving in less than a quarter of a century have improved the illustration to unknown fineness and beauty, the old love for seeing is revived again, and by looking at pictures, our representation has been uncommonly enriched. And now everything is embellished with illustrations in a good way and in a sinful way. The power in letting things be seen is recognized again. Even newspapers seek strength in this. At present it is still the picture with the Word. Gradually it will become ever more picture and ever less Word, until in the end exaggeration will avenge itself and the more just relation will return.

The main point with it all is, that our nature has been so created and disposed, that it prefers immediate sight. And that it carries this even into the spiritual desire to see, rather than to arrive at insight by exercise of thought, is not a defect in us, neither is it a result of sin, but a Divine instinct. Of the heavenly glory it is not prophesied that the redeemed will be subtle thinkers, but that they manifest themselves as children of God in this particular also, that they desire to see the Eternal Being, and that they surely shall enjoy this clear, beatific vision.

Philip's request: "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us," was but the naive expression of this deep desire, and Jesus' answer to this question shows, that the entire Christian religion can be capitulated under this viewpoint of sight. The Apostles gloried in the fact that they had seen and beheld the Word of life. In prophecy the vision had prepared the way for this seeing. And when the apostles portray the glory that is to come, they prophesy that now we see as in a glass darkly, but that then we shall see face to face, and that in this seeing we shall know even as we are known. Not reading, not reasoning, no, but seeing, and clear vision shall constitute heavenly bliss. And John adds: "Beloved, it is not yet made manifest what we shall be, but we know . . . that we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is." This seeing is cultivated by picture and print, and seeing spiritual things is aided by the emblem--The Cross, the All-seeing eye, the emblems of faith, hope and love, The catacombs of the early Christians are full of such emblems.

That nature, and life itself, is full of imagery, is of still greater significance. The Bible, more than any other book, employs it, by which to show us the spiritual. Apart from picture



and print, and aside from the emblem, it is this imagery which does not stand by the side of the Word, but enters into the Word, and shows things through the Word itself. The true vine, the good shepherd, the Lamb of God, the sower who sows the seed, and so much more, it is all imagery borrowed from nature and from life, which God employs in his Word, by which to bring the spiritual nearer to us in greater clearness.

The Scripture does the same thing with respect to the Most Highest, whereby to bring the view of the Eternal Being closer to us. This Eternal Being comes near to us in the imagery of: The Lord is our Rock, the Lord is our High Tower. He is our Shield. He is our Keeper. He is the Father in the house of the many mansions. He is our King, seated upon the throne of his glory. And among these images is also this beautiful one: "The Lord is thy Shade" (Psalm 121:5). Isaiah uses it when on his knees in worship he exclaims: "Lord, Thou art my God, . . . Thou hast been a strength to the poor, . . . a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, for as heat through a thick cloud, so Thou shalt bring down the noise of tyrants" (Is. 25. Dutch version). And likewise reads the song of Hamaaloth: "The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand" (Ps. 121:5).

This figure of speech is beautiful because it is gentle and tender. It is not a revelation of power. No strong arm here bares itself. There is scorching heat such as in the desert of the East can prostrate life. And see, quietly and with majesty, a thick cloud passes over the desert levels, and sunlight no more blinds, and sunheat no more burns, and the traveler breathes again, refreshed and restored by the Divine shadow from above. Shade! We sons of the West do not know the glory of this short word to the man in the East. With the exception of dog-days, the sun is no fierce tyrant to us, to make life a burden. To us the sun is a lovely something, which we seek. The sun refreshes and cherishes us. We love his light. But in the land where prophets prophesied and psalmists sang, where Jesus walked about with his disciples, everyone seeks by means of thick walls, heavy hangings, high trees and long white garments, to escape the fierce tyranny of the sun. In hot seasons everything there burns, glows, and is scorched. And in level deserts man and beast are helplessly surrendered to the heat of the sand and the scorching rays from above. Everything calls and prays for shade. And all this, applied by metaphor to the struggle of God's people, and to the battle of life of his servants, inspired both prophet and Psalmist to refresh Israel with the glorious word of comfort: The Lord thy God is thy Shade!

Thy shade against what? Against the heat of the day metaphorically descriptive of the burden of the daily task, of the heat and fierceness with which startling opposition, adversity and persecution overtake you. The Lord is thy Shade is allied with the other image: the Lord is thy Shield, but has another tendency. When you have to do with an enemy, a persecutor,



whom you know, whom you see before you, and whose assault is upon you, you need a shield, and he who in such threatening moments has sought his shield with God, has always found it there. But it is entirely different when heat brings burnings which can not be grasped, which from the mysterious background of our lot in life, from covert opposition, as an elementary force press themselves upon us from all sides, and make us distressed, and which we can not resist. Such is the case with the Arab in the desert, when the heat of the sun makes the sand burn under his feet and the roof of his mouth to be parched. And so it is with the people of God, when opposition arises on every hand, when here it is water that threatens inundation, and there it is the whirlwind that carries everything before it. And so it is in the personal life when because of the will of God, and for his sake, one trouble brings another, and one is driven from trial to trial, and the heat of battle steadily grows in strength and at length you have to succumb.

And in such an hour when, as we would say, the water comes up to the lips, but which makes the Scripture, which is Eastern in its imagery, speak of a scorching heat from the sun which threatens utter prostration, then the Lord is the Comforter, since he is then your shade which covers you, and makes you breathe again. In accordance with the sacred imagery this can be done by means of a cloud which intercepts the heat of the glowing sun, but it can also be done in a more tender way. In the desert a father may take the side of the sun and so make himself a shade for his child that walks with him. And this is what the Psalmist suggests, when he sings: "The Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand." And thus the Divine tenderness of highest love mingles itself in the comforting.

God leaves you not alone. The journey through the wilderness can not be spared you. The heat must burn. But the Lord looks after you. He comes to you. His approach to you is very close. He takes a stand between the heat of the sun and you. He takes you by the hand. He covers you with the shade of his majestic greatness. And so you go on your way rejoicing, refreshed by God's love and covered by his holy shade.

All this is poetry. We know it well. But though it be such, this does not make it fiction. There is that which no eye has seen and no ear has heard and has not entered the heart of man, but which, already, here God gives to be understood, to be seen and to be enjoyed by those who have been initiated into his secret walk. God can be far removed from us. He can also be close at hand. This depends on his grace. This depends upon the inward condition of the soul. This much is certain, that when he is close at hand and the heat of the day threatens to bring prostration, then he is your shade, and you feel the cool of it on your right hand. The cooling effect which the shade of God brings, must be felt. It must be felt in the soul. And if you do not feel it, may it not be because you are not near unto God?

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"HE INCLINES HIS EAR UNTO ME."

The ear is inclined toward someone, either when our hearing is impaired, or when he to whom we listen has a weak voice, or when the distance is too great that separates him from us. The first is impossible with God. How should he, who has planted the ear, not hear; how should he who has created sound, and the hearing of it, not hear all creaturely sound? Hence, when it is said of God, that he inclines his ear to our prayer, it always means a grace to usward, an act of Divine compassion, whereby the Majesty in the heavens adapts himself to us, bows Himself down to us, and seeking, meets us in the way.

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True prayer is always clothed with deep humility. There are all sorts of prayers. Prayer that is said; words that are muttered thoughtlessly; prayer because the stated hour has struck; prayer from sense of duty; prayer born from need; prayer from deep longing after God; prayer for higher, heavenly strength; prayer from gladness in happy thankfulness; prayer for oneself; prayer for others; prayer when one is alone; prayer with others; spoken prayer; silent prayer;--the form always changes, and each has its own value. But in all true prayer, in which one can not rest until he knows that God listens to his prayer, the soul feels small, the person is conscious of weakness, and in his own estimation he is as nothing, and less than nothing, before the Triune God, and self is effaced in order that God may draw us up to himself, that the heart may be lifted up, and that we may have freedom of utterance.

What is the world compared with the firmament, and what are we who pray, compared with the world in which we are one of more than a thousand millions of living souls? There are a few mighty ones who feel, and must feel, that they are great in the world. Think of a Napoleon, or of a Bismarck. But there is nothing of this in the ordinary man who prays, whose name is scarcely known outside of his village or town. The mighty ones on earth have their own account with God. We can not reckon with them here. We deal here with the ordinary worshipper who is scarcely known outside of his own little circle. And what is such a one, if he bends his knees before the Most High God, the Almighty Creator, who maintains and governs this little world, and the many thousand suns and stars which sparkle and shine in the heavens that endlessly spread themselves above us?

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In all true prayer, therefore, i. e., with such prayer with which in some measure at least the soul thinks of the majesty and greatness of God, he who prays can never be anything else than a nothing in his own esteem, and be deeply conscious that his prayer is but a passing breath, unless it pleases the Lord to incline his ear unto it.

This need springs from the insignificance of the human voice, from the immeasurable distance, and more still from the indispensableness of personal inclination to him who prays. When we would have prayer pierce the heavens, our voice is so much the acme of weakness,

that it makes no difference whether a leader in the house of prayer raises his voice so as to make it resound through the arches, or whether a sick man on his bed breathlessly whispers his low prayer to God. Even where no sound of voice is heard at all, the silent prayer must be breathed from the soul. The voice here avails nothing. We can compel a hearing with men by speaking more loudly and boldly; but when we would speak to "our Father in heaven" the voice loses absolutely all significance. Then the stentorian voice of the orator has no advantage whatever over the weakest voice of a child. And whether the shipwrecked man in his extremity cries out his "O God, help me" in the face of the howling tempest, it is all the same. Whether strong or weak, our voice avails nothing here. The bleating of the lost sheep can make the shepherd hear. Our voice can never move God to hear us.

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The voice in prayer is for our own sake and for the sake of those who pray with us. Even on our knees in solitude we feel impelled to express our prayer in words. Clearness only comes into our prayer by the means of words. It brings relief, it unburdens the soul. The undulation of sensations within comes to rest in the whispered or spoken word of prayer. A prayer without words can cry out from the soul after God, but that takes place instinctively and we do not even call that prayer. Real prayer goes through our consciousness. He who prays must know what he wants to pray for. His memory must be active. He must think of the needs, for which he prays. He must know the mercies for which he gives thanks. He must be fully aware of the task in behalf of which he invokes Divine help. From the mysticism of the heart the praying soul must come to be clearly conscious, and this comes to pass in the word and through the voice, and this makes prayer perfect. This shows itself still more strongly in prayer with others. Then the voice is the instrument which brings the prayer of him who prays to the soul of those who pray with him. He who leads in prayer must be like him that plays the keys of the organ. His soul plays. The soul of the others must sound with his. And thus there is common prayer; a special grace imparted to us by God.

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Then comes the distance. When we want to ask some one across a stream or lake for something, we naturally raise our voice, and it helps us when he on the other side turns his ear toward us, and by his hand back of it shows that he listens, and tries to understand our call. And what broad waters flow between us and God, when we want to call on him. The whole world lies between and all the absorbing interests of life, and the immeasurable distance to the heaven of heavens, where the Lord is enthroned in everlasting light.

Our Savior commanded us not to begin prayer by addressing the Holy Spirit within us, not with calling upon the Omnipresent One, who compasses our going and our lying down and whose hand is upon us, but with a reverent invocation of "Our Father who art in heaven," and the Heidelberg Catechism says so beautifully, that we should do this, in order not to think of the great God in an earthly way. Of course, this is not all. By continuance prayer becomes more intimate. This means that in prayer God gradually reveals his holy presence to us and comes close to us. And at length even enters our heart, when the Holy Spirit prays

with us and for us, and teaches us how to pray. But to begin with this is sickly mysticism. At first we face the distance. First the soul must lift itself to higher things. Not here below but above is the altar of the prayers of the saints, which burns with incense before his face. No more here below, but in heaven our Savior is seated at the right hand of God, and prays for us, and by his intercession supports our prayer. First "Lift up your hearts," the *sursum corda*, and then as we pray God in his majesty graciously condescends to us.

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And this true impulse of prayer expresses itself in this, that prayer can sometimes become a calling, a crying, a roaring, as the Psalmist says; and only when we observe that God inclines his ear to us, and regards us, and hearkens to our prayer, does the praying soul find rest. When in prayer we feel that the listening ear of God inclines itself to us, the distance is bridged, and we know that God has come near to us, and that we are near unto God.

And so, at length, prayer reaches its highest bliss in what in the third place we called the personal turning of God to him who prays. Thousands upon thousands call on God every morning and every evening for help and for salvation. True, the number of those who no longer pray is on the increase. But still the numbers of those who in times of need and stress cry after God for deliverance are incalculably great. And now the point is, to know that among those thousands and tens of thousands who are to be noticed, God also looks on us, and that he knows that we, too, call upon him. Among all these voices that cross each other and mingle together to have our voice also penetrate to the Almighty. If we may express it in a very human way, to know, to perceive, to feel, that we, too, come to our turn, and that for us also there comes a moment of hearing--that is what he who prays means, when he gives jubilant thanks, that God has also inclined the ear to his prayer.

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Of course, this is not so with God. He does nothing in turn. He hears every one who prays immediately and all at the same time. But in our human consciousness there is always in our prayer, when it penetrates, a sense that God now turns also to us, and inclines his ear to our personal prayer. That he inclines to your prayer differently than to the prayer of others, because the Most High God knows your particular life, understands your personal nature, estimates your special need of soul and therefore has stored up for you an altogether particular hearing of your prayer.

And this is the glory of prayer. You call upon God, and he knows you. He distinguishes you as one among thousands. However insignificant you may be, with whatever burden of sin you come to him, he does not pass you by. He despises not your supplication. He turns himself to you, and inclines his listening ear. And when you perceive this inclination of God, prayer becomes a seal to you of your election. With close by you, but that eternally you belong to him, kings and princes on earth, the mighty and the great alone are admitted. To him, the King of Kings, even the most forgotten and despised have access. When you pray, and God inclines his ear to your prayer, you are close to God, and your Father who is in heaven, seals the fact to you, that not only now you have his presence

"TAKE NOT THY HOLY SPIRIT FROM ME."

The Holy Scripture speaks of a seeking of God's face. "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, Lord, in the light of thy countenance" (Ps. 89:15). But the Scripture speaks also of something more intimate, when it comes to a mutual fellowship, when not only the light of God's countenance shines on us, but when also the soul lifts itself up to God. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant" (Ps. 25:14). But with the third round it goes still further, when Almighty God not only makes his face to shine upon us, and admits us to his secret walk, but when he enters into our heart, makes it his temple, and as Holy Spirit dwells in it. "The Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which can not be uttered, and he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints" (Rom. 8:26-27).

This three-fold degree of fellowship should be carefully distinguished. He who stands on the first round of this ladder of fellowship has turned away from the vanities of the world and has accustomed himself to the light that shines from above. He walks no longer in his own light, but in the light of God's countenance. The darkness is past. He knows in whom he believes. And the people that thus walk in the light of the Divine countenance, who enjoy this not merely from time to time, but continuously, the Scripture pronounces blessed. Then of itself and unconsciously the second round is reached, the entering upon the secret walk with God. Not that the light of God's countenance shines on us all, but in this way, that the soul has become a mirror, from which this light is reflected. That God shines on us, and that the soul shines out toward God. This is the secret of the Lord which is inwardly disclosed to us. But even this is not enough. The intimacy of living near unto God goes still further, enters in still more deeply, and then it comes to this indescribable, this unspeakable, this impenetrable reality that the Lord God unites himself in the Holy Spirit so closely with our spirit, that he is not merely above and around us, but that he is also in us, that he turns into us, makes our heart his dwelling place, and that in our inmost self he speaks to us and we to him.

This highest round is not reached at once. There is progression here, a blessed development and deepening, which is not acquired by all, and in which provisionally, they who have reached it, find themselves only now and then. This is known as their most blessed moments; as a peace of God which comes and goes again, and which, when it is lost, is sought again anew. The break can come from lack of spiritual training. It can come through a superior power from without. But in most cases it comes through sin. The latter was the



case with David, and therefore from his desolate and "God-estranged" heart the prayer at once arose: "Take not thy Holy Spirit from me" (Ps. 51:11).

When we treat of the Holy Spirit, our finite mind deals with mystery. Human language has no words for it. Our conception here fails of all analysis. We can believe, we can undergo sensations, we can enjoy, but here on earth, at least, and in our state of sin the deep mystery of the Triune Being of God can not be unveiled to us. We worship Almighty God as our Father who is in heaven. We worship the God of all grace in the Only-begotten Son, whom he gave unto us, whom he sent, and delivered in our behalf. And we worship still more intimately the thrice Holy One in the Holy Ghost, whom we possess as Comforter in our hearts. In whatever direction our thinking and pondering moves, whether to the world round about us, whether in the world of our heart, it is always God whom we meet, it is always in God that our searching gaze finds its point of rest, it is always to God that our worship and devout adoration lift themselves. It is always God who overshadows us, and inwardly fills us with his holy love. One and the self-same God, one glorious and ever-blessed Being, one Omnipotence which carries and knows us.

But it remains a mystery. A mystery which is tender to our heart, rich in blessed enjoyment, ever more intimately revealing itself to the seeking soul, but far transcending all our thinking, all our understanding, all our study and pondering. It is the most real of all realities. It is the one thing that stays by when once the world shall fall away from us, and consciousness shall be darkened in the haziness of death. It is the secret of the Lord at which scorners laugh, which leaves the world cold, awes the sinner and strikes terror at his heart, but which, according to the covenant of peace, is shown to God's child in the stillness of solitude. It is the Holy Ghost himself who, entering into the heart of God's child, sets the seal upon it of this Triune Mystery.

But for this reason fellowship with the Holy Spirit in us is exceedingly sensitive and tender. Nothing must come in between, or it is gone. It can not withstand anything or it is lost. It can not bear any disturbance, or it has fled. Not that the Holy Spirit withdraws himself and leaves us to ourselves. On the contrary he remains in the heart which he has chosen for his dwelling place. Neither Satan nor the world can expel him from his temple. And this is his Divine love, that dwelling in us, he allows himself to be grieved, to be offended, to be hurt and wounded by our sin, and still continues his stay.

This does not seem to you to be the case. In the hour of transgression, you feel that the Holy Spirit became a stranger to you; that he went far away from you; and that he could scarcely be reached by your earnest supplication. He truly continued to hold tenure in your heart, but in the heart itself a wall of separation was reared between your spirit and the indwelling Holy Ghost. The door of the temple within was locked by your own ego. You descended in your own being to the deeper underground, above which this temple raises itself. In this temple the Holy Ghost was still enthroned, but you had no more access to it. So all

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fellowship was broken. All secret intercourse was cut off--your sin had wound you round as a spider the fly. And while the Holy Spirit, whom you grieved, in seeking compassion reaches out after you again, you draw yourself back in your own sense of guilt.

And even in such moments, faith that is not understood, continues to shine through. After his deep fall David felt the anxious estrangement. He realized that as long as God looked upon his sin, no restoration of fellowship was possible, and therefore he prayed: "Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities" (Ps. 51:9). He became inwardly conscious that his polluted heart was bound to estrange him from God, and therefore he pleaded in such touching and beautiful terms: "Create in me a clean heart, God, and renew a right spirit within me." He walked in deep darkness, and so he prayed that the light of God's countenance might pour down its beams again upon him. But though he bruised his guilty head against the wall of separation, in that same striking moment the sense of faith was alive in him, that behind that wall the Holy Ghost still reached out to comfort him, and therefore he prayed not: "Give me back thy Holy Spirit," but altogether differently: "Take not thy Holy Spirit from me."

Thus the soul that is troubled and wretched holds fast to faith. It does not understand this in itself; it does not grasp this; but it feels that grace does not let go, that grace is in God, that God with his grace still operates within, and it only fears that this grace, which is in God himself, might be removed from it. And against this fear the soul prays, supplicates, cries: God, stay by me, stay in me. Let me not go forever. And this supplication keeps on, in earnestness and in sincerity, until at length in unspeakable compassion the door of the temple opens itself again.

And then the joy of salvation returns; the meeting again between the soul that had deeply grieved the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit who rather than let go the soul of God's child, had allowed himself to be grieved. It is well with him who has experienced this with regard to his own sin. He alone understands what it is to have the Holy Ghost as his Comforter.



"KNOW YE NOT THAT YE ARE THE TEMPLE OF GOD?"

In prophecy it is said, that God "turned aside to tarry for a night" ([Jer. 14:8](#)). This figure is borrowed from the wayfaring man who at sundown turns in to spend the night, and when, in early morning the sun appears above the horizon, he leaves the hospitable inn and pursues his way. Applied to the Holy One of Israel, this means that at times the prophets were aware of the indwelling of the Spirit in the soul; but that it was not permanent, that it was transient, and that soon the God close by had become again a God afar off. By the side of this experience of a God who turns in to tarry for a night, and then leaves the soul again, Jesus puts the promise, that on the day of Pentecost, God the Holy Ghost, shall come to the people of the Lord, and shall not go away, but abide with them forever. St. John, in his Gospel (7:39), states this forcibly, when he says: "The Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified." This can not mean, of course, that the Holy Spirit did not as yet exist, but signified that the Holy Ghost had not yet taken up his abode in the church permanently, because, only after his ascension, Jesus would send the Comforter from the Father to the church.

And so it must be understood when the Apostles speak of the church as of a "Temple of God" and as a "dwelling place of God in the Spirit." "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you" ([I Cor. 3:16](#)), not merely signifies that the Holy Spirit turns into the hearts of the saints, but much more and much more strongly, that having entered the heart, he abides there permanently; that he never more leaves the heart that has once been enriched with his indwelling, but according to Jesus' promise he remains there forevermore.

It indicates a new state of things, an entirely different dispensation of the Spirit. What under the old dispensation took place transiently, what was an occasional descent from on high into the hearts of a very few, under the new dispensation is an age upon age indwelling in the whole church. Under the old dispensation the separation between God and man was maintained. The only dwelling of God among men which was permanent was in Zion. But under the New Covenant, in virtue of the sacrifice of Golgotha, the wall of separation has been done away for good; what separated man from God has forever been brought to nought. God has not merely come to his people, but has come into his people. The temple of Zion has ceased to exist, and in the place of it has come the church of the living God. She is now God's temple. God dwells in her.

Thus humanity is divided. There is the unregenerated world, with which the separation continues, and which has no more temple on Zion. And there are the people of the Lord, who are no longer carnal, but live their lives in the spirit. Among this people, in this Church



of the Lord, all separation has fallen away. She is more closely allied with heaven than with the world. She has become the permanent, abiding, the never-ending dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

But care must here be taken. This does not mean that God's spirit reveals his operations in God's saints alone. He who says this, denies the omnipresence of God, the Holy Ghost, and limits his activities. The Holy Ghost is himself God, and therefore there is nothing in God's creation in which this Spirit does not operate. Not alone in everything human, but in every creature, where there is a working of the Son and of the Father, there is likewise a working of the Holy Ghost. With every other representation the unity of the Threefold Divine being is lost. In creation itself the omnipotence of God is evident; that is to say, the omnipotence of the Father, as well as the omnipotence of the Son, and the omnipotence of the Holy Spirit. From the Father is the fullness of power, from the Son the fullness of thought, from the Holy Ghost the fullness of energy. There is no force of nature, no organic working, no Divinity evident in the richness and beauty of nature, but the Holy Ghost glorifies himself in it. And if this is evident in the inanimate creature, it is much more strongly evident in the conscious creature. To think of an angel apart from the fact, that all talents and gifts which operate in him, are derived from the Holy Ghost, is absurd. The same applies to man. No general has ever excelled, no poet has ever sung, no scholar has ever reaped the admiration of the world, no artist has ever enriched life with his creations, but it was the Holy Spirit, who caused the spark of genius to glow in him.

Such and not otherwise is the teaching of Scripture. It even goes too far, that no gift of the Spirit, and no talent among men has ever been used against God, but it was the Holy Ghost who not only apportioned this talent, but also maintained it, and caused it to work. Hence this is the awful judgment which awaits the man who has misused his talent against God, that once he shall know what it is, with a gift of the Holy Ghost to have turned himself against God.

The indwelling of the Holy Ghost in the soul is altogether different from these gifts. Entirely apart from our gifts and talents we have a personal life. This personal life enables us to company with the three persons in the Godhead personally. As among men we company with one another, so that they and we enter into conscious fellowship, and undergo one another's influence, mutually receive and return love, enter into their thoughts and acquaint them with our own, suffer their superiority, enter into covenant and relation with them, devote ourselves to them and make sacrifices for them, so it is given man to enter into personal intercourse with the Holy One, in secret fellowship and in holy communion. This indwelling of the Holy Ghost in us signifies, that God not only allows himself to be sought of



us, but that he himself has come to us; that by regenerating us he has enabled us to obtain personal fellowship with him, that he did not wait till we had found him, but that he made the approach to us and touched us not from without but from within, and that in the deepest secrecy of the life of the soul he established the tie which made us to taste his presence in the very roots of our being, in the deepest ground of our sensations, in the immediacy of our first perceptions and feelings.

This Divine fellowship does not depend on natural gifts and talents, for he who is most richly endowed with genius may suffer the lack of it, and the plainest among the plain may enjoy it to the full. In humanity itself God has implanted the disposition for this. Sin alone has disturbed it. In regeneration God restores this disposition. Then fellowship is possible again. Then fellowship comes again. Then in the deepest secrecy of his soul man is one again with God

This is the work of the Comforter. It is not yet the heavenly state, which will be all joyous when even the memory of our sin not only, but of the fact of our ever having been sinners will be taken from us, and will be cast into the depth of the sea. Here we still feel that we undergo a Divine, artistic operation. By having our understanding darkened and by being blinded and forsaken we are reminded again and again of the antithesis between this glorious indwelling of the Holy Ghost, and the fact that we have been born in sin. With us the Holy Spirit continuously reacts against our sinful nature. And therefore here on earth he is and remains our Comforter. For this is the blessed comfort of a child of dust, that while on one side he still sinks away in misery, yet under it all and with it all he remains conscious of the blessed presence of the Holy Ghost. That the Holy Spirit does not go away, that he does not allow himself to be sent away, that he does not give us up, but continues to dwell with us, and to take us as we are, is his infinite, his Divine love. That he did not merely "turn in to tarry for the night," but that he abides with us forever, is our joyous bliss, and the glorious richness of our comfort.



"ACCUSTOM NOW THYSELF TO HIM."

The exhortation that we should accustom ourselves to God, carries a reproach that brings shame. It is as though one would say to a child: "Accustom yourself to your mother!" This might be said with regard to a stepmother, stepfather or stepbrother, but we do not accustom ourselves to our own mother, who has carried us under her heart. We love her with all the fidelity and affection of the heart of a child.

We only accustom ourselves to what is strange to us, or what by estrangement has become so. When, therefore, we are exhorted to accustom ourselves to God, it implies that our Father who is in heaven has become a stranger to us; that this estrangement is still a barrier in the way of our fellowship with God; and that we should endeavor, the sooner the better, to accustom ourselves again to God, in order that this obstacle might be removed.

With God, of course, this does not mean, what it does with us, when we speak of becoming accustomed to one. We speak of it most frequently when we first come in touch with some one who acts strangely, a man of strong peculiarities, who is unprepossessing. Then it is our duty not to be repelled by him, but indulgently to seek common points of interest with him, and to adapt ourselves to his strange manner. We also speak of accustoming ourselves to one, who either by a difference in development is far above us, or who by social difference has another outlook upon life. For this makes a difference in inclinations and sympathies, in mental activity and choice of vocation in life. He is interested in what does not interest you. And in the great drama of life you play in an altogether different act from his. Thus to accustom oneself to another, in all such cases, means, that we restrain ourselves, that we smooth down the sharp edges of our own character, and that constrained by the dictates of love and the necessity of social intercourse, we enter into his life, in order to understand him, to sympathize with him, and gradually to adopt him into the circle of our affections.

All this of itself is entirely different with respect to the Lord our God. With him we have to do with our God and our Creator, with our Lord and our King, with our Father who is in heaven. Everything in him that appears strange to us is our own fault, our own sin; it is sign and token that we are wrong; that we are corrupt in our sensations and feelings, and that we are astray in the deliberations of our hearts. If we were what we ought to be, there would be no estrangement from God, and no need of the exhortation to accustom ourselves again to God. Hence the saying: "Accustom now thyself to him," is a judgment that is passed on us, a complaint against our mode of life, and at the same time it is a sacred admonition to become a child again in fellowship with our Father.



What is unbelief in these our days? From what cause is the quiet, firm confidence in what God has revealed unto us, shaken with many, even among the faithful? One first speaks of impenetrable secrets; then of problems which defy the understanding: gradually it is doubted whether revelation is correct, until, at length, in the face of Scripture and experience the human interpretation of life is boldly posited as the only valid one. What this amounts to is, that feeling strange to God and to his Word, there is no willingness to get accustomed to him, to his doings and to his Word. On the contrary it is demanded that God shall change himself and show himself to be conformed to our thought. If we accustom ourselves to him we must change and reform ourselves until we are meet for God. But doubt and unbelief demands that our confession of God shall be modified in such a way, that it shall turn out a God for us who shall suit us.

This struggle was not so sharp and bitter at one time, because at least in its main outlines the Bible interpretation of life was counted valid in science, in public opinion, and therefore in education, and in the better forms of social intercourse. He who in those better days believed, was carried by the general tenor of life, and there was no occasion for offense, not even among the younger people. But all this has changed. Every fundamental idea about God, creation, the fall, the Atonement, life after death and the last judgment, which was once common property, has been given up by science, has become uncertain in public opinion, has been banished from education, and dismissed as topics of conversation from among more serious-minded people. And not this alone, but gradually an entirely different system of fundamental ideas has been put in place of it. An altogether different confession has arisen, a different catechism has found entrance. Broadly ramified, the rationalistic interpretation of life now stands in public opinion side by side with the Christian Confession.

Thus to the estrangement from God which is occasioned by sin, a second estrangement has been added, which tempts us to adopt an interpretation of life, which openly conflicts with the plan, doings and wisdom of God, as revealed in his Word. Everything in God has thereby become strange to many people. In no single particular do they feel at home with God or in his Word. The child has ceased to know his Father. Hence the call: "Accustom now thyself to God" is most serious and doubly significant. It now means: Disengage yourself from the tie that binds you to the wisdom of the world, and with all your mind and heart enter again into the plan and most holy thoughts of God.

Do not take this in a philosophical sense. Interpret it practically in behalf of life. Especially with regard to the mystery of suffering, to which Eliphaz applied it, even though mistakenly, in the case of Job. Suffering would be no mystery amid the hardships of life, if it were always carefully measured out to individuals, according to their misdoings against God or man. For then nothing would be evident in suffering save righteous retribution, and for the rest every one's lot in life would be alike. This thought certainly implies the unchangeable fact of eternal retribution, in accordance with every man's deeds, whether they be good or evil.

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The mistake, however, is, that this retribution of eternal justice is confused with the mystery of suffering here on earth; so that suffering is taken individually, and estimated by each personal manner of life and behavior. This makes us stumble on the hard fact, that we are offended at the godless man who prospers, and even worse, that our soul smarts with indignation at the sight of a true child of God, a noble character, a faithful servant of Christ, who, as we would say, did nothing wrong, overwhelmed by waves of affliction. That men might do so, we understand. When a tyrant honors the godless, and harasses the children of God, we think it dreadful, because it is always God who allows it; but we can submit to this. But that God himself inflicts this in sickness, and by means of cruel death, is and remains at this viewpoint a stumbling block which one can not get over, and which has killed much rootless faith. What accounts for this, save that God's thoughts are entirely different from our thoughts, and that instead of accustoming ourselves to his plan, we stubbornly maintain our interpretation of suffering in opposition to him.



With God, individual retribution is connected with the last judgment, and not with sentence passed by an earthly judge, and far less still with suffering, which he brings upon us. According to the teaching of Scripture, sin is no evil that cleaves to single individuals, but a poison that has entered into our whole race. The creation of man was not individual, but in it was created a race, all mankind, which, in all ages and among all nations forms one whole. Not a large number of people that only afterwards by laws and other ways are counted as one whole, but our human race; from which individuals proceed, and to which they belong as twigs and leaves to a tree. And to save the race of man which he created, God brought suffering into the world of men, as an antidote for the poison of sin. With him suffering is a cup of sacred medicine which he administers not to the individual person, but to our race, in order to counteract the poison of sin. And now he selects priests and priestesses who are called of him, to administer the sacrament of suffering to the world. If he elected godless people only for this purpose, they would harden themselves against suffering, and the godly would pride themselves on being spared. The medicine would do no good. It would bring spiritual petrification. It would bring loss for gain.



No, to bear suffering, he calls first of all upon the best, the most godly, the most noble, his prophets and his martyrs. Thereby the holy operation of the medicine goes forth and accomplishes that whereunto he has appointed it. The Cross explains it. God so loved the world, that he gave it his only Begotten Son. Personally Jesus stands entirely outside of sin. He is not only the most godly, the noblest, the best of the children of men, but he is the Son of Man, and upon him comes the burden of suffering as upon no other man. And from no suffering among the children of men has there gone forth an operation unto salvation as from his Cross. And therefore, the Cross expresses the thought of God, the appointment of God, the wisdom of God. Whosoever would understand his own sorrows and the suffering of the world, must accustom himself to this appointment, to this thought and to this wisdom

of God. And he who does this has heavenly comforting, yea, he can give thanks that the cup of suffering has not passed him by. He feels that he is himself a priest, in order that following after the One High priest, he may, in the name of the Lord, administer the sacrament of suffering.

"THE SPIRIT OF MAN IS A CANDLE OF THE LORD."



To be near unto God is a luxury of soul which by grace can be our portion also in unconsciousness. When a child of God that enjoyed the secret walk is put under an anesthetic for the sake of an operation, it does not break fellowship between his heart and God. The same is true of a swoon. In high fever when the heated blood over-stimulates the brain, and delirium ensues, the relation with God remains equally intact. Even sleep, which for many hours deprives us of self-knowledge, may not be taken otherwise, and this entirely apart even from our consciousness in dreams. And yet in each of these conditions, from our side, as far as conscious life goes, being near unto God is inactive. But consciousness of fellowship with God is not, therefore, lost. Being wakened by a gentle touch, it is felt again and resumed. Consciousness of this fellowship has only become inactive. It is with this as with our capacity of sight. This, too, in sleep is not gone, but its at rest. Electric light illustrates this clearly. When the button is turned, everything is light, and when it is turned again, everything is dark. The power remains the same. It only draws itself back from shining.

From God's side, on the other hand, fellowship with the soul of his child operates continually; even under narcotic influence, in a swoon and during sleep it maintains itself and acts. The knowledge of this imparts rest, as one undergoes an anaesthetic, and no less that peaceful feeling with which at night we lose ourselves in sleep. "Let me sleeping wait for thee; Lord, then sleep I peacefully," as it was sung in Hernhutt. And who can doubt but that the strength-imparting and strength-renewing operations with which our Father who is in heaven favors his children, are yet more manifold and effective in sleep than by day. The third part of our life, that binds us to our couch, by no means serves the needs of the body alone. It meets a higher end. Particularly by night God builds his temple in our hearts. This detracts nothing from the fact that, "To be near unto God" only obtains its highest significance, when with our clear consciousness of day we hold blessed fellowship with God. When we perceive, observe and know, that the soul is near to God and God near to the soul; when, humanly speaking, there is an exchange of perceptions between God and us; when we, speaking reverently, with the telephone call up God in prayer, and far from on high the answer comes. But consider well, that this calling and answering are not exhausted by the words you stammer and the ideas which thereby operate in you. A mother has tender, affectionate communion with the little one at her breast, apart from any word and outside of any intellectual understanding. That which operates in this fellowship and maintains it, is



life itself, the drawings of the blood, the thrilling of the feeling. And though, when the child shall have become a youth and a young man, this fellowship will express itself in words and in ideas, the root of this communion, even in later years, will reach deeper than the lips that speak the word. What does not the look of the eye convey, the expression of the face, a tear, a smile, and how sweetly does not operate in and under all this the communion of the same blood, the tenderness of hiding love?



All this is not unconscious, but constitutes part of the consciousness. It is as the fragrance of a flower, as an atmosphere of love which we breathe in. It is the perfume and the atmosphere of the heart, which we drink in with full draughts. And truly, you well know what the scent of a rose is, and of an hyacinth; you are perfectly conscious of it, even though the ablest botanist is not able to analyze this perfume in ideas, nor to describe it in words. Thus to be consciously near unto God, means far more than you can understand, or express in words. It is a becoming aware, a perceiving, a feeling, which may not be attributed to the nerves. That creates false mysticism. But it is a perceiving and an expressing of self in a spiritual way, in the immediate union of your inner sense with the life of God.

To make this plain the Scripture distinguishes between the soul and our inner being. It speaks on one hand of the heart and of the soul, and on the other hand of something that lies far behind and deep underneath the two. This is expressed plastically in several ways, mostly by contrasting the heart and the reins, and also by speaking of the bowels, or as in [Proverbs 20:27](#), by contrasting the soul with "the innermost chambers of the belly." Translating this into our language, "the soul of man" here means our consciousness, and the latter clause what we call: Our hidden inner being. In this sense it is said, that "our consciousness is a candle of the Lord that searches our innermost being." Our consciousness is a searchlight which God himself sends forth across our entire inner being, in order that in its brightness and clearness we should learn to know our own inmost self.



Thus only are these words intelligible to us, and unveil a deep, far-reaching thought, which penetrates and appeals to us. Our consciousness is not of our own making. To become conscious is not our act. But all consciousness is an operation in us which is quickened by God, and which is maintained in us by him from moment to moment. It is on a line with the sun. The sun is the light in the world of nature, by which God enables us to see, to observe and to investigate nature. And in like manner the consciousness is a light which is ignited by God in our personal ego; or better yet, it is a light which God causes to shine in the world of our innermost being, in order that in this spiritual light we should examine and estimate our own spirit. This light of our consciousness is called a candle, because when we go down into ourselves, we begin with a sinking away into pitch darkness, and in this black darkness of our innermost being, God meets us with the candle of our consciousness.

Of course, our consciousness is no candle, which the Lord uses to search us. God has no need of the light of the sun by which to clearly see his whole creation. In the deepest



parts of the earth, where no beam of sunlight ever enters, it is light before God as the day. As David sang in [Psalm 139](#): "Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to thee." What is here true of the light of the world, applies equally to the world of our inner being. There, too, God has no need of a candle, wherewith to throw light upon us. In the darkness of this hidden world also the darkness shineth as the day. But we have need of this candle and it is grace, that by the light of this candle of our consciousness God lightens the darkness of our inner being. We make artificial light. This makes us think. We do this by reasoning. We do this by our representations. And that can have its use. But frequently this artificial light shines falsely. It misleads. It never shines further in than the surface. This artificial light of our own pondering and musing never enters into what Solomon calls, with such plastic, graphic power, "the innermost chambers of the belly." And all too frequently it blinds our eyes, so that we can not see the light of the candle of the Lord with the eye of the soul. Hence the so-called "civilized world" for the most part is blind to the light of God's candle in us.

The light of this candle of the Lord in us does not argue, and does not analyze, but shows what there is in us, lays bare our own being before the eye of the soul, gives us self-knowledge, and cuts off all self-deception. And it is the light of this candle of the Lord which makes us clearly see in the deepest underground of our being, the fibres by which the root of our being has fellowship with God; fellowship by reason of our creation after the image of God; fellowship through the blessed, glorious regeneration of our sin-corrupted nature; fellowship through the Divine indwelling of the Holy Ghost; fellowship through the glorious inworking of ever-increasing grace; fellowship above all else through the tie that binds us to Christ, and makes us members of his body.

The brightness of this light is always the same in degree, but the effect of it gradually increases in strength. At first there is still so much that is wrong in the heart, so much dust of sin, that covers the heart and renders brightest light invisible to us. But gradually this vile dust flies away before the breath of the Lord, and then the eye comes to see what was hidden underneath this dust. And thus it can not be otherwise, but that the deeper the light can shine in, the more gloriously it becomes manifest to the eye of the soul that we are bound to God with all the ties of our life, and that our fellowship with God embraces our whole life.



"I IN THEM AND THOU IN ME."

The soul's nearness to God and our "mystical union with Christ" belong together. All the apostles placed the emphasis on this; and in their writings the fathers of the Reformation, with Calvin in the lead, always referred to the mystical union with Christ as an indispensable factor in all true religion. The temptation to which, alas, so many yield, of staying on Golgotha, and of there closing off their account with Christ, kills the faith. The course of procedure is, that the conscience awakens for a moment; that the weight of sin burdens the soul; and that fear of judgment strikes the heart. In such a moment the consolatory thought of the cross arises invitingly in the soul. If the atoning sacrifice is accepted, one is saved. Nothing more is needed save only to believe. And one is readily persuaded to do this. To express this as sharply as the case allows: One closes the bargain. And now he deems himself saved. He accepts it as a fact, that he is assured of eternal life. He thinks that the atoning sacrifice is glorious. It brings perfect salvation. Thus Christ has become his Savior. But in his conversation nothing is heard of a closer, tenderer relation of the soul to Christ. In the utterances of his spiritual life nothing is perceived that refers to it. He is now saved, and that is the end of it.

This, however, is nothing but self-conceit. Nothing but spiritual egotism is at play in this. Escape is sought from eternal punishment; one wants to insure himself for eternal salvation. But there is nothing indicative in this of thirst after the living God; nothing of the child's longing for his Father's house; nothing of sacred jealousy for the honor of God's name. And from this, no spiritual power can proceed. No religion can operate in, nor go forth from, this. And what is more, it can not be true, that in this wise Golgotha can bring propitiation for the life of the soul.



The Gospel does not preach this. It does not explain the atoning sacrifice to us in this way. The Scripture never attributes power of salvation to Golgotha, except as the mystical union binds our inner life to the life of Christ. It must be a being buried with him in his death, in order to rise with him unto life. They alone who have become one planting with Christ, share the grace which he obtained. They alone who have become sheep of his flock, can come after the great Shepherd of souls. It is not Golgotha which saves us. He who saves us is Christ, who died on Golgotha. You must become one with him, as member of his body. You must be accepted and incorporated under him as your Head, before one drop of grace can fall on you. In the Father you must have been given to Christ, so that his glory may be revealed in you. The mystical union must have laid the tie of love eternally between him and your soul. Yea, it must become Christ in you, and the Father in Christ, so that through

this middle link your life of nearness to God can become a reality. For so your Savior himself prayed in his high-priestly prayer: Holy Father, I in them and thou in me" (St. [John 17](#) :23).

If, however, our mystical union with Christ shall maintain its true religious character, and not degenerate into sentimental Christolatry, this relation to Christ must never be taken as an end in itself. Christ is the Mediator, and there can be no Mediator except for the sake of making our approach to God possible. To be near unto God, in sacred confidence to feel oneself to be close by God to live here on earth in nearness to God through faith, and once, after death, to serve God eternally in the Fatherhouse above--that is and remains the end and aim; and everything the Scripture reveals to us regarding the Mediatorship of Christ, must result in this, and can never rest in itself. Once Christ himself shall deliver up the Kingdom to God, even the Father, that God may be all in all. He who stops short with himself, or has no further desire than to be numbered with God's people, arrests spiritual progress in his own soul.

The ideal end at which we aim, may and can not be less, than to enjoy God forever, and to exist for no other purpose than to glorify his name. And just because this is the ideal end, all religion on earth is imperfect, which does not already here bring us nearer to God, make us dwell in nearness to him, and induce us to spend all our strength and all our talent in his service. Piety that consists in soothing emotion and in spiritual recreation, lacks strength and inspiration. And our piety only becomes energetic when we love God with such perfect consecration, that we know of no higher joy than to drink in his peace, no greater recreation than to be near unto him, and no holier ambition than to fight and to suffer for his holy name. And not even service of Christ may detract anything from this. The Savior himself has never desired or aimed at anything else than to bring us to the Father. Whosoever turns this into a sort of Christ-worship, making him the end and aim, and thereby losing from sight the approach to our Father who is in heaven, does not honor Christ, but opposes him, and does not confirm the mystical union with his Savior, but tears away the fibres thereof.

This makes the union mystical, i. e., it is not lost in emotions, sensations and meditations, but rests in the nature of the soul. The feelings which you cherish for Christ, the sensations wherewith the Person and the gracious work of the Savior affect you, the thoughts concerning him on which you ponder, and on which your confession is based, truly possess supreme merit. They are indispensable. All of your conscious life must be saturated through and through with Christ. But without more, this gives you no share in the mystical union. That which is mystical in a holy sense, lies deeper than the consciousness, and roots in your being itself. Hence, the Scriptural teaching concerning regeneration, the new creature, the new man. There is not merely atonement and forgiveness, and on your part confession, faith and singing hymns of praise. No, Christ has entered into our nature. This was possible, because our nature was created after the image of God; and therefore that which shall take you away from yourself and from sin, must touch you in your own nature, in your very

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manner of existence, it must bring about the change in your person, in your outward life, and thus it will be an holy and a Divine work, which does not take place in your lips, nor in your brain, but in the mystical underground of your being.

And this wondrous work is not directly brought about by the Father, and in every one by himself, but is effected through Christ, is bound to him as Mediator of all, and finds in this Mediator its indestructible guarantee. For the tie which Christ establishes between himself and us, is so sacred, that he compares it with the tie that binds him in his Divine nature to the Father. "I in them, and Thou in me, Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are" ([John 17:11](#)).

No outward, mechanical representation should be made of "the body of Christ." Among ourselves we speak of the body, the corps, the corporation of those who are like minded, who work together for a given aim. They who belong to it, are called members, and the management is the head. But with the body of Christ all this has a far deeper sense and a far more serious significance. No one becomes member of the body of Christ by making application, or by subscribing to a doctrine. No one is incorporated in this body by a military oath. No one becomes a member here, in order presently from choice, to resign his membership. No, the body of Christ is anchored in the soul, as an organism which forms one whole, no part of which can ever be alienated from it. It is invisible to the eye, but known of God. Even an infant can belong to it as an integrant part, before it has ever lisped the name of Jesus. We do not join that body, but God adopts us into it, incorporates us in it and appoints each of us, as members of Christ, an own, fixed place in it. At the same time our calling and destiny are thereby forever fixed. In this body we are fellow-members with other members, not from our choice, nor from theirs, but pursuant to Divine disposal, we and they form a unity which never can be broken. And with them all we are under Christ, as our living, quickening and inspiring head, from whom alone warmth of love is obtained. And our existence as members in that body and under that Head has no other aim than through the mediator to bring us near to God again, to assure us of an eternity in his holy presence, and thus to guarantee the highest end of our existence: even an existence throughout everlasting ages for the sake of the honor of the thrice holy God.

This is the mystical end, which the mystical union with Christ serves as means, and therefore Christ intertwines the tie that binds him to his own with the tie that binds him to the Father

in the: "I in them and Thou in Me." A unity sealed of God.



"FOR THE SPIRIT OF GOD RESTETH UPON YOU."

It was a wonderful word which Jesus spake--one which still pours balm into many wounds, and revives courage when ready to faint; a word which has made heroes and martyrs, and has strengthened and comforted them--when at the end of the beatitudes he said: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake."

This word reaches farther than the prophecy, that prison and martyrdom awaited the disciples. These would be limited to certain periods in the struggle of Jesus' church. But what is not bound to any age, but always goes on, is the malice and hatred, the mockery, scorn and disdain, from which the world can not restrain itself, whenever the Lord's people gather strength to oppose it and courage to resist it. Persecution unto blood is exceptional. This other persecution, which with the lancet of scorn and abuse, strikes at the heart, goes on in all ages. And therefore, this beatitude of the Lord enters so deeply into our human life. It betrays the tender sympathy of Jesus for what awaited his own. It finds application, now here, now there, every day. No day passes but it imparts courage and comfort. It does not mean that we should defiantly meet the world that is offended at Christ, but it aims to inspire the disciples of the Lord to stand their ground when they would retreat, and to remain unmoved in the face of slander and disdain.

But do not forget that this word has its dangerous side, because it has often been misquoted and misapplied. This depends upon that which in your actions and words makes people disdain and persecute you, and to say all manner of evil against you. It may be true zeal for the cause of the Lord, but it may also be exaggeration, eccentricity or loveless bigotry; or, worse yet, it may be the gap that yawns between your confession and practice, hypocrisy which, in part, disfigures your life. And even if in the latter case the reason of resisting the world may be zeal for the cause of Jesus, yet, in fact, so much of self mingles with it that the "for my sake" with which Jesus conditioned his beatitude, only partially applies to you. Yea, it may, and does happen, that the mockery, disdain, and slander of the world, is invited almost so exclusively by your own sinful alloy, that even not a few of your fellow-believers are bound to take the part of the world against you, and far from calling you blessed in Jesus' name, feel instinctively that your example has hampered rather than helped the cause of the Lord.

Understand this well. It does not mean to say that you are only right, when the world honors your loveableness of character, acknowledges your honesty and uprightness, and pays homage to what is called your philanthropic and ethical nature. The world has demonstrated this differently in the case of Jesus himself. When we do nothing else in the name of Jesus than what the world can praise, that which is characteristic in our confession



and in our life is gone. On ethical grounds nothing could be said against the Apostles of the Lord, and yet the world has disdained them, and has not rested until it had hounded them to the death. In our confession, life and zeal there must always be that which the world can not tolerate, which offends it and compels it to resist. Only, what may never be wanting, if the beatitude of the Lord may be applied to us, is what Peter (1-4:14) states as follows: "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and the Spirit of God resteth upon you." This must be so. The Spirit of the Lord must rest upon you, the Spirit of the Lord must speak both from what you do and from what you leave undone. It must not be against you, but against the Spirit of the Lord, that the fierce anger of the world turns itself. Then you are reviled for Christ's sake, and from this disdain springs the blessedness which your heart craves.

The question here again is whether you are "near unto God," for when you are near unto God, God is near unto you, and then the world turns not against you, but against God, and only against you, in the measure in which you are near unto God, and God is found near unto you. The proof of this is, that as soon as you let go your hold on God, the world is ready at once to turn its scorn into praise, and its disdain into applause. There is undoubtedly hatred against the neighbor in the sin of the world. This began with Cain. But only insofar as the personal hatred of egotism operates against one's neighbor, the fire of this hatred is brought to burst out into flame by the passion for personal profit, by material interests, by the struggle for position, by willfulness and jealousy. This hatred of the world is not turned against Christian people in particular, but operates at large in the world itself.

But in the lowest parts of the sinful human heart there is no hatred against the neighbor, but against God. Thus it began with Satan, and thus he has transferred it into the hearts of mankind. This hatred against God may in a general way express itself covertly, and only rarely turn into open denial of God and blasphemy. But it is this hatred, which propels the stream of the life of the nations. The never-satisfied passion for emancipation. The ambition to be one's own lord and master, and to own no God as Lord and Master above self. To be as God and to be God himself, and unwillingness to bend the knee, is the evil germ from which all sin grows. And because the Lord's people oppose this, and loudly plead for God's majesty, the world turns on these people, to stop their mouth, to rob them of influence, and to doom them to inactivity.

But the fire of this hatred only breaks out fiercely and unsparingly, when the world perceives that it is no more you who speak of God and bear witness for him, but that the living God himself speaketh in you, because he dwelleth in you, and when for this reason it can strike in you at God himself and at his Christ. When the world perceives that the spirit of the Lord rests upon you, it can not tolerate you, and puts the choice before you between letting go of God and its deadly hatred, which shall not rest, until it has spiritually or morally destroyed you.

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To be near unto God, so near, that he has made your heart his temple and has come to you with the Christ, in order to take up his abode with you in the Holy Ghost, is glorious, blessed, sweet mysticism of the soul; but there is more. The heart can be no bushel to hide the light that shines in you. When the Spirit of God truly rests upon you, that light shines out, and he who hardens himself against that light will come not at once but gradually to discover, that you are one who stands in contact with the living God, and that he who has dealings with you, of himself comes to have dealings with that holy power which is the Lord's. And then opposition follows, not on account of secondary interests, not because of accidentals, but because of what is highest and most glorious in you.

When Asaph sang of the blessedness of being near unto God, his mind was engaged with this antithesis between the world and God. This antithesis can not be separated from the nearness to God. The nearer we are to the world, the farther away we are from God. And the nearer we are to God, the greater the distance between us and the world. If it were possible for us to go out from the world, after we have come near unto God, there would no conflict break out in the heart and no hatred in the world against us. But this cannot be. "I pray thee O Father, not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that in the world thou shouldest keep them from the evil" ([John 17:15](#)). The grave significance of the Christian position is, that with God in the heart, life has to be lived in the midst of a world, the heart and life of which reacts against God. It has indeed been tried, as Christian so to appear, that the world hands out a passport and grants you an honorary diploma as one who "though Christian, can be tolerated;" but this seductive exhibition of favor is not bought at anytime, save at the price of dulling the sharp edges of our confession.

If the world could make such separation between you and the God whom you profess and whom you serve, that it could prosecute its opposition to God without touching you, it would readily do so. The world still feels itself bound to you as man. But with true followers of Christ, this can not be done. They are so near unto God, that the eye of the world discovers no more distance. And therefore it attacks you personally by making the most of anything wrong it discovers in you, by mocking at every unsanctified utterance, which is observed in you, and then falsely and slanderously saying all manner of evil against you. To be near unto God and to bear this trouble, belong together. In such a way however that it must never be courted; the world must never be incited to it by your desire after the martyr crown. Only what is altogether natural and springs up of itself is inwardly true and has merit before God. And then blessedness ensues not only later on but is already tasted in the midst of oppression, and then God's angels see and God's children perceive already here, that in the midst of trouble the Spirit of glory, the Spirit of God resteth upon you.



ONE AFTER THIS MANNER, AND ANOTHER AFTER THAT.

There is an evil among devout friends of the Lord, which must be resisted. In spiritual things each desires to impose a law of his own upon the other. Piety is said to be bound to a given form. One's own way of piety must be the standard for every one else. Minor differences may be tolerated, but in the main the same sort of piety must manifest itself in all God's children alike. And so it follows that the piety which they practice is the standard for all their spiritual examination and criticism.

That pride may have a part in this, can not be doubted. But in this instance, at least at the beginning, pride is not the motive. It is rather that a beginning is made from the earnest desire to belong to the people of God, partly as an assurance of one's own salvation, but more for the sake of taking an active part in the work of sanctifying the name of the Lord, and of advancing the interests of his Kingdom.

In the family circle, or outside of it, one meets with those who carry the impression of tender piety, and who are reputed in general to be very godly. Such people are envied. O, if one could only himself be such. And so he sought their company, watched them, observed what they did, and what they did not do, listened to their conversation, and so gradually formed an idea of what he himself should be, in order to be initiated equally closely, as one of God's dear children into his secret walk. Thereby a definite type of piety was brought before his mind. According to this fixed type, he sought to reform his life in the world, his life before believers, and his life before God. And when he finally succeeded in this, he rejoiced as one who had gained a prize, was over-rejoiced when he became adopted by "the pious" as one of their own, and now is fully convinced that every one else must come in the selfsame way, must correspond to the selfsame type, must have the selfsame experiences, yea, that in their language and expressions they must manifest the very thing which as an ideal had long escaped the censor himself, but which at length he had obtained.

Our fathers used to say, that this is putting oneself in the place of the Word of God. Not from oneself, nor from any saint whatever, but exclusively from God's Word the standard must be derived which determines genuine childship, and the true gold of our godliness. These censors did not deny this; only they tried to show that God's Word posits the claims and marks of true grace, which they themselves imposed upon you, and which they sternly applied in their own circle. But one thing they forgot, and this became the cause of all this injurious spiritual unnaturalness; they did not see, that God's word, as in every thing else allows play-room in the spiritual life for very great diversity, and in this very diversity seeks strength.

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This does not mean to say, that the Scripture acknowledges two classes of spiritual children. There is but one class, but in this one true class the Scripture aims at an almost endless diversity, an ever new variegation, an ever surprising individuality, change and modification in all sorts of ways; not only in the groups, but in each separate child of God. It is with this as in the world of flowers. The rose constitutes a class of its own. No one will mistake a rose for a lily, or take a field violet for a rose. To be a real rose, it must exhibit certain characteristics, or else it is not a rose. But what endless variety there is between the monthly rose and the swamp-rose, the tea-rose and the Alpine-rose. What varieties again in each of these groups what difference again in growth, leaf, color and in fragrance. Does not every more richly developed rose address us as a something by itself, with a charm and beauty all its own?



Such is the case in the whole creation of God. He calls every star in the firmament by name, and this implies the expression of an own being. And on the earth every mountain-line differs, and every animal, even every insect, as well as every vegetable and food that springs from the ground. And in like manner every one of the children of men is "after his own kind;" every race, every tribe, every people, every family and every family-member differs from every other. No mother is ever mistaken in her children. And so it is also in the spiritual. The Holy Spirit divideth to every man severally as he will, ([I Cor. 12:11](#)) or to express it still more strongly: one can not be a standard for an other. Paul who was himself an Apostle refuses to be this. And he declares with utmost emphasis: Every man, i. e., each individual, hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that ([I Cor. 7:7](#)).

So it is, and so it must be, because our spiritual life, if it shall be real, is not our work, but a work of God. It is a difference as between writing and printing. What comes from the press is in all the copies of the same work precisely alike. Every man's handwriting on the other hand exhibits a character of its own. It is the difference between the products of nature and the factory. A factory manufactures after a fixed model, everything alike; in nature in which God works, everything differs and everything exhibits a something of its own.

If now the spiritual life of piety is forced into a selfsame mould, the work of man counteracts the work of God; then there ensues spiritual unnaturalness, painted flowers, but no real flowers; then no virtue goes out from it, and this sort of imprinted piety does not bring one nearer to God, but rather builds up a wall of separation between the soul and God. Then there is spiritual dullness, depression and gloom, whereas God's children should glory in their freedom, and by reason of this free, happy feeling of the breaking of bands they should jubilate with a song of angels in the heart. The lark which meets the sun with a song, not the snail which marks its slimy track on the hard clay, is the image of the redeemed in Christ.



Only let not liberty here be mistaken for license. Every bird sings with a voice of its own, but received that voice from God. And so has God, who created you, implanted and increased in the hidden depths of your being that peculiar something from which your character, your

person and likewise your own form of childship springs. Everything in us also is organically connected. The mingling of blood, the sensitive life of nerves, the relation between understanding and imagination, the stringing of the heart, the embroidery of tendencies and sympathies, the tone-scale of the conscience, susceptibility to emotions and sensations, education, environment, business, all this together puts a peculiar stamp upon our whole spiritual being. One is after this manner, and another after that. And in connection with this the Holy Spirit divides his spiritual gifts, without mistake, and not as we would have it, or as another would suggest, but even as he wills. Spiritual uniformity after a given pattern is here unthinkable. As God clothes the lilies of the field differently, so he weaves an own spiritual garment for each one of his children. Uniformity must be discarded, and our spiritual robe must unfold itself singly before God and men.

As every precious stone has a light of its own, and no jasper can be an emerald, so in one's heart the diamond of childship must sparkle with its own brightness. Then only will the secret walk with God be free, and rich, and broad, for only so do we appear before our God and Father in the form, in the spiritual robe, and with the spiritual jewels, which he has given his children. To draw near unto God is not going in with the crowd, but it is the approach to God in this own, this particular, this personal, this peculiar way, which God has appointed for us. A mother knows each of her children by their own voice, even when she does not see them; and so does our Father in heaven know each of his children by their own voice, which he draws out from the soul.



"A SOUND OF GENTLE STILLNESS."

"To be near unto God" is not alike in every case, but, even as with everything else that touches life intimately, it is with "one after this manner, and with another after that." They who have drifted away in the stream of methodism, have not realized this, at least they have not acknowledged it, and hence the danger in methodism of barrenness in spiritual things. Always doing outside things, always zealous labor and toil for Jesus, but so little sound of gentle stillness, in which the secret walk is enjoyed.

Because of our sin there is always danger of fatal onesidedness, even in holiest things. There is sickly mysticism, which sits down by itself and accomplishes nothing. And by the side of it methodism, which is never at rest, and which in being over-busy at length has neither ear nor eye for the inwardness of the holy walk of a saved soul with God. And therefore, the mystic has something to learn from the methodist, and the methodist from the mystic. Only from the impulse of both does blessed harmony arise.

By itself a mystical search after the Divine is by no means yet Christian. The heathen in Asia practice it, even on a large scale, and though it has mostly disappeared from Islam, it has been practiced there, and it is still known among the Sufi in Persia and by the Dervishes in Asia Minor. But to bear the Christian stamp nearness to God must be through the atonement and relation with the mediator. "The Father and I will come and make our abode with them" ([John 14:23](#)). And this excludes from the search after God and from being near unto him, the always killing uniformity. In this sacred domain imitation leads to nothing but self-deceit. All mysticism of soul, which seeks and finds God, realizes that there is fixedness and unvariable sameness in God's unchangeableness, but the reflection of what is Unique and Eternal in God, which is cast into the human soul, cannot be and never is the same, because one soul differs from another soul in nature, disposition and utterance. For this reason every soul has a history of its own, from which special needs and talents arise.



Hence it is not correct to infer from Elijah's experience at the cave, that the Lord only reveals himself in "A sound of gentle stillness" ([I Kings 19:12](#) R. V. Marg-reading) . The commission that was given to Elijah, shows differently. He was commissioned to anoint Jehu, to which was added the saying: "Him that escapeth the Sword of Hazeel shall Jehu slay: And him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay" ([I Kings 19:17](#)). There never was a bolder fanatic than Jehu. Not in the fire, and not in the storm, but in a sound of gentle stillness, does not say by any means, that Moses did not find God in the fire of Horeb, nor David in the storm of persecution by Saul. It only states, that for Elijah, at that moment and in the mood in which he found himself, the heat had first to be cooled, and the storm in his heart had first to spend itself, before he was able to meet God in a sound of

gentle stillness, and to receive his prophetic commission. On Carmel it was fire and it was storm, and if ever and anywhere, it was on Carmel that Elijah beheld the presence of the majesty of the Lord.

The impossibility of making a rule regarding nearness to God, that shall apply to all cases, extends so far, that a selfsame rule for all of life, even with one and the selfsame child of God, is unthinkable. He who is old and full of days has known the years of manly strength, and back of these the years of youth, and back of these again the days of childhood. And let him speak, who during these four periods of his life has known something of the sacred, hidden walk with God, and he will confess that in each of these four periods it was different. In general indeed there was progress, but yet in such a way, that now as man he longs at times for the return of the days of his childhood, that he might the better understand the saying of Jesus regarding children: "Of such is the Kingdom of heaven."

This makes it such a profanation of the sacred, when we parents have no eye for the peculiar character of the life of the soul of a child, and by our heavy oppressive forms ignore the sympathy the brightness and enthusiasm of the child. The spiritual training of a child starts with faith that God operates in the child, or at least can operate in him. But at the same time, that the Holy spirit doeth this "as he wills" (I Cor. 12:11). Without this spiritual insight it is impossible to be a mother, father, older sister or brother, yea, even a nurse-maid or a teacher of children, in its higher sense. Love of children wrongly applied blights so much in the heart of the child which otherwise would bloom luxuriantly. And as with the child, so it is with the lad and the young daughter. In every period of life there is an own form of life of the soul with its own needs. He who understands this pleases and disciplines, supports and strengthens the child, and leads him to God, and so makes gains for God. While he who always endeavors to apply the model of his own condition of soul to that of the child mars development and dwarfs it.

It is not otherwise with the great difference which God has ordained between man and woman. There are men who make one think of a woman, and among women in our times ambition gains ground not only to develop themselves more independently, which is right, but also to obtain this development in a form like to man; which goes against Divine appointment. But apart from these eccentricities, every one feels, and knows that the soul-life of women bears another stamp, and is differently strung of God, than the soul-life of men. Perceptions, powers, feelings, talents differ. The lily is not inferior to the palm-tree, but it has received another beauty, another glory of God. The same sun in God's heaven works different effects upon one plant than upon another.

And so it is with regard to being near to God on the part of the man, and being near to God on the part of the woman. It is the one Sun of righteousness which works differently upon each. The mother, the father, who looks upon son and daughter as one, and does not treat them differently sometimes spoils so much which with more intelligent insight would



bloom gloriously. Only father and mother can suffice for the mixed family, and where either of the two falls away, the task of the remaining one of making due allowance for the difference of nature and disposition of son and daughter is extremely difficult. This applies as well to man and wife especially when one has made farther advances in the way of salvation than the other. The pious wife who longs to win the hesitating husband defeats her own purpose, when she aims to graft her feminine soul-life upon him; likewise the husband who for the sake of winning his wife for God tries to drive her in the spiritual yoke of his own masculine life, is himself the cause of his bitter disappointment. The husband should indeed strengthen the wife spiritually, and accustom her to storm and fire, and the wife should refine the husband spiritually, and accustom him to the sound of gentle stillness, but the fundamental trait of the proper soul-life of each must remain inviolate. The wife lives near unto God differently from the husband.

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A similar difference characterizes the several conditions in which we find ourselves. Take the ecclesiastical conflict. In this struggle there is a period of necessary and unsparring resistance against everything that desecrates God's covenant. But after victory is won, there comes a time of calm and peace, of quiet work for God's Kingdom, in the struggle against sin, misery and woe. And it is frequently observed, that men who in the first period nobly persevered, and showed in themselves men full of the Holy Ghost, in the next period of rest and peace, visibly retrograded, and deserted their former spiritual vantage-ground.

And as in ecclesiastical affairs so it is in the struggle of our own life, in the difference between rising superior to one's sins and fainting in the face of too great temptation. All this creates a difference of conditions, of circumstances, of sensations, of experiences of soul; and woe to him who amidst all this, has only one string to the harp of his soul. Our heart has been richly strung of God, and for every turn in life the heart must be able to play another string, for the sake of the honor of God and the comfort of our hidden man.

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The example of Elijah shows that God himself counts with this, and after the nature of our state approaches our heart from different angles. He alone who has a listening ear for this, who adapts and disposes himself accordingly, and is inwardly so richly disposed, that he seeks after God at any gate which it may please God in those circumstances to open for him, will not only feel himself "to be near unto God," in all circumstances, but will also in every circumstance enjoy it most richly. At one time in quiet meditation, at another in bitter conflict, now going out, then coming in, but at all times it will be vital, inspiring and strong.

God's seeking to draw our soul unto himself and to open it for himself, is changeable as the seasons in which nature undergoes the workings of the sun. And therefore he who spiritually knows only one season of year, becomes impoverished. He who follows after, in the changes which God brings upon him, is the rich child of the rich Father who is in heaven.

**"THOU DIDST MAKE ME TRUST WHEN I WAS UPON MY
MOTHER'S BREASTS."**



The secret walk with God is not only different for one child of God than for another, but the difference is inwardly connected with individual disposition, character, nature and temperament. Where there are two persons who live close to God, one not only doeth it differently from the other, but the way and manner in it of each, is related with his condition and frame of soul and even of body. To be near unto God can therefore never be imitated. It is no lesson that can be learned by heart. Every one must seek his own way to God, until by Divine grace he finds it. To be near unto God can never be anything else than the outcome and the fruit of our own personal spiritual life. If then it shall be real, and no imitation, it is bound to assume a form of its own, which entirely corresponds to our nature, and which would not do for another.

Let this first of all comfort you and put you at ease. It frequently happens, that a dear, true but very plain child of God hears others tell of a walk with God, which he can not grasp, or that he reads of Augustine and others, who communed with the Eternal Being in a measure and form that far, very far transcends his own experience. This makes him doubt whether he will ever himself come near unto God. Such it can never be with him and yet, such the hidden walk must be. In this way Satan detains the souls of the humble. For it is not so. With Augustine, that great spirit, it must needs be so and not otherwise, and for this very reason it never can and never will be so with the humble and the plain. As it was with Augustine or Calvin would not meet their case.



But next to this comforting thought, it contains a strong stimulus and a spur. It imposes the obligation to produce from one's own being and in connection with one's own spiritual existence and life of the soul an own form for the hidden walk with God. It will not do to say: I can never attain the height of an Augustine. Just because you are not an Augustine, it will not do to imitate him. For you are called of God, and you are bound, to seek from and for yourself, this own and only path, by which you, and no one else, can attain the hidden walk, and continue in it. This does not mean to say that there may be no blessing in learning how others have sought and found it, or that reading what some great spirits have written about their nearness to God may not inwardly edify us. Even the humblest poet can learn from Bilderdyk and DaCosta. The humblest artist-painter can profit by the works of Rubens and Rembrandt. All this can be productive of great good. Only, as one and the selfsame bread forms an own blood in every individual constitution, and maintains an own life of the nerves, thanks to the inner workings, so also it is one sacred material on which many

subsist, but always in this way, that with every individual the inner spiritual feeding has a process of its own, and leads to an own result.

Not only in the case of Paul, but also of Jeremiah and David the Scripture describes this particular character of every individual's hidden walk with the Eternal Being. Although [Psalm 22](#) bears a strongly marked Messianic character, and although this song of the most grievous woe only attains its fullest significance in its application to the Man of Sorrows, it would be misleading, if we did not take it as an interpretation of David's own experience, and if we did not apply it to the Psalmist first.

As St. Paul declares, that it hath pleased God to separate him from his mother's womb, and to call him by his grace, and as it reads in Jeremiah (1:5) "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee," so also David confesses that the Lord's interest in him began before he was bom. "For thou art he," sang he in [Ps 22:9](#), "that took me out of the womb: Thou didst make me trust when I was upon my mother's breasts: I was cast upon thee from the womb. Thou art my God from my mother's belly."

Entirely apart from the deeper significance of these words when applied to the Messiah, it was from the life of David's own soul that this conviction sprang regarding his own walk with God, and it should not be lost from sight, that entirely apart from his calling as the elect servant of the Lord, he applies it altogether in a general sense to the forming and creation of a human being. "Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made, marvellous are the works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret and curiously wrought in the lowest part of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet these was none of them." [Psalm 139: 13-16](#)). This was said apart from David's special calling in an altogether general way, and the church has never hesitated, in singing [Psalm 139](#), to apply this to herself.

Thus, in order to form a just estimate of the beginning and the development of our hidden walk with God, we have to go back not merely to our conversion, but back of this to our conception and to our birth. The way in which each one of us shall find his own, personal walk with God, was written in God's book, in days before we were born.

If it is said that Jeremiah and Paul did not state this fact in connection with their personal initiation into communion with God, but very distinctly in connection with their special callings, one as prophet, and the other as apostle, it is readily granted. But on the other hand it is equally true, that for their callings, as prophet and apostle, their own personal, spiritual development was of highest significance. In their prophetic and apostolic calling they had to fight the spiritual fight. Their official life was not lived outside of the life of their own soul. The fact that before their conception God had foreordained in them everything that

they would need for their calling, also implies that their spiritual quickening, training and development had been provided from God's side before their birth, and that in their conception and in their birth such a human person was called into being, as would be able to enter upon such a spiritual condition and to fulfill such a spiritual calling. In whatever way therefore we take it, the three strong declarations of David, Jeremiah and Paul always contain this positive teaching, that already before, as well as in their conception and birth, the Lord God has ordained and created them in such a way, both after soul and body, that in their spiritual and bodily creation every necessity had been provided, which later on would fashion them in this especial manner, and construct their spiritual stature.

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Applying this to ourselves, we should not doubt but that our conception and birth, quite apart from our own as yet unconscious condition, was a work of God according to God's plan and compass, and under his holy inworking. That which characterizes the disposition of our soul, our gifts and talents, our form of existence, and even the particulars that concern our body, is no play of chance, no arbitrariness, no fate, but the plan and working of our Providential God. Hence we are not made, as we are, in order that only later on God might see what he might make of us. No, everything here has been thought out, everything here forms one whole, everything here has been appointed from the beginning by an omniscient, fore-seeing and almighty God with a view to the appointed end, and directed at the same time, at every point of the way, with the view of obtaining that end.

If that final end is your eternal salvation, and if the spiritual life of the soul, including the secret walk with God, leads to this end, the whole appointment regarding the form in which you were to be born, both after soul and body, was of necessity directly connected with what you once will be as a child of God, and with the particular way in which God will be willing to receive you, in distinction from others, into his holy, secret walk. If in your intercourse with people, you daily meet with those who have much in common with you, and you with them, but never meet with a person of whom you can say, in every particular: "He is just like me. He is my exact double," there must be something in the disposition of your soul and in your bodily existence, which is different from that in others. And this is not by chance, but after God's will and appointment. And every peculiarity that constitutes your person, is in turn no play of the riches of nature, but has been so disposed and not otherwise, because each of you have to seek your secret walk with God in your own way and after your own method; and that you might find that way, and walk in it, you were in need of just such a disposition of soul, and of such natural temperament.

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Thus are you free from people, even from pious people who press their piety upon you. But in everything, from your conception and birth you are personally bound to God. For consider and do not forget in [Psalm 22](#) it says: "Thou didst make me trust when I was upon my mother's breasts." To make one trust, in such a way, that the soul itself trusts, is to evoke

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an inner working of the soul itself. David reckons the life of his soul from the moment when as infant he cradled at his mother's breast.



"AND WORSHIP HIM THAT LIVETH FOR EVER AND EVER."

Prayer and worship are not the same. This is felt at once when we consider the distinction between religion in heaven and religion on earth. Here on earth we are in all sorts of need and misery. We endure a thousand anxieties. We struggle with disappointment and adversity. And every day our life is a concatenation of needs that call for fulfilment. This condition of itself impels us to make prayer and supplication, to invoke help and deliverance, to implore for redemption and the grant of our desires. In religion here on earth prayer, supplication, the invocation of higher help is entirely in place.

This is altogether different in heaven. Undoubtedly in heaven also there is prayer, even much prayer. Christ himself lives to pray for us. But prayer in heaven, on the part of Christ and of the angels and of the blessed, bears an entirely different character from our prayer on earth. "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," can also be prayed above. The Kingdom of glory tarries. The conflict between the power that opposes God and Christ continues. The end is not yet. And therefore it is natural that everything in heaven invokes this end, and prays for the coming of the Kingdom of glory.

It is also plain that in heaven prayer is made in behalf of God's people in the earth. The Scripture teaches this clearly with respect to Christ. That the angels remember us in their supplication is quite certain. And that the blessed themselves unite with Christ and the angels in prayer for the triumph of the Kingdom of God in the earth, can scarcely be taken in question. But though we follow along this line as far as scripture allows, it is self-evident, that neither the angels nor the blessed can join us in the prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread, forgive us our debts, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil." The blessed may pray that they might be clothed upon, but their state is not one of need, misery, lack and want. They are blessed and drink with full draughts from the fountain of bliss. And where we are permitted to look at life in the heavens, as in Revelation, we are told almost nothing else of angels, seraphs and cherubim, and of the blessed, save that they worship. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory.

If then there is this difference between religion above and religion on earth, that with us prayer stands in the foreground, and worship in the heavens, it is of utmost importance, that we carefully consider the character of this worship. Prayer is the search after God's nearness in our behalf, that he might be gracious unto us. Worship is the search after God's nearness, in order from our side to bring tribute unto God of praise and honor, thanksgiving



and glory. In principle one is the opposite of the other. He who prays desires something from God. He who worships desires that his soul and his whole being may devote itself to God. He who prays intends that something shall come to us from God. He who worships intends that something from us shall come to God.



That grace operates in worship, is self-evident, but it is another kind of grace. It is grace, that the infinite, almighty and self-sufficient God will accept the magnifying of his name at the hand of the creature. He is so infinitely exalted that the creature can not bring him anything. And though every voice of angel and every tongue of man were to be silent forevermore, the Eternal Being would be in need of nothing, and would remain sufficient unto himself. And herein is grace that the most High God, who is in need of nothing, will take pleasure in the songs of praise of angels and of men, and that he grants unto them the sacred joy of showing forth his praises. All worship, all thanksgiving, every hymn of praise and every tribute of honor rests upon the foundation of this to us impenetrable grace.

This worship and tribute of praise can at the same time serve to make great the name of God before our fellow-creatures, but in worship at least this is not the intended aim. He who sings the praises of God, can do this for the sake of confessing his Holy Name before unbelieving multitudes, and of winning them for God, but worship is an holy utterance of soul, which takes place between our soul and God, and can at most adapt itself to the worship of fellow-believers. In its highest utterance, worship can not be mechanical. Worship only comes to pass when the soul loses itself in God, when, in adoration it marvels at his virtues and his works, and of it self breaks forth into praises even as the Eolian harp emits its dulcet strains, when the wind plays on its strings.



Examine now the life of your own soul and see, not whether there is more prayer in it than worship, but whether, together with prayer, worship is accorded sufficient room of its own. And then, alas, it must be the honest confession of many, that in the life of prayer, worship constitutes but all too meagre an element. We do not say that most people do not worship also, but we are bold to express the surmise that the blessed joy of worship is but all too little known and sought.

And this should not be so. He who seeks the secret walk, he who desires to be near unto God, should not in prayer be engaged almost exclusively with himself or with his own interests, but when kneeling before God, he should not even lastly be busy with God. The knowledge of God lies in worship, far more than in prayer. He who prays for something, thinks first of all of his own need and want, and he only loses himself in his God to this extent, that with God there is power and might that can come to his help in his need. He, on the other hand, who worships, loses himself in God, forgets himself, in order to think of God alone, to let himself be illumined by the lustre of God's virtues, and to cause the reflex of God's greatness to be reflected from his own soul, as it mirrors itself in his adoring and spell-bound spirit.

Only when the Kingdom of Glory shall have been ushered in, shall we, on the new earth and under the new heaven, together with all God's angels, do nothing else. At present, need and want continuously bring prayer to the lips. And yet, woe be to him, woe be to her, who already here, has not some knowledge of that real life, which finds its blessedness in worship.

Let thanksgiving here be the training school. The Reformed Confession takes the whole life of a child of God as one of gratitude, and giving thanks is the beginning and continuance of all worship. O, who would not daily pray for the forgiveness of sins; but it is dreadful when earnest thanksgiving for pardon obtained on Golgotha remains lacking or at least does not fill the soul. So it is with our whole life. There is constant need and want, and the pressure of soul from the depths to call upon God, that he might be gracious unto us. But is there ever a moment in prayer, when there is no occasion as well, to give thanks for grace obtained, and to honor him who gave it?

Giving thanks is not yet perfect worship. It is worship only with respect to what God has done for us. But he who has learned to give thanks, honest, affectionate thanks, comes of himself to this yet far more perfect worship, which has no other desire than to glorify the majesty of God. With the heathen at times there was more worship for idols than is found with us for the Holy One. Is the admonition superfluous that we shall accustom our children from the beginning not only to pray, but also to giving thanks and to worship? There is nothing so effective in bringing the soul near unto God as worship.



"THE BODY IS NOT ONE MEMBER, BUT MANY."



Christ is your King. He has been anointed King not merely over Zion, the mountain of his holiness; not merely King, after the earthly Zion had been profaned, over God's kingdom in the earth. No, Christ is also King over the persons who are subject unto him. Our personal relation to Christ can not be expressed in a single word. It is many-sided. When we think of the guilt of sin, which threatens doom, Christ is our Reconciler. When we seek safety with Christ against the power of sin and of temptation, he is not our Reconciler, but our Redeemer. Or when we look to Christ for direction and guidance in the labyrinth of life, the selfsame Savior is not our Reconciler, not our Redeemer, but our Shepherd, who has gone before us in the way, and has left us an example.

But even this does not exhaust our many-sided relation to our Savior. For that self-same Christ is also our glorified Head with the Father, the Lord before whom our knee must bend, and whom our tongue must confess; and therefore the King who has incorporated us with his people; whose subjects we have become; and in whose palace we shall once be expected. The honorary title of King is even so little accidental, that the great plea on Golgotha is at length fought out under it, and at the bar of Pilate the conflict between the Emperor of Rome and the Anointed One of God concentrated itself in the struggle for the honor of Kingship. As announced to John the Divine, in Revelation, the Lamb is not alone our Reconciler and Surety, not alone our Redeemer and Savior, and not alone the Shepherd and Bishop of our soul. No, the Lamb of God--and in this antithesis you feel what strikes and irritates--the Lamb of God is also Lord of lords and King of kings ([Rev. 17:14](#)). The Lamb with the crown is the exalted, the holy combination of self-effacement and dominion.



Your King! But in what sense? Is earthly kingship here the real, the actual, and is the kingly image of the earthly prince applied to the Savior, merely by way of comparison, by which to express his power and honor? Christ your King! Does this title of honor merely serve to have you think of Christ, as in a distant hamlet the man behind the plow thinks of his sovereign in the royal residence? This is to him a secret and mysterious power, expressed in the image on a coin, but for the rest it is a power which remains foreign to him, a power far off, of whose splendor and lustre, of whose glory and pomp, he can form no faint idea, but which he honors from afar. A sovereign in the glorious palace, but who is unapproachable by him, to whom he pays tribute because he is his subject, and for whom, if he is pious, he intercedes in his daily prayer.

And truly, there is likeness here. Christ also is enthroned in a palace of glory, even in such a palace, that all royal pomp on earth pales before the splendor of its greatness. The subject of Jesus also sacrifices for his king his child in Divine service, his money in the labor

of love, his strength in what must be done in behalf of his kingdom. This King also has his throne afar off, and here on earth the King of God's kingdom can not be seen. But with this the likeness ends. That Christ is your king is as a figure of speech, so little derived from earthly princes that on the contrary the kings in the earth are only image bearers of his glory, and that true, real, actual kingship is never realized in a prince on earth, but is known in Christ alone.



Head, Lord and King are but three rays of the selfsame glory. Head points to the inner relationship and sodality of your life, existence and inner being, with the life, existence and being of your Savior, Lord expresses that Christ owns you, that you are his property, that you belong to him, that he has redeemed you from the power of Satan, and that he has bought you with his blood. And only in this two-fold relation, because he is your Head and Lord, he is also your King, who has taken you up into his Kingdom, incorporated you with his people, made you sharer in his lot, and rules you by his royal law of life. You are his subject, but only because thereby you are a member of the body of which he is the head.

This seems at first hearing an enigmatical union, but it is one which beautifully explains itself when that body, and in it the significance of the head, and what under the head every member is, is clearly understood. Imagine man, to take a perfect instance, as in paradise he came forth from the hand of God. The clean, pure, beautiful body, and in that body the several members, in which it revealed itself, and its noble head, with the fullness of facial expression, with the fine, expressive features, with the animation that uttered itself in them. Thus only can we have the image before us of the body of Christ, of the members in that body, and over all these members, the glorious Head.

The image here, however, is not merely the human body. Body in this connection rather indicates in a broader sense what we more commonly call an organism, even in the sense in which an animal also is an organism, and the plant an organism, and as we apply the figure of a body or of an organism to all sorts of association of man with man. Thus we speak of a corporation (which is nothing else than a body) signifying thereby all sorts of unions, societies and confederations that are formed. So we say that the family has an organic existence. So we speak of the body of the state, and of the body of the people. And for this reason, and in this connection, we call him who directs such a corporation, the head of such a corporation, or the head of the body of the state. It is even the rule to call those who belong to such a society or body, members of the society, or members of the church. To become a member of a nation, is to become incorporated in that nation.



And this is the figure of speech which the holy apostle applies to Christ and his people. The organism of the plant also renders service here. Did not Jesus say: "I am the true vine, and ye are the branches?" And does not St. Paul speak of having become one plant with Jesus? It is always the one effort, to make it tangible and clear, that Jesus' Kingship is no external dominion over us from without, but that before we become subjects of Jesus, we are linked

into his life, and that with the thread of life itself, if we may so express it, we are bound to him; so that it is one blood of life that circulates in him and in us; and that it is one spirit of life that animates us and him unto life. Yea, that as little as the head can be moved from one place into another, but the foot, the hand, the eye and the ear go with it--so also every vital movement of our King of itself stirs also in us, and puts us into motion with him. Thus Christ is our King, because of itself and of necessity the members follow the body, and the body goes wherever the head directs it.



"LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY."

If the temper of the soul were harmonious, you would never feel nearer unto God than in prayer, and in prayer you would never be far away from God. To pray and not be near unto God, rightly interpreted, is impossible. And yet what prayer is not made each day in every city and village, yes, we may say in every house, again and again in which the soul never for a moment comes under the overwhelming impression of standing before the face of God. Sin weakens our inner life in all sorts of ways. Hence the mainspring of the life of the soul can not properly operate as we should ardently wish it might. Then we feel that we can not pray. Yet we do not want to neglect prayer. So we fold our hands and stammer our petitions. But when the Amen has been said, we feel discouraged by the lack of elevation and inspiration that has marred our devotions.

Apart from leading others in prayer, every one must and can pray, and yet to pray well is an exceedingly difficult art, or rather it is a sacred action, which demands the utmost clearness, urgency and readiness of soul. But to pray well must never become art, or else it ceases to be prayer. The disciples realized this, and when they had witnessed once again the sacred act, that Jesus, having gone a little distance from them, had separated himself in prayer to the Father, they were so impressed with the sense of their own inability to pray that, on the return of Jesus, one of them said unto him: "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples" ([Luke 11:1](#)).

An over-spiritual child of God, in our days, would perhaps have turned away such a request with a rebuke. For everyone must pray of himself, and what value can a memorized prayer have before God? But Jesus was not so over-spiritual. He never prayed otherwise than of himself. But he understood how difficult true prayer must be for us who are sinners, and though his disciples were to be the teachers and leaders of the church in all ages, he appreciated the request that he should teach them how to pray, and so he gave them to pray the Our Father in his own heavenly language.

He did not say: "Pray after this manner." He did not give them the Our Father as an example, how to pray. No, the Lord expressly said: "When ye pray, say." John, too, had evidently given his disciples such a formulary prayer. And so Jesus also gave his disciples a prayer in a fixed form, a prayer evidently intended and appointed to be prayed by them all together. For the form is in the plural: Our Father, our daily bread, our trespasses.

In all ages, in all her forms, the Church of Christ has been true to the Our Father. And in our liturgy our fathers also have not only adopted fixed prayers for public worship, but have always ordered the use of "Our Father" in the congregation of believers. But since the eighteenth century this has been discarded. Particularly from Scotland the influence has



come in, to put everything aside that had the appearance of a fixed form, and to prescribe in church none other than the free prayer of the leader. This aim was high. But was it not too high, and has not over spirituality worked all too grievously an injury to the spiritual?

Undoubtedly, the highest end is attained when, independent of every aid, from the free impulse of the Spirit, the soul lifts itself up to God, and on the wings of the Spirit, spreads itself before God in sacred, devotional language. Such glorious moments are not infrequent in the prayer life. And it is plain that in such moments even the Our Father is not sufficiently concrete to direct the soul in its utterance before God. But in all seriousness, how many among the great and small in the congregation have risen to these sacred heights. And, if there are such, how many are the moments of a long day, when they are in such sacred and exalted moods? We must needs reckon with reality. And think not only of yourself, but have a tender consideration for the poor sheep in the church and in your own home, whose spiritual standing is still low, and who yet needs must pray, and for whom it is no less glorious than for you, when in prayer they come a little nearer unto God, and may perceive something of his holy presence. How much higher did not the apostles of Jesus stand than we, and yet for them Jesus deemed a memorized prayer so little aimless or superfluous, that he himself gave them one.

It is true, every written prayer leads to abuse. But would you think that Jesus has neither foreseen nor known, to what abuse even the Our Father would lead? And yet he gave it to his disciples. Nothing can be so holy, but our infirmity and sin will turn it to abuse. Baptism is abused. The Lord's supper is abused. The Scripture is abused. Must everything then be condemned because of this? Prayer also places a painful choice before us. Say that only the Spirit's prayer from one's own soul is acceptable before God, and forsooth, there will be no more abuse. But, then, there will also be thousands of families where no more prayer will be said, and all remembrance of it will gradually be lost. But restore the use in its fixed form, and of necessity the muttering with lips will ensue, in which the soul has no part. Not in every case, praise God, but with many, and thus many a prayer is profaned.

Standing before this choice, many incline to say: "In that case let the rest go without prayer, provided there are a few who pray aright. In any case cut off the work of the lips, in which there is no heart." And yet we may not say this. What Jesus spake to his disciples excludes this. Let us be more humble. Let us acknowledge, that even the congregation of the Lord occupies too low a viewpoint for what is so deeply spiritual, and that, if prayer is to be maintained, if it shall continue to be a power in the whole church, in every home, for every member of that home, for great and small alike, both must be practiced; as well the prayer from one's own soul, as the written prayer which all can pray, because all have been instructed in its use.

Our praise in hymn and psalm would also be of an higher order if every one of us were born poets and if we never sang hymns from a book, but always from our own inspiration

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and impulse. But this we do not do. We can not. We are no poets. And no public praise would be possible if the same hymn were not sung together. This also leads to abuse. Hymn upon hymn is sung by more than one person in the congregation with the lips, in which the soul has no part. But who will for this reason banish hymns and psalms from worship in God's house? This would be a reaching out after overspirituality which would mean death to public worship.

But there is still a more significant reason. Do we not know from experience that when the soul seeks to draw near unto God, nothing at times is more helpful than to repeat to oneself some inspired verse from the Psalms, which we have learned when a child, and which by its devotional language of itself takes us out of our ordinary world of thought and lifts up the soul to God? When we wanted to pray, and prayer would not come, has not the Our Father frequently been the grateful means of bringing us into the prayerful mood? The Scripture also is a formulary, and always remains the same. And is not reading of Scripture before prayer continually the means that not only enables us to pray, but to pray in such sacred terms as to carry the soul with them?

A twofold cause here operates. First, language. Prayer and praise have a language of their own. This language does not rise of itself from every soul. There have been those who were specially gifted with this. Is it not natural that they, who sing after David, and who pray in the words of Paul, feel that this helps and elevates them, and brings them further than of themselves they ever could have come? But there is still something more. Words of prayer, and elevations of praise, which from youth have been with us in life, impart to our utterance of soul a steadiness which strengthens, and makes us inwardly devout. And when in addition to this we realize that these wonderful words of prayer and elevations of praise are not only familiar to us, but that they are now, and have been in all ages, the language of God's children, it is as though some portion of the precious ointment of Aaron has been poured out upon it all, the sweet fragrance of which refreshes the heart.

The aim of the seeking always is to experience under it all the blessed nearness of God. Well, then, the Our Father also, when it is quietly, restfully and solemnly said, opens the gate of heaven to the soul. Psalm language of itself carries the soul upward. Everything that lends our wandering, and frequently impotent soul the support of the sacred Word, lifts us up into a higher mood. Moreover, everything in prayer and praise that makes us experience the communion of all God's saints and fellowship with our own more godly past, places a protecting power by the side of the power of the world that aims at keeping us far distant from God.

The benediction also at the close of public worship might easily be composed by each preacher for himself. That this is not the case, that in the benediction at least a fixed form has been maintained, is a gain to be thankfully acknowledged. Now the preacher can put

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nothing into it of himself. He is forgotten thereby, but just because he steps into the background, the benediction affects us as a gentle dew of grace which comes to us from God.

"AS IN HEAVEN."

For the soul "to be near unto God" implies, that we lift up ourselves with mind and heart from our everyday surroundings into the sphere of the Divine Majesty. This is what, in language of Scripture, the *Sursum Corda* has become, namely: the impulse to lift up soul and mind unto God and to appear in the audience-chamber of his holiness. In his infinite compassion God truly comes down to us, to dwell with us, and with his rod and staff to comfort us. This by itself brings God near to us, but by no means always brings our soul near unto God. The seeking love of God can for long times be near unto our heart, and can even be within it, while the heart is unconscious of it. An infant can be carried by God's nearness, and have no sense whatever of the Divine Majesty. In conditions of sickness, which darken our consciousness of self, God's nearness to his child is not removed. Even when in dying our consciousness fails us, the nearness of God continues to support the soul, which he has called unto himself.

But however closely these two are allied, they must always be carefully distinguished. Whether God is near unto us, and whether we are near unto God, is not the same. And in behalf of the latter, not of the former, it is exceedingly important that our mind be not too closely chained to the world of visible things, but that we should understand the sacred art of turning our mental perception from this world into that which is around God's throne.

The soul first learns this in prayer. And it is noteworthy that in the short form of the *Our Father*, Jesus repeatedly directs our thoughts to the invisible world. At once in the address: "Our Father, who art in heaven." According to the Heidelberg catechism, this means that we should not think of God in an earthly way. And this is correct, provided it is properly taken not as a sound, as a word or as a term whereby to express something supermundane, but as an effort of the soul, by which, at the very beginning of the prayer, to free itself from the embrace of earthly interests and to enter into the high and holy spheres that surround the throne of God. The prayer: "Thy kingdom come," carries the same effect, since that kingdom can not be anything else than the kingdom of heaven. Hence the petition implies, that the powers of the kingdom of heaven ought to permeate our life ever more strongly.

Fellowship with life around God's throne, however, is most clearly expressed in the third petition: Thy will be done on earth among us as in heaven among thy angels. Here the reference to heaven is immediate. Here both the similarity and the difference of life on earth and life in heaven is simultaneously shown. Here Jesus urges us that in prayer, and in seeking the nearness of God, we should acquaint ourselves with the world of angels and of the redeemed, in order by our relationship with their world, to strengthen our approach to God. Jesus urges us even so strongly in prayer to bring our souls into contact with the invisible



world, that in the last petition he makes us sensible of the inworking that goes out upon us from the head of the fallen angels. "Deliver us from the evil," is the petition which reminds us that evil, that sin which springs up in our heart, is fed and inspired by a higher power from the invisible world, and that God alone can deliver us from this deadly inworking. Is it then too much to say, that in this brief prayer of six petitions, Jesus leads us out from the earthly sphere of visible things, and unveils to the sense of our soul clearly and strongly the reality of the invisible world? And all for the sake that we might the more fully and the more intimately enjoy "to be near unto God."

In Scripture, this communion with spirits from the invisible world, is shown in more than one instance to be inseparable from nearness unto God. Only think of the vision call of Isaiah and of the Revelations on Patmos. Isaiah not only saw the Lord upon the throne, but also the Seraphim around it, and he heard the "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts," which with other music rang through the arches of heaven. On Patmos it was the same. There, too, the seer's eye beheld the holy One, and also the Chenibim who reveal God's majesty, and what is more, from "the elders," i. e., from the circles of the blest, he heard the hymn of praise: "Thou, Lord, art worthy to receive glory and honor and power!"

And so throughout the entire Scripture there runs a golden line of heavenly light, which brings the prayers and the hymns of praise of God's people into fellowship with the songs of praise of angels and the redeemed. It is not only that the angels and the blest in unapproachable light, and we on earth in our twilight, sing praises to the Trinity, but that there is a connection between the voices of angels and the tongues of men. Indeed, sometimes it seems that we on earth but echo what is sung around God's throne in heaven, and that our heart only finds rest when there is holy accord and blessed harmony between created spirits above and the creature that on earth thirsts after the nearness of God.

But this presents the question whether this indispensable fellowship with God's angels and the redeemed around the heavenly throne has not been too much lost from sight in our circles. That we should be on our guard against abuse in this matter, is self-evident. Idolatry has not improbably arisen from this search after intercourse with the world of spirits. Even within the church of Christ the search after this fellowship has all too frequently drawn souls away from the nearness of God, rather than introduced them into his holy presence. Dealings of the soul, if we may so express ourselves, with angels and the blest, have tempted anxious souls all too often to introduce intermediary persons between our soul and God, to whom to look for help rather than to God. It is plain, therefore, that for the sake of correcting this abuse, safety was sought in sobriety, and that with holy enthusiasm it was undertaken not to allow oneself to be drawn away in his prayer by anything, not even by angels, from God himself and from immediate communion with God. But it can not be denied that by exaggeration this carefulness has led to the other extreme. For is it not a fact, that in the prayers of the church, in prayer at home, and in personal supplication, the spirit-world is almost



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entirely ignored, and that thereby all such prayer has become antagonistic to the note which Jesus himself has struck in the Our Father?

In the Our Father, Jesus brings our soul again and again in touch with this higher world of spirits, while from our prayer this communion has almost entirely died away. For the sake of avoiding the abuse of one extreme, one can easily and of itself pass over into the other extreme, and this is bound to injure the life of our soul. He who dies, knows that he will not find God and the Savior alone by themselves, but he will find them surrounded by a world of saints. Not a Father alone, but a Fatherhouse, and in that Fatherhouse the many mansions, and in those mansions, with God's angels, the saints that have gone before.

And though we speak of this world of glory as of the world above, because we can not think of it otherwise than as being far exalted above this guilty earth, we well know that this distinction is not a separation, and that already here on earth communion with that world is possible. When the Psalmist would praise God, he calls upon the angels to praise and bless the Lord (*Ps. 103*). There is an host of the Lord that encampeth round about them that fear God. Not only Satan, the head of fallen angels, but good angels, too, are in communication with our soul. And in moments of blessed elevation of spirit the soul has been conscious of the nearness of the good spirits of God, and it has seemed that they made us feel in a more tender and more intimate way the nearness of our God.

We undergo the same inworking for good or for evil from men. One evil-minded person in your environment can draw your soul away from God, estrange every utterance of life from God, and throw you back into your earthly, sinful shallowness. On the other hand, one devoted child of God in your midst can effect the exclusion of every unholy suggestion from conversation, the opening up of the soul, and the closer approach to God.

Such is the case here. He who accustoms himself to enter into the life of the holy world of God's angels, and already here on earth admits the company of the saints into the circle of the perceptions of his own soul will thereby not only banish evil, but will himself attain a holier mood, will feel himself supported in praise and prayer, and will encounter far less difficulty in raising himself from his earthly life to the nearness of his God.

We were not created for solitariness. The moment when, deserted of all, you have to fight your fight alone, you feel that something unnatural has come upon you. Not alone, but "With all the saints," we will come to the knowledge of our God, and if in eternity it will be the wonderful exaltation of life together with all angels and all saints to glorify God forever, why, then, should we forsake and neglect the glorious power which already here on earth can unfold in our prayer, if by anticipation we live already here in the blessed communion, which awaits us up yonder. With all God's saints we are one body in Christ, as our head, but on earth we taste little of the fellowship of the whole body of the Lord. On the other hand, communion with saints and God's angels is continually open to us. Blessed

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is he who not only enjoys this in his own soul, but also knows how to inspire thereby the nearness of his God.

"STRIVING AGAINST SIN."

One who in mature years, and in his right mind, does not strive from time to time against some sin or other, can scarcely be imagined. The human heart is an impenetrable riddle. Even with sneak thieves and drunkards we are often amazed at a coy tenderness that shows disgust with one or more sins, which in better circles are altogether too frequently given free passage. But repression of some striking sin, in the case of oneself or of others, is by no means always yet what the apostle calls the struggle against sin. Everything here depends on what occasions the struggle against this or that sin. One will resist such a sin from concern about his health. This is often preponderant with respect to sensual sin. Another takes care of himself, because, in case his sin became known, it would injure his good name. A third strives against a temptation because indulgence would ruin him financially. A fourth puts a mark against a given sin because in his narrower circle of life it is sharply condemned. Only think of Sabbath desecration. And in this way, by all sorts of persons, one sin or another is resisted from reasons that have nothing to do with the real struggle against sin. With not a few, indeed, there is no mention whatever of a conscious motive, and all their striving against this or that sin springs from a certain moral instinct, from the judgment of public opinion, or from the desire to be decent. In this way profanity has become noticeably less in our civilized circles, but far more because it is now considered coarse and uncivilized, than from fear of the holy God.

All such resistance against all sorts of sin, however, should not be judged from the heights as indifferent. Because of its very contagiousness every open sin is most dangerous. Apart from its guilt before God, sin by itself is moral sickness, and everything that opposes the outbreak or progress of this sickness is gain. Only the struggle against sin in any form, without higher motive, brings no spiritual gain. David's saying: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned," remains the fundamental rule. And only when we strive against sin, because sin opposes God, does our struggle obtain the holy, the higher character.

The struggle against sin, because sin strives against God and God strives against sin, brings us near unto God. The struggle then remains no longer merely moral, but it becomes religious--an expression of godliness, and at the same time a precious means of cherishing nearness unto God. See it in the life of nations and associations, how waging a common war brings people together, closely unites them, and makes connections for the present and the future.

When France at length obtained Russia as an ally, Russian sailors in Paris were almost carried on hands. In the war of the Boers against England every Dutchman felt his heart beat in sympathy with that of his fellow countrymen in South Africa. From fear of Russia



the English and Japanese have become brothers. The same is seen in the life of society and church. In times of election unions arise between temporal allies, which govern their entire future. It is seen in every domain that nothing unites so closely, and brings one so near to another, as the struggle against a common foe.

The same applies to the struggle against sin, when it is honestly carried, because sin is inimical to God. For then God and you fight the same fight. Then this fight of itself makes you join yourself to God. Then you do not fight alone, but with your God. With the weapons which God provides for this warfare, under Christ as your leader. And then nothing brings you so near unto God, and keeps you there, as the lifelong continuance of the bitter fight against the enemy of God, and of your own soul, and of the soul of your loved ones.

And then it is not a life-struggle against one particular sin, but against sin, i. e., against all sinful influences, inspirations and workings, which go out from Satan upon yourself and your entire surrounding. Indeed, there are bosom-sins, and it is no minor fault, when the heart is so little known to itself, that no confession can be made before God of the sin that most assaults and conquers self. And it cannot fail but that everyone who takes his private life seriously is more particularly on his guard against certain definite sins, and in his thoughts and prayers is more engaged with these, than with other sins. His struggle directs itself most against that evil which overcame and injured him most. And in memory thereof the shame and sorrow because of defeat in the struggle against this particular sin, will intrude themselves most strongly upon him. It was this sin which inflicted the most cruel wound, and left behind the blackest mark.

But do not fail to observe the danger which this implies. For is it not heart-breaking to see the number of lesser sins in their character to which even earnest Christians are stone blind? And the burden of this guilt rests for no small part upon this one-sided striving against a particular, great sin. Where a greater danger threatens, all sorts of lesser dangers that might harm are of themselves almost lost from sight. When a loved one lies at the point of death, no one inquires after the concerns of cellar and kitchen. When a runaway horse races through the streets, no one is on the lookout for muddy places, but makes himself scarce. When fire breaks out in the house, no one attends to the draught from an open window. In saving a man from drowning, no one is concerned about the incidental tearing of clothes. When war breaks out, of itself all sorts of other quarrels, however important, are silenced. And thus a more serious evil will always cause the struggle against a lesser evil to weaken.

And such is also the case with respect to the soul. When the struggle is continued to resist and to repel the particular sin which tempts one the most strongly, a number of other sins have almost free play and their progress is unnoticed. He who perseveres in the main fight against arrogance and pride, against sensual propensity, or avarice, is thereby exposed to the danger that little untruths, dishonesties, infidelities, bitternesses, vanities, selfishnesses



and so much more, become almost a second nature, strike root in his heart ever more firmly, and soil his inner life. This is only discovered when at last the chief enemy has been as good as worsted. Then tenderness of conscience begins immediately to work with these erstwhile neglected sins, and one is frightened at the sight of the luxurious growth of weeds in the garden of the heart.

And to what cause can this sad outcome be attributed save to this, that one struggled bravely indeed to free himself from his worst enemy, but utterly lost sight of the struggle against sin, because God strives against it. It continued to be an effort to set one's person free, to measure his strength of spirit and will against the strength of this particular sin; dissatisfaction with self, in case of defeat, and the determination not to rest until victory was gained. But all this went on outside of the secret walk with God. Divine help was invoked to worst the enemy of the soul, but there was no awakening of soul to beat off, as a poisonous adder, the enemy of our God. And, therefore, such a struggle could not bring you nearer unto God, but every time threw you back upon yourself.

Should we then give up the struggle against the sin that tempts us most, that we might resist the numerous lesser sins? By no means. He who leaves the main entrance to a fortress unprotected merely to repel assaults at the side entrances, will, when presently attacked from behind, have to give up all further resistance. No, what you should do, is, with an eye open to the moral danger that threatens, by a far more serious exertion of strength, the sooner the better to make an end of the struggle against your chief sin, not by giving it free play, but by breaking with it once and for all. Thus alone will you obtain a free hand, in the Lord's strength, to bring spiritual harmony in the further discords of the soul. That this is possible is evident from the witness borne by many a disciplined child of God, who at length has put on the whole armor of God, and has triumphed gloriously. The mistake is, that one makes his leading sin his bosom sin, and then views it as an evil which by some fatality he is bound to resist until death. The enigma of our human heart is, that we resist our main sin most continuously and at the same time cozen it. A duality within, in which, through lack of heroic action, we accustom ourselves to what is deemed to be a necessity of life.

Then it is not the spirit within us, which, united with the Spirit of God, fights in our soul the fight of God against sin, for the sake of God, but a *ience*. This evil, however, must be broken. It must become a life-struggle against every sin and against the sinful nature, for the sake of the holiness of God. In order to come nearer unto God, the child of God must take service under Christ in the warfare which God himself wages against Satan and his works, and thus obtain a twofold result: that whereas hitherto he suffered defeat, now he conquers, and that whereas he thus far wandered away from God, now he knows himself to be near unto God.



"LIVE IN PEACE."

When Asaph wrote: "But it is good for me to be near unto God," and thereby expressed in words a deep utterance of soul, which age upon age has found an echo in thousands of hearts, life had many more advantages for those who sought the Lord than it has for us now. In the East, where Asaph lived, it is still the custom that every event in life is put into relation with God; that in everything God is remembered, and the name of God is named. There is so much that draws us away from God, and therefore, pious usage prescribed, that from early infancy the child should be trained to remember God in every event of life. This is still the custom under Islam, where it is overdone, even to the extent that it must give rise to abuse.

But there is something attractive in the habit. The call to prayer from the pinnacle of the minarets has the same tendency. Where there is so much that draws us away from God and keeps us far removed, a counterpoise was sought in life by which to bind the soul to God. The Christian church did the same in the middle ages. The ringing of bells, the stations of the cross, crucifixes, and so much more, all tended to quicken the thought of Christ. And in the age of the Reformation our fathers tried to reach the same end by putting prayer in between everything, by multiplying church services, and by the effort to sanctify every event of life in God. Not only testaments, but also contracts of rents were begun in the name of God. On coins the words appeared, "God with us," or, as in the United States of America, "In God we trust," and wherever it was possible God's holy name was brought to remembrance. An atmosphere prevailed in this which was pregnant with something of the holy, sometimes even too much so. To this was added that in the days of Asaph and of our fathers the religious undulation was far stronger, and religion occupied a far broader place in life.

But we have everything against us. In society life the name of God is scarcely ever mentioned. No bells are rung. An entirely different world of thoughts fills minds and hearts. He who tries to keep up sacred usages is criticized as being old-fashioned, if he is not scorned. A life divested of God and his name is most desired. And as regards religious undulation, it still continues in small circles, but the tidal wave of life goes, purely materially, for money and sensual pleasure. In such a time "to be near unto God" requires a double effort, and nothing should be neglected, neither positively nor negatively, that here may have effect. Positively every means should be persistently applied to engage the soul with God each day for a longer period of time and with greater intimacy; and negatively by opposing and resisting everything that hinders or prevents our communion with God.

Does the church of Christ understand the great interest that is here at stake? Can it be said, that an effort is in evidence, at least within the church, to pursue this exalted aim? As



one means "to be near unto God," the Apostle indicates a "life in peace." His exhortation runs: "Be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and of peace shall be with you" (II Cor. 13:11). And yet this peace is continually broken. Let us be well understood. It does not say, that there may no differences arise, nor that with every difference safety must be sought in indifference. Paul did not do this. No, the point in question is the spirit in which differences are faced and settled. A twofold impulse may have play. On one side the holy impulse, in the face of differences to be doubly on our guard, that love shall suffer no less, and that no unholy word shall escape our lips or pen. But also on the other side the unholy impulse, in the face of differences to allow one's bitter mind free play, to give one's passion to annoy free rein, and to inflict whatever pain one can. With the first, one puts himself in an atmosphere of love and peace. With the second, one breathes an atmosphere of bitterness and anger.

In the church it is the same as in the family. Between husband and wife, between parents and children, and between children among themselves, differences continually arise. It can not be otherwise. Interests, insights and endeavors run in opposite directions. But see the difference between one family and another. In the family that is of a noble mind, a limit is put upon these differences, a spirit of love prevails, which of itself opens a way of escape. And where love dwells, the Lord commands this blessing, that hearts remain united. But next to this, alas, how many families there are in which pains are not spared to measure out the difference as broadly as possible, to put the sharpest arrow, as long as it is not poisonous, on one's bow, and where again and again husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters face one another like furies. This is always the same antithesis which we have indicated. This sinful earth brings us no world, no family or church, without differences or disputes. But it all depends whether a dispute in family or in church finds an atmosphere of love and peace, or one of bitterness and anger.

And now the Apostle points out that cherishing the atmosphere of love and peace is not only a Christian duty, which brings gladness and comfort into life, but that it is also a necessary requisite for the cultivation of life in fellowship with God. A child of God can, and indeed must, be near unto God and live in communion with God even amid conditions of restlessness and strife. He who perseveres obtains this blessed end. But, O, it is made thereby unspeakably much more difficult. Where the atmosphere that surrounds us is charged with evil electricity, and the tongue can not be held in leash, and discord rends the robe of love, and the passion of strife breaks loose, everything draws the heart away from communion with its God. There the peace of God, that passeth all understanding, can not fill the soul. There is no calm there and no inward restfulness to lift oneself up from this earthly sphere into the world above, and to enjoy the bliss of nearness unto God. And then in two ways harm is done. First, you fail of one of the most precious means of being near

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to God; and again you become subject to the dominion of an element that inserts itself with separating effect between you and your God.

A gently tempered mind can, with respect to this, be a blessing to a whole family, to a whole community; and a mind that is poisoned with the bitterness of gall can spoil the tone and spirit of an entire family and an entire community, and make godliness therein to suffer bitter loss. Of every thoughtless and unholy word, and also of every bitter and irritable frame of mind, account must once be made before God. For do not forget, that nothing trains the mind and heart so effectively as the custom and the habit which form and govern the condition and the mood of heart and mind.

If you have once acquired the habit of holding yourself back and of self-control, and when Satan places poison into your hands, at once to reach out for the alabaster box of precious ointment, the struggle becomes gradually easier, the effort to encourage stillness more lovely, and the joy of having cultivated peace and love increasingly rich. If, on the other hand, you give way to your sharpness, to your passion, to your bitterness of mind, you lose more and more the power of self-control, and create for yourself and your surroundings unspeakable harm and wrong.

The peace of which the apostle speaks has nothing to do with sentimentalism, with lack of courage to speak, with being blind to wrong practices. Mere sentimental goodness is no sacred art, but cowardice. But this is sacred art: to stand strong and courageous, in everything, and yet so to take hold of things, deal with them, and settle them, that no unholy spark starts fire in your own mind, and that you do not disturb for a moment the inward peace of those who are around you.

He whose piety is more appearance than reality, cares for none of these things. But he who strives unto the end in every way to keep sacred his secret walk with God, and to be continually near unto God, can offer no resistance to the stress of this apostolic word. He feels in his own soul that the atmosphere of love and peace makes him dwell near unto God, and therefore he flees from the sphere of strife and unrest, because it draws him away from God.



"A DECEIVED HEART HATH TURNED HIM ASIDE."

The world, our environment, our business, yea, and what not, as a rule leads us away from God. This means that it takes definite effort, in the midst of daily activities, to keep our thoughts and utterances of soul directed toward God. There have even been whole days of which at night on bended knee, it had to be confessed that the mind and soul had not once been lifted up to God. To picture this in brighter colors than the case warrants, will not do. Thus and not otherwise is the sad reality with many whole days of life in which God has had no remembrance. We were too busy, too overwhelmed, too much diverted and preoccupied than that at night we could retire with the blissful experience of how good it was "to be near unto God."

This is, of course, exclusively a result of the sinful character of our earthly life, for by itself there was no need that anything should draw us away from God. God does not stand by the side of things. He is in all things. From him, by him, and to him. Diversion is a necessity when too onesidedly and too exclusively our spirit has been engaged with one thing. This is noticed by the staring eye, the expressionless face, and the constant return to the same subject. And the specialist recognizes the danger of this. When the soul and the mind are directed to one thing too onesidedly and too continuously, so that one thinks of nothing else, forgets everything else, and involuntarily keeps busy with the selfsame thought, there is the beginning of mental disorder, and diversion is the proper medicine.

This is not the case with thinking of God. In the created world a number of things stand side by side of one another, each with their own claim, and our mind is normal when in just proportions we pay proper attention to them all. If this order is broken, by thinking too much of one thing, and too little of the other, equilibrium is gone and the spirit fails at length in its own confusion. God, on the other hand, never stands by the side of a created thing. It should never be ninety parts of our attention for the creature and ten parts for God. Neither should it be ten parts for the world and ninety parts for God. In the full one hundred parts of everything God is to be worshipped. Jesus emphatically declares: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy strength, with all thy soul and with all thy mind. In the same way the one hundred parts of our strength should be operative in created things. But both should proceed so as to enter into and permeate each other, and together constitute one blessed life. Thus it is in the Fatherhouse. Thus it was in paradise. Thus it sometimes is here for the space of one brief moment. But as a rule it is so no longer. There is division. There is distraction. The struggle of godliness is to oppose this division, to resist this distraction, and yet, at least parts of each day and parts of each night, "to be near unto God."



What divides and distracts should be justly estimated. With respect to this, Adam is still inclined to put it upon Eve, and Eve to charge it to the serpent. The world, the many activities of life, the diversions of the moment are held accountable for our distractions and life without God. One is busy from early morn till late night, and in dead weariness one falls asleep, sometimes before prayer is said. There is no time for God and for his service. There may be for those who quietly remain at home, but not for the man of business. And so life is ever held accountable, the restlessness and noise, the ever-enticing world. Or complaint is made of the body. One does not feel well, headaches, fevers and other troubles keep the spirit bound. Only there is almost no complaint of one's own soul. And against this Isaiah enters his striking accusation: Your deceived heart hath turned you aside.

Surely the world has come in with its enticements, life with its activities. Thereby you have allowed your heart to be deceived. But it is not the world, nor its activities, but your deceived heart that has turned you aside. It has even turned you aside to this extent, Isaiah adds, that your soul can no longer save itself, i. e., it can no longer escape from its own intoxication. Isaiah declares this regarding the man who has an idol for himself. A tree has been taken home. The knotty parts have been cut off, and of the smooth part the poor soul makes an idol. And it is not the idol that is at fault, but the idolatrous thought in the soul, which had captivated the heart, before he made his idol. That piece of wood, that idol is but the expression of what went on in his heart. Not the idol, but his deceived heart turned him aside, even so effectively" that at length he no longer sees the difference between a piece of wood and God. Or, as the prophets put it: "He is turned aside so far that he can not come to discover that there is a lie in his right hand" (Isaiah 44:20). This selfsame evil operates, not only among the heathen, but, if in another manner, among Mohammedans, Jews and Christians. It is a human evil. An immediate outcome of our sinful nature.

How does this show itself? Very sharply and clearly, as soon as a magnet operates upon the heart, which attracts, interests and holds the attention, and which involuntarily and of itself again and again stimulates the soul and the senses, fills the thoughts, animates conversation and brings one into a fanatical state of mind. This does not mean the tension and activity of spirit, when duty, business, the course of conversation, etc., arrest the attention to itself. On the contrary, in this case lack of attention and neglect of due examination of the interest at stake, is a fault; and may even be a sin. No, the idolatrous turning aside of one's inner self only becomes apparent when this magnet continuously draws, and even without occasion, and when the drawing does not operate from without, but from one's own heart.

There are people who, when they come to you, you instinctively know in advance what they will talk about. There is but one thing that fills their minds. One interest to which they are continually awake. With one it is money, the idea of becoming rich, of increasing gains in every way. With another it is pleasure and the desire to shine. With a third it is art, music,



a concert, a piece of literature, a museum, so long as it is dedicated to art, and makes an artistic showing. With another, again, it is a scientific problem which constantly pursues him. With another, again, it is politics, or society gossip, or the hunt, or sport. In all this, spiritual sickness is symptomatically present as soon as one particular interest, even apart from special occasion, of itself engages the attention, animates and preoccupies, and renders one dense and unsympathetic with respect to other things.

For then there is one-sided concentration of mind upon one given point. This one thing is, then, the main thing, to which everything else is rendered subservient. This means to say that this one thing takes the place with him, which in a normal condition of soul, is only accorded to God. And thus it becomes idolatrous. It is the one absorbing subject of thought. One never gets through talking about it. No sacrifice is deemed too great in its behalf. One devotes himself to it with all his soul and mind. Nothing higher is known and respected. With respect to it even brotherhoods are formed, insomuch as one is interested only in those who live in behalf of the same interest and are absorbed by the selfsame thing. With those who live like this the equilibrium is broken, and the highest place, which is God's right to fill, is occupied by this other thing, which they love with all their heart, and with all their mind, and to which they devote themselves with all their strength.

Now, it is self-evident, that being magnetized in this idolatrous fashion, does not occur with Christians in this literal sense. This neither can be so, nor is it so. He with whom this is the case may announce himself as a Christian, but a Christian he is not. But from this it by no means follows, that the child of God is not exposed to this danger. It is even confessed, of those who have most earnestly sought after the secret walk with God, that no sin was so constantly at the door of their heart as this inclination to allow themselves, by the workings of their own heart, their soul and their mind, to be turned away from God to creaturely things or creaturely thoughts. To be full of the Holy Ghost means, that the desire of the heart, which goes out after God and holy things, is constant. He with whom this is the case does not need to repress other things from his thoughts in order that he might think of God. Involuntarily he thinks of God, and of other things only by special effort.

But what continually occurs, even among Christians, is the very opposite, to-wit: That of itself all sorts of other things are subject of thought, and that only by determinate effort the soul is engaged with God. If, now, these are every time other, alternating things, the danger is not so great. For then it is not one given thing that captivates the heart, and the worship of God stands high above every other interest. On the other hand, however, the danger is great when the heart allows itself to be turned aside onesidedly to one given thing or to one special sort of things, which enthuse us and engage the heart, for then they are apt again and again to take the place in the heart which belongs alone to God.

You can not be near unto God and have part in his secret walk, when involuntarily and of itself magnetically you are every time turned aside again to things that are finite. For then

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the heart has deceived itself and the deceived heart has turned you aside. And, therefore, when you struggle, and feel that your life is not one that is near unto God, then cease to complain onesidedly of the world, of your environment and of your busy life, as though these alone turn you aside from God. Rather turn in upon yourself. Spy your thoughts, conversations and perceptions. And when you see that not alone, and not even mostly from without, but from these thoughts within there arises the diverting working, which disturbs your fellowship with God, and prevents you from living near unto God, then cast down this idol within and destroy it.

There is no room for Christ and Belial in one and the selfsame heart. Or do you not know, with St. Paul: "Do ye not know your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you?" (II Cor, 13:5).



"WHATSOEVER YE DO, DO IT HEARTILY, AS TO THE LORD."

God, in his word, opposes every tendency and every effort to break up life into two parts; one for ourselves and one for God. He allows no division, no separation; no six days of the week for us and Sunday for God. No unconsecrated life interspersed with consecrated moments. No unhallowed existence through which at distances a sacred thread is interwoven. No life apart from religion marked here and there with piety. No, the claim of Scripture on this point is absolute, and though it seems strange to us, the claim remains: "'Pray without ceasing;" in everything give thanks; rejoice in God always; and: "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord" ([Col. 3:23](#)).

To Thessalonica Paul writes: "Pray without ceasing. Rejoice evermore. In everything give thanks" ([I Thess. 5 : 16, 17, 18](#)) . To the Philippians: "Rejoice in the Lord always" ([Phil. 4:4](#)). And to those at Colosse: "'Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord" ([Col. 3:23](#)). There is no respite given. No compact made with you. God takes no pleasure with anything less than all of your life. Where faith becomes the rule of life, its dominion aims to be absolute. No finds, no excuses, no half-measures are tolerated. He who would live this life as a child of God, as a servant of Jesus Christ, inspired by the Holy Ghost, must be led and carried in everything by faith. He who divides and makes distinctions robs God of a part that is God's. If you would love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength, every subterfuge is closed off, and the all-claiming and all-demanding character of faith is founded in Love itself.

Every division works injury to your life, and to your religion. He who makes division here, and does too much for religion, neglects his family or his calling. And he who divides and is not pious, gives the lion-share to the world, and with an avaricious heart deducts from what he pretends to set aside for God in strength, time and money. He who would have the blessing of nearness unto God and of going through life in secret fellowship with God, can not cultivate it spasmodically. With him God must be known in everything he undertakes to do. God must be the sole end and aim, God must be entreated and given thanks. This can not be done in a formal way with closing of eyes and folding of hands and muttering of words, but in the inmost chamber of the heart and in that hidden recess of self-consciousness whence are the issues of life as well as of prayer.

This is opposed by the idea that a clergyman can continually turn this fellowship with God into a reality in life, but not a business man; that the man or woman who is zealous for missions, philanthropy or evangelization, stands in holy service before God, but not the father and mother in the family. The work of a clergyman, missionary or nurse is then called consecrated labor, and the work performed by the gardener, merchant or seamstress is said



to be secular. This false representation of the matter has worked much injury to piety and to vital godliness.

It goes without saying that he who ministers in the sanctuary is of itself more closely engaged with holy things, and enjoys an uncommon privilege, of which he shall give an account before God. Nor can it be denied that at the exchange and in the shop it takes more effort and victory over self to continue in everything near unto God. This is a greater struggle in which God knows what we are made of, and is mindful that we are dust. But by the side of this stands the fact that ministering in the sanctuary brings with it in no small measure the danger of becoming accustomed to holy things, and of handling the same more and more with unholy hands, whereby judgment is made so much the heavier. In best churches and in most excellent missions also evil times returned again and again, in which priests and priestesses profaned the sanctuary, and when not from among them, but from among plain patrons and working people and shop-keepers and merchants the new action arose, which restored the holy to honor. A pious preacher, a godly missionary, a consecrated nurse, and likewise a truly godly warden, elder or deacon, represents a glorious power. But it is a mistake to think that of itself the more consecrated calling brings true godliness with it. Young preachers of tender consciences, have frequently been bound to confess that they were put to shame by the godliness of many a plain member of their congregation. Moreover, it must be granted that in our extremely defective condition certain definite and special consecration of a part of our life, of our strength and of our money to religious activities and interests is necessary. You can not serve God all the days of your life in such a way but that the day of rest retains its supreme significance. You can not continue near unto God in everything you do in such a way, but that the particular moments of direct prayer, of worship in the Word, and of thanksgiving and praise continue to be a need of the heart. Neither can you practice justice and compassion in everything in such a way, but that setting apart of special gifts for the service of God is appreciated by you as a sacred duty.

In the Jerusalem above this duality also shall fall away. The church triumphant in heaven shall not stand in, nor by the side of, the life of glory, but shall be that life itself. But such it is not as yet here. It can not be otherwise but that here this duality continues. The church is something else than the family or the shop. The mighty antithesis between things of this world and things of the Kingdom demands this. But this may never allow religion, piety or godliness so to withdraw itself within the sacred domain as to become a churchly life with godliness by the side of a life in the world without godliness. Godliness may find a more exalted utterance within the sacred domain, and impart strength for daily life, but to be true and genuine, it must be a golden thread that maintains its glistening brightness throughout all of life.

It all depends on whether you truly believe that God is almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth. Whether you believe and consider that every material you handle is his creature;



that every article of food and drink on your table is his creature and his gift; that your body and all your senses are his embroidery; that every force of nature with which you come in contact, is his omnipresent working; that every circumstance you encounter has been appointed you by God; that every relation in which you are placed by blood, by marriage, by appointment or choice, has come to you under and by his providential plan; that your every exigency and difficulty has been put in your way by God; that every task or duty to which you are called comes to you from God and has a definite significance in his government; that you can not think of anything so high or so low on earth but it all forms a link, great or small, in the chain of his dispositions; that no joy is enjoyed and no suffering suffered, but God measures it out to you; in brief, that nothing can be thought of in heaven or on earth, and nothing can exist, but God, who created heaven and earth, maintains and governs it, has a holy purpose with it all, in everything is God who disposes and ordains, and who in all things uses his people, which includes you, to carry out his counsel. To make an exception of anything whatever with reference to this, is unbelief.

When, therefore, the Apostle says: "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord," he says nothing but what immediately flows from your confession that you believe in God the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth. For then there is nothing in your personal life, or in your family life, or in your study and work, or in anything you do, that would separate you from God, and that should not rather, provided it is rightly interpreted, lead you to God. You can, indeed not sin as to the Lord. Sin separates, breaks fellowship and throws you back upon yourself. But for the rest, whether you stand behind the counter or work at your trade; whether you sit in your office; whether you lose yourself in study or devote yourself to art; whether you are at home or in other company--it all can and must be one working, one activity with strength imparted of God, in things Divinely created, for a purpose which God has ordained.

Hence the question is whether your faith, not in the mysteries of salvation, no, but your faith first of all in God as Creator of heaven and earth floats with you as a drop of oil on the waters, or whether it permeates all of your life and is applied by you to everything. In case of the latter there is no division anywhere, and the man who plows and sows, the carpenter at the bench or the stone layer, the mother who cares for her children and her home, in brief, every man and woman, in any position of life whatsoever, never labor apart from God, but always in his creation and in his service.

Then to be near unto God, the fellowship with the Eternal, the secret walk with him who knoweth the heart, is no sweet-smelling savor by the side of life, but the breath of life itself, spreading its sweet perfume upon your whole existence. Then in everything you are glad, because the majesty and the grace of God breathes upon you from everything and in everything. Then, in everything, you pray, not with the lips, but in the heart, because, in whatsoever you do, you feel your deep dependence upon his Almighty power. Then in

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everything you give thanks, because all trouble is outcome of his grace. And every adversity is intended to stimulate you, with the aid of ever more grace, to greater exertion of strength. Then everything will be done heartily, i. e., not mechanically, not slavishly, not of necessity, but willingly and gladly, because in this way you are permitted to do it in his service. And thus you attain that high level of existence where godliness and fulfillment of duty are one, because whatsoever you do, in quiet and restful nearness unto God, you are permitted to do as to the Lord.

"HOW EXCELLENT IS THY NAME IN ALL THE EARTH."

One of the last hallelujah psalms closes with the mention of the children of Israel, as "the people that is near unto God." It says in full: "He hath exalted the horn of his people, the praise of all his saints; even of the children of Israel, a people near unto him" ([Psalm 148:14](#)). The distinction that is here made is, that not only the individual soul may find itself in closer fellowship, in more intimate communion, in more constant walk with God, but also that this, in a much vaguer sense, of course, may be true under given circumstances of a large number of persons, and even of a whole people.



To a certain extent this can be said of a rural population in distinction from the population of cities. The story of "the temple of uncarved wood" remains herewith under sentence of its own unreality. For in its hypocrisy it never was anything else than the poetic, pious talk of those who would rather take a walk on Sunday than go to church. We mean the fact, which has been observed in almost every country, that the rural population, taken as a whole, has remained more devoted to religion than the great masses of city people, at least among what are called protestant that have become estranged from all home religion and from public worship. It can even be said that this serious phenomenon increases in proportion to the increase of city population.

This does not mean to say that in these great cities there is no remnant of devout people. These city people, indeed, are sometimes very influential, and in many ways their piety is of a higher type than rural piety, especially in strength of purpose and elasticity. This is the result of greater friction and of more intense competition. He who in such cities still cherished the sacred traditions of the fathers, did so under protest. He had to suffer for it, and to struggle in behalf of it. But he who maintained himself in the conflict, came out of it better disciplined, fortified and strengthened, and felt himself better equipped against unbelief and indifferentism. But apart from these relatively always small exceptions, it can not be denied that in rural districts reverence for religion is more firmly rooted, and that in city life this reverence wanes; especially where there are great industries, much commerce, and much speculation at the exchange. Indeed, among factory owners and hands, among merchants and office clerks, among members of the exchange and capitalists there are also truly pious children of God, but they are white ravens among the black flock.



That which co-operated to bring this about is manifold. What with weather and wind, harvests and failure of crops, with cattle and land plagues, people in rural districts are far more directly dependent upon the works of God than people in the cities. With respect to industrial interests and mechanical inventions man is the more prominent agent who exercises power. In rural districts temptation also is less brutally on exhibition. Evenings there

are shorter and people rise earlier. People know each other more personally, which makes the discipline of public opinion more effective. The membership of a church is smaller, which allows the supervision of the church to be more general. And so there are many causes that co-operate, but among these the principal cause always is: Life in the country itself, and the consequent influence of nature, of the visible creation of God which surrounds the countryman. From this it can be inferred that he who seeks to be near unto God loses a notable capacity, when he does not open eye and ear to the impression of the nearness of God, which the visible creation can impart.

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The need of this opening of eye and ear is evident from the large number of city people who in summer go to the country, but who go only for pleasure and fresh air, and return as estranged from God as when they started. But as a matter of fact, the city man misses nature. Parks and boulevards offer some compensation, but the great masses, especially working people, only return home at dark. The starry heavens truly also glisten above our cities, but among those who walk the busy streets in the evening, who lifts his eyes on high to see who has created all these things, who bringeth out their hosts by number, and calleth them by name?

In our villages nature is all around, whether it is desired or not. It forces itself upon the inhabitants. In cities, on the other hand, people are shut off from nature and only they who seek it above or outside of the town find it. In the country God's voice addresses us from within and from without. In the city alone from within, while the human voice makes itself loudly heard in all sorts of ways to hush the voice of the Lord, even in his starry heaven and in his thunder. They who are advanced in years, and whose life's task is done, not infrequently seek the country again to make good what they have lost. In most cases, however, susceptibility to understand nature has been lost, and so they remain isolated from their surroundings.

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Now, compare this with Scripture. Man has his origin in a glorious paradise, where all nature addresses him in a pure language of God. Even after the fall so much excellence remains in broken nature that the invisible things of God are understood from created things, both his eternal power and divinity ([Romans 1:20](#)). "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day abundantly uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no people or land, where this voice of God is not heard" ([Psalm 19](#)). Excellent is his name in all the earth. The voice of the Lord is upon the waters. The God of glory thundereth. The voice of the Lord is powerful. The voice of the Lord is full of majesty. The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars, even the cedars of Lebanon ([Psalms 29](#)). And so it goes on through all the Psalms. Read and read again [Psalm 104](#). And at the end of the Psalter we have a striking description of nature in [Psalms 147](#)

and 148. And even before the Book of the Psalms is Job with his wondrous descriptions of the Behemoth, the horse and the pleiadea. It is all one mighty call in the greatness and beauty of nature to behold the glory of God.

And when in Scripture we come to the preaching of the Son of Man, it is again the self-same call: "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow!" "Behold the fowls of the air;" it is light thrown upon the mysteries of the Kingdom borrowed from what is seen in the sower and the shepherds; and at the close of his ministry there is the touching comparison of Jerusalem with the hen that gathers her chickens under her wings. The glow of nature scintillates throughout all of Revelation. God's ancient people was a rural people. The holy land, which God had appointed for his people, was then, though no longer now, a fertile field of unequalled beauty. The new earth under the new heaven shall be a return of paradise. The wilderness shall blossom as the rose. And when our times are familiar with the glorification of the artist-painter, because of the beautiful scenes which, with depths of color and life, he works before our eyes--what dullness of the spiritual eye it betrays when at the same time it is blind to the thousand-fold more enchanting glory in the handiwork of our God, who is the chiefest artist of all.

It affects one strangely, therefore, to find so little, if any, appreciation of the beautiful in nature among Christian people. Undoubtedly the voice of the herald of Peace far excels the many voices of nature. "In his temple," says the Psalmist, after having described the power of God in nature, "in his temple doth everyone speak of his glory" ([Psalm 29:9](#)). And in the Hallelujah song of [Psalm 147](#) it is said that Israel is highly exalted above primitive peoples, because the Lord hath made known his word unto Jacob. And in closing it declares: "He hath not dealt so with any nation: Neither have the heathen knowledge of his laws." In the congregation of believers, where the word is rightly proclaimed, there is a spiritual beauty which far outshines the beauty of nature.

But shall we be onesided on this account and allow the half to be lost? According to our confession God is known in two ways. Surely from his Word, but also from the creatures, which are letters in the book of creation, to make us know the might and majesty of God. Christian conferences, devotional meetings, devotional books, are all very excellent, but must on this account the great book of creation remain closed to the eye of the soul? It all goes for the sake of impressions, impressions on the collodion-plate of the heart. For the sake of impressions which far excel the impressions of daily life, and those which we receive from men.

We may not, and will not, live under the impression that the Divine can ever be reduced to the measure of the human. We will not lower and lessen God after our dimensions, but



lift up ourselves to the measure of the majesty of God. Not a God after our image, but we created after the image of God. And this you will not get from books, and not from travel, and not from acquaintance with men. For all this only confines you to the limit and to the measure of our small proportions, and is altogether different from a rising or a setting of God's sun; altogether different from the flash of lightning or from the thunder that rolls in the clouds; altogether different from the glory of the starry skies that arch themselves above you; altogether different from the great forests, or the lion that roars for prey.

In nature we have the sublime, and in the sublime we have the Divine utterance of what is superlatively beautiful and glorious. The high and the lofty: even a majesty which infinitely surpassed the small dimensions of human economy and of human work, so that you may know and understand that you are not in touch with the bungling works of man, but with the glorious, sublime art of the Creator of heaven and of earth. Truly, the beautiful in nature can not disclose to you the way of salvation, and its spiritual mysteries. For this purpose God in compassion has given you his Gospel. But what the outshining of God's majesty and divinity in nature effects is: that it binds and expands and elevates all your ideas to an higher sphere than what your sight, can give you; that it lifts you up from the insignificant-human to the Divinely-great; in brief: to what is exalted! And that in this way it brings the High and Lofty One nearer unto you.



"THOU TRIEST MINE HEART, THAT IT IS WITH THEE."



Many causes can interrupt the secret walk with God. The most mysterious to the pious mind is, that God withdraws his face, in order, by the want of it, to make you thirst more strongly after it. The most common is, that earthly interests so engage the attention and keep it absorbed that the soul is ensnared by them. And the most offensive to the soul is that actual sin came in the way, which not only broke your fellowship with God, but continued to prevent the return to the nearness of the Holy One.

Actual sin alone has mention here. A word, a deed, of which you felt, when you faced it, that it would be a sin to you, and which you failed to evade. A sinful tendency, a sinful mood, especially a sinful desire, can seriously affect the fellowship with God, but the working of it is different. For on this side of the grave this sinful inclination will stay by us, but provided it is not cherished, this by itself will not prevent the secret walk with God. The secret walk with God is always in Christ, from which it is evident that we do not come to God as one who is holy, but as one who in himself is a sinner. But it is different with a sin that has been committed. Then there was consent, permission and the doing of it. Then at once the light of God's benign countenance was gone. Then on the side of God it become dark, and the inclination to flee from God was stronger than to be near unto God.

We perceive this change in our spiritual attitude clearly, at once and in the most painful way, when it was a sin that tempted us; a sin which, once committed, startled us, and for which we would give anything if the stain of it could immediately be removed from our soul. When, if we may say it in an ordinary way, it was a bad sin. For nothing shows our low moral viewpoint so sadly as our general ignorance of our minor daily sins, neglected duties, unlovelinesses, expressions of egotism, pride and vanity; small untruths, little dishonesties, and much more of the same kind.



This is still entirely different from what David calls "secret faults." They are faults which may stain the garment, but so little as to escape our notice. This refers to unknown sins, and which only with later development of soul, will be recognized by us as such. But we know the sins which we say are "not so bad." We have become accustomed to them and therefore they have ceased to trouble us. Our soul no more reacts on them. And of this sort of sins it is certainly true, that they hinder the secret walk with God, but do not prevent it. They do not break what once existed. But they affect the hidden walk with God to this extent, that it becomes sporadic, remains fellowship from a distance, and that we fail of the fuller enjoyment of the same.

Interruptions by sin in fellowship with God are only possible when, as a rule, you are near unto God, when you know him in all your ways, and have been initiated into the secret of salvation, and then commit a sin which startles and frightens you, and brings a dark cloud to your sky, and you are thrown back upon yourself, and you feel that you have no more part in the lovely walk with God.

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In [Psalm 32](#) David speaks of such a break, and frankly confesses that this condition was continued because he kept silence. "When I kept silence thy hand was heavy upon me day and night." But at length he broke this silence, "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord." And when he has done it, the break is at once removed. Now he seeks and finds God again, and so he sings: "For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found. Thou compassest me with joyful songs of deliverance." Yea, now he meets with God again, and God does not repel him nor hold him back. But he hears it sweetly whispered in his soul: "I will instruct thee; I will guide thee with mine eye."

And in this Davidic experience of soul lies the only true diagnosis, and the only effective medicine. When we were so weak, nay so wicked, as willingly and knowingly to commit a sin, the first impression which it made on us was that we wanted to hide from God, that we were afraid of appearing again before his presence, and that with the bitter remembrance of our sin we drew back within ourselves. Not from enmity, but from fear. Not from lack of will, but from shame. We well knew that we must get back to God, but we postponed it. We wanted to pray, but we allowed time to intervene. We kept silent. And in this oppressive silence, which so sorely weighed upon the soul, we got farther and farther away from God.

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This is the diagnosis, i. e., the explanation of the wound from which at such a moment the soul bleeds. The only true medicine is immediately to break your silence, seek solitude, kneel down, and without sparing yourself confess plainly and candidly your sin before God, call upon him for forgiveness, yea, implore him that he take not his Holy Spirit from you.

This takes pains. At such a time you must do violence to yourself. You feel the sharpness of God's anger, and back of it you must grasp his mercy. But the outcome of this is always surprising. It is just as David said. It breaks at once the ban which sin put upon the heart. Something in the soul gives way, and liberation follows, deliverance, reconciliation, and God comes near in faithfulness as Jesus pictured it in the shepherd with the lost sheep. It seems as though in such a moment God draws nearer than ever to convince you of his infinite compassion.

Satan whispered within: "Stay away from God," but your Father in heaven called out to you: "No, come unto me, my child." In this approach of your sin-confessing heart to God, and of God to your soul, the interruption falls away, and it is good for you, unspeakably good, to be near again unto God.

And what is the secret of this healing work of the soul? Is it not stated in Jeremiah's words: "Lord, thou knowest me, thou seest me, thou triest mine heart that it is with thee"

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(Jer. 12:3 Dutch version). That which makes the utterances of Psalmist and prophet so striking is, that they interpret all of life within the scope of battle for or against God. Battle against God on the part of Satan. Battle against God on the part of unholy, worldly powers. Battle against God's holiness on the part of every sin. They do not speak the weak, cowardly language of a self-developing and degenerating moral life, but they relate every thing to God, as the center of all things. It is all a battle of sin and unrighteousness against God, and a battle of God against all unrighteousness and sin. It is an age-long battle, from the days of paradise on, which will not cease until the end of the ages, when God in Christ shall triumph over the last enemy. And we are all involved in this conflict, and have our part in it. When we sin, it is on the side of Satan against God. When we live by faith, it is on the side of God against Satan.

This is the interpretation of life as given by prophets and apostles. And this should be the profound and striking interpretation of life on the part of all God's children. And what is a sin which we commit? Even this: that in an evil moment we strengthen the forces of evil against God, and that in co-operation with Satan we oppose God. And if this be the case what is it to make confession of sin, save that so soon as you realize this, you at once step out from among the ranks of Satan and return to the battle lines of God, imploring mercy, that you may be counted worthy again to fight under his banner, and again to join forces with him?

And now the heart appeals to the omniscience of the God of all compassions. Did you mean to desert the ranks of God and to join the forces of Satan? No, no; and once again, No. You did not mean to do it. The thought of such an evil did not rise from within yourself. You allowed yourself to be taken unawares. You slipped without realizing the dreadful wickedness of your deed. And now as you perceive that this is the sin that you committed, you appeal to God. In the inmost recess of your heart there was no desire to desert God. And your sorrow of soul, your remorse, your self-reproach is, that in the face of it, you have incurred the guilt of an act of enmity against God. And, therefore, you plead with him and ask him, the all-knowing, whether as he tries your heart, he does not see, and does not know, that in its deepest depths, as against Satan, it is with him.



"GET THEE BEHIND ME, SATAN!"

It can not be denied, that in former times, especially in the middle ages, too much was made of Satan by dragging him, as it were, rightly or wrongly, into everything. But does it not seem that now we rather incline to the other extreme, and forget, if not deny, the very existence of the Evil One? With this denial, self-conceited freedom in matters of belief makes singular shifts with the Gospel of our Lord. For then it is said that one frees himself from the Old Testament, but for this very reason adheres the more closely to the Gospel. These wavering spirits are not concerned with Moses but with Jesus, and frequently do not hesitate to criticize you, who hold to the whole Scripture, as being too Old-Testamentish and consequently only half Christian.

But see how these people, who are so loud in their praises of the Gospel, themselves deal with it. It is true that Satan has almost no mention in the Old Testament, and that he is broadly dealt with in the Gospel. And not this alone, but in his words as well as in his works, Jesus continually shows that he reckons with Satan. Only think of the temptation in the wilderness, of the constant casting out of devils, of the great conflict of evil spirits against the Savior, how he understood that all his sufferings and death was a struggle with this Prince, and how, without multiplying instances, in the short "Our Father" he added the petition as a final prayer for all his people: "Deliver us from the Evil."

All this, however, will not do. The half friends who have put the Old Testament aside, in order to adhere solely to Jesus and his Gospel, do not hesitate to dismiss this whole matter of Satan's influences, part and parcel, from their Gospel. And with respect to this it is evident again, that every such effort aims not at forming the mind and thought after the Gospel, but at moulding the Gospel after their own world of thought.

With respect to this they who, while more faithful to the Gospel do not deny but forget the real workings of Satan, are not free from guilt. Or is it not extremely rare, that in spoken or written address, in psychology or in revelations of the inner life, the Evil One is reckoned with as a real factor? It should be carefully observed, that like a thief, Satan is most pleased when his presence and his work are not noticed. In circles where his existence is denied or ridiculed, his hands are altogether free to murder souls according to his liking. But that he can be so strangely forgotten by those who are more inclined to believe the Gospel, offers him the finest chances to poison souls. We may be sure that in all this denial and in all this forgetting of the actual existence of Satan, a trick of Satan himself operates. When the mighty spirit of Christ moved the waves of the sea of life in Palestine, Satan did not succeed with this for a moment, and Jesus compelled him to show himself. But now he succeeds in



keeping himself in hiding, and unseen and unnoticed, from the ambush, to inwork his character, and consequently with better effect.

How the working of Satan proceeds is not revealed unto us in its particulars. We only know that the world of men is not the only world of conscious beings. There are myriads of other spiritual beings who are known as spirits, angels, cherubim, seraphim, etc. It is also certain that this world of spirits is not separated from our world of men, that it exists by the side of it, and is in all sorts of ways related with it and inworks upon it. And in the second place it is additionally revealed, that in this world of spirits the antithesis between holy and unholy has broken out, even earlier than here on earth, and that from this world of spirits it has entered into our world of men.

Hence there is a certain alliance between good spirits and good men, and also a conspiracy between unholy spirits in the invisible world and unholy spirits in the visible world. Joy among good angels of God over one sinner that repenteth, and smiles of derision among evil spirits when the effort to bring about the fall of a lost man meets with success. It is all one conflict, one warfare, one struggle with Christ as the Head of holy spirits here on earth and outside of this world against Satan, who is the head of all unholy spirits among men and among devils.

All this is clearly, broadly and exhaustively set forth in the Gospels, Epistles and in Revelation. We know this, we believe this, and are obliged to direct our doings and non-doings in accordance with this. But how these workings of unholy spirits upon the world of men proceeds, is wrapt in shadows, so that only some vague features give direction to our thoughts. This much, however, is certain, that a threefold working severally delineates itself with sufficient clearness. There are workings from the unholy spirit world, which, without definite attack, of themselves find a vehicle observable by us, in public opinion, customs and habits of life, and sinful human nature. This is the common, the everyday recurring, the ever continuing process which, as it were, is in the very air, and of which we all undergo a certain influence. There is a second working which is better defined when one of the many evil spirits makes itself master of the spirit of a given company of people or of the spirit of a given individual. Sometimes several wicked spirits do this at once. Bring to mind the parable of Jesus ([Matt. 12:45](#)). And, then, there is a third, still more definite, yea, even the most definite working, when Satan does not employ the agency of one of his adherents, but when he prepares himself for battle, in order to make a leading assault in the world of spirits.

In accordance with the spirit of the times, and of persons, the first, second or third working appears more conspicuously in the foreground. This is seen in the days of Jesus. The main dispute had then to be settled, and all three of these workings were strongly evident. Satan himself, in array against Jesus and his apostles, evil spirits arrayed against chosen victims, and the ordinary workings among the rank and file of the people. Escape



there was none. Hiding would not do. The conflict was in the open. Altogether different from now.

Even in those days, however, Satan tried to hide himself. We refer to this for our instruction. Peter, with his sensitive nature and excitable mind, was used as instrument. "His Jesus to die on the Cross! Never!" Love for Jesus was the motive of antagonizing this dreadful thought in Jesus. And so we read: "Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, 'Have pity on thyself! This shall not be unto thee!'" ([Matt. 16:22](#)). The working of Satan was concealed in this. Peter did not realize it. But Jesus saw through it at once, and in turn rebuked the disciple, who was adrift on his feelings instead of resting on the prophesied plan regarding the man of sorrows. "Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of man." Thus Satan did not gain a hair's breadth. Jesus unmasked him at once. Even with his attack from the ambush he could make no advance against Jesus.

But this event is of infinite value to us. It shows that a direct attack of Satan can lurk in loveliest forms of devotion, when apparently no evil intent is at play, even when we have the impression of walking very tender ways. This does not say, that Satan ever attacked you personally. It is very possible that he confined himself in this to the use of one of his subordinate spirits. It is even possible that as yet he has never influenced you otherwise than by his general workings in the spiritual atmosphere. But the incident with Peter shows that you might be mistaken. That there might have been an attack of Satan when you did not in the least suspect it. And in any case, that the daily prayer: "Deliver us from the Evil!" is no superfluous wealth for anyone of us.

Thinking of a temptation that was endured, the question sometimes rises long afterward, entirely objectively: Was not this a direct attack of Satan on my heart, and was it not God who delivered and saved and preserved me? It is not always in the temptation to some particular great sin. See it in the case of St. Peter. He deemed rather that he was doing good. But this is certain, that the greatest obstacle in the way of the world of evil spirits is your seeking and striving to be near unto God, to live in his secret fellowship, to choose your path in life and to follow it unto the end, in conscious communion with God.

And for you, on the other hand, there is no safer stronghold in which to hide and safeguard yourself against these unholy influences than in being much in close nearness unto God. For this reason Satan is ever on the alert to interrupt this fellowship with God in your heart. That you seriously seek this hidden walk with God, is reason enough for Satan to venture an attack on you in a particular way, by no means always to allure you into a great sin, but very frequently, as in the case of Peter, by imparting unto you diverting workings of the affections.

Be, therefore, on your guard. As soon as you become aware of spiritual coolness, as soon as you perceive that this, that or the other thing renders it difficult or prevents you from being, and continuing, near unto God, then consider what influences you are becoming



subject to, what unnoticed inworkings take place in your soul. Shake yourself free from them all. And do not rest until you have found your hiding place close by the heart of God. Hesitation, procrastination will not do. Jesus broke the spell immediately, and at once repulsed Peter with the words: "Get thee behind me, Satan!" Brief, forceful and aggressive! Thus only the snare breaks, and you can escape.

"OH, THAT THOU Wouldest Rend the Heavens."

Ascension day is a Divine memorial day. It is the glorious memorial day of our Savior. The work of redemption which was to be accomplished on earth was now finished. Not only his bearing of the form of a servant; not only the way of the man of sorrows; not only entering in upon eternal death, but also the sojourn of forty more days on earth, in order to consecrate his apostles to the holy, gigantic task, which awaited them from now on.

These forty days again were a sacrifice of love brought by Jesus. The glory of heaven allured him. The place at the right hand of God called and wooed him. The crown awaited him. But yet he tarried. He still remained in the sphere of this world. Not because it attracted him. On the contrary, between the risen Savior and the world, which was still submerged in misery, every tie of connection was severed. With respect to this world he had ceased to dwell in its midst. He had died unto this world, and his resurrection had not restored him unto it, but only to the circle of his saints. And so there was something anti-natural for him in this forty days tarrying on earth. He no longer belonged to it. He had become estranged from it and it from him. Even though he still tarried in it, the world would see him no more. He would still be in it, but out of all connection with it, no longer belonging to it, but to an higher sphere, into which he had actually entered by his resurrection.

But Jesus loved his disciples. The touching parting with them in Gethsemane, the parting with Peter in the court room, the parting with John on Golgotha, could not be final. Not the world, but they must see him after his resurrection. They must be initiated into their new relation to their Lord. Regenerated in his resurrection itself they must receive the apostolic anointing. They must be prepared for the transition into the new relation, when they would be alone on earth and their Master in heaven. And for this purpose Jesus had brought this last sacrifice, that he did not ascend to heaven immediately after his resurrection, but only weeks afterward, and that for those many days he forewent the glory which awaited him on God's throne.

But this could not last. The end must follow. It was an holy pause in his glorification, entered upon from love, but which of necessity had to be as short as possible. It could not, and was not, permitted to be a continuous intercourse with his own. That would not have answered his purpose. It would not have accustomed them to the parting that was to follow. And therefore there was nothing but an occasional appearance in order to withdraw himself again. At first more frequently, then more rarely, in order presently at Damascus and on Patmos to reveal himself but for a fleeting moment. In between these lies the final parting. The last meeting on the Mount of Olives, with Gethsemane at its foot, Jerusalem stretching itself behind it, and back of Jerusalem Golgotha and the cave from whence he rose. Jesus



had given them his last command. The moment of parting was at hand. And then from the top of the Mount of Olives he lifted himself from their midst, and ascended so that they saw it, higher and ever higher, until a cloud received him out of their sight, and angels from the spheres of light came down, who gave them the last word of comfort: "He is gone away from you, once to return. Once the whole world shall be his."

Where those heavens are, whither Jesus went, remains a mystery to us. We look for them above, and all Scripture tells us, and our own heart returns an echo to it, that the heaven of glory must arch itself above us. It is an increaded need of our soul to look for God's throne not in our proximity, nor yet underneath, but above us. The heavens are God's throne and the earth is his footstool. We look up to the heavens, from whence light comes to us, where God's stars twinkle in the firmament, from whence rain descends to us and waters the earth and spreads blessing all around us. But dimensions here do not count. The heavens of our God are not of our materiality, they do not count with our distances, they are not comprised in the measure of the finite. Once they will open themselves to us from a direction where we did not expect it. They will not be where we surmised it. But in unknown glory they will open their gates to us. And into this glory, when he ascended, Jesus has entered.

"Oh that thou wouldst rend the heavens!" exclaimed Isaiah (64:1) in great distress of soul. For, taken in its deepest sense, our misery consisted in the fact, that by its sinful degeneracy our world was shut off from the heaven of our God. The holy above and the unholy round about us and in our own heart. And then there was every time a looking up to heaven above which seemed like brass, and whose closed gates and windows scarcely allowed our prayers to pass through. We were disposed to that heaven. We were designed for it. Only a life in communion with that heaven could impart the Divinely intended lustre to our existence here on earth. We were not able to climb up to those heavens, in order to unlock their gates. All we could do was to look up to that heaven, stare at it, and call to it and supplicate, that our God, or he who alone could do it, would rend those heavens, and afford us access again to them.

And this prayer has been answered in Christ. First in that he descended from heaven, and then in that he ascended thither again. By the latter far more strongly than by the former. For, surely, when Jesus was on earth, there was always an opened heaven above him, and angels of God ascended and descended above the Son of Man. But only by Jesus' ascension has communion between heaven and earth been established on a broad scale, durably and permanently. He ascended, not as he descended, but he carried up our human nature in himself. He came to us from heaven as the Son of God, but as the Son of Man he returned into heaven. His ascension is no break of fellowship with his own, but rather an anchoring forevermore of the tie which binds him to his saints on earth. This fellowship is even wonderfully mutual. He our Head, and in him our life hidden with God, but on the other hand,

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he, our Savior, taking up his abode in the hearts of his own and staying near them with his majesty, his grace and with his spirit. And now there is not a moment more of interruption, far less of a breaking of the tie which binds our earth to heaven, but in the sacred mystery we have an ever continuing, living, holy outpouring of light and brightness, of power and might from on high, and by the side of this, in an equally sacred mystery, a restless ascent of our faith, our love and our hope up to the throne of glory.

By his ascent up to heaven Jesus has not become farther removed from us, but he has come nearer by. What now vibrates and lives and operates is fellowship between the King of glory and his saints on earth, no longer confined to the upper room, no more limited to a mountain in Galilee, but beaming forth throughout the whole world, wherever there are souls which he redeemed and saved and who, in supplication, go out to him.

It is now an invisible, unobservable, but a forceful and systematic operative Divine regimen which Christ as our Head makes valid in all the earth. In the wilderness Satan showed Jesus the kingdom of this world and mirrored to him a diabolic authority over them all. Jesus refused this, and for what he then refused he now received as crown upon his work of Redemption the spiritual and Divine government over all peoples and nations. Thus he perfects over all this world, wonderfully and majestically, the gradual preparation of spiritual conditions which will once bring about the consummation, in order that then he may establish his eternal kingdom, in all its completeness, in this selfsame world, from which he ascended.

Thus have the heavens been rent, thus have the windows and gates of heaven been opened, never to be closed again, nor even to be veiled. He who with his prayers now stands before a heaven of brass, has no one to blame but his own unbelief and lack of spirituality. But for him, for her, who believes, the heavens are opened, and from thence pours forth into the darkness of this world and into the darkness of our own heart, a soft, blessed glow of light, love and life. And the soul that is cherished thereby, has already now "walks above" among the saints of God, and with the smile of joy on his face, he sees the approach of the hour when, having finished his earthly course, he, too, shall enter upon the fulness of that glory.

The early Christians realized this, and therefore, clothed in white garments, they carried out their dead who had fallen asleep in Jesus amid songs of joy. We, at a greater distance from the Mount of Olives, follow other customs, only, let it never be with less fixedness of hope in the heart in behalf of our beloved ones who have fallen asleep.

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"WITH ALL SAINTS."

In your most pious frame of mind, and urgent longing of soul to be near unto God you may not claim the Lord your God for yourself alone. This is a sinful abuse which is readily committed by passionate devotion. In the "Our Father" a plural is used, where we, when left to our own impulse, would readily use a singular. It does not say: "My Father," but "Our Father," who art in heaven, and the plural "us" is used in the Lord's prayer to the end. This does not mean that we may not use the singular in our devotions. In the "Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachthani" Jesus quoted [Psalm 22](#) and of itself there could be no plural used whenever the Son of God practiced fellowship with the Father. Jesus as such stood entirely alone, in holy isolation. And though it may not be in that exalted and peculiar sense, in which it was the case with Jesus, yet with us also conditions arise and experiences of soul, which isolate us, and of which at least we do not know that we have them in common with others. Then it is a personal condition, from which we call upon God, and it is natural that we use the singular and say: "My God" and "my Father."

This, however, should not be the rule, it should not be the common tenor of our prayer. Of itself this is not so when we pray together. But it must not be so in our quiet, solitary and personal prayer. In case of common need, even when we pray alone, we feel instinctively that this is not permissible. In times of shipwreck this has spontaneously shown itself. If among the more than one thousand miners who perished at Courrieres, there were those in that dreadful subteranean hell who knew how to pray, it probably was not thought otherwise. And when recently Vesuvius vomited fire and sulphur, they who were devout did not remain at home to pray each by himself, but all gathered together for prayer in the churches.

Such is the case with all men before God, in the common need of sin and misery. This common need may assume a special form in each individual case. Sin may bear a special character and the misery of life may make itself known in a particular way to each of us. This, however, does not take away the fact that all sin and misery flows from one common source, that it makes us sharers of a common lot, and that it should move us unitedly to call upon God for redemption and deliverance.

If such is the case with our supplication from the midst of danger, it is the same with respect to our thanksgiving for grace received and with our prayer for safe-keeping by this grace. Every one's salvation and deliverance is from Bethlehem and Golgotha and the opened grave. One and the selfsame Satan seeks to work harm into the grace of all, and the safe-keeping of all by the grace of God proceeds from the inworking in our hearts of the same Holy Spirit and from the same glorious government of Christ as our King. If thus in sin and misery we share a common lot with all mankind, in the sphere of grace we share a common



lot with all those whom the Father has given to Christ. Our spiritual attitude in holy things therefore neither can nor should be any other save that we know and feel that we approach God "with all saints" and that with all the saints together we stand before our God.

Consider that the Apostle says: "With all saints" (Eph. 3:18). Some godly people well know fellowship with the godly in their own town, but they forget that the godly and the saints are not the same, and this they leave out of account. This does not say that it is not good and excellent to be daily in spiritual touch with such in one's town, in order to strengthen the faith and in behalf of mutual edification. Only, common fellowship with the godly is altogether different from the sense of sharing a common lot "with all saints." With "the saints" the Scripture does not speak of subjective, personal piety, but of objective sanctification through and in Christ. "The saints" are the redeemed, they who have been drawn unto eternal life. Not your choice, but the choice of God here counts. Not a fellowship with those whom you think are godly, but sharers in a common lot with those who have been effectively called of God.

Thus the circle of the saints is not narrow, not provisional, not local, but it is a multitude which no one can number, in all parts of the world, here and up yonder, from the days of Paradise until now, and from now on to all eternity. As we sing in the Te Deum: "The holy church throughout all the world doth acknowledge thee."

Hence, "with all saints" means fellowship with all those who have been and will be redeemed by the blood of Christ in your immediate surroundings, in your whole land, in your church, in other churches, in other lands, both in the present, in the past and in the future. It is the whole "body of Christ" with all its members, not one excepted. With the patriarchs and prophets, the apostles and martyrs from of old, with your redeemed relatives and family members and acquaintances, who have gone before into eternity, with those who still continue with you, with those who grow up from among the children of the church, and those who are still hidden in the seed of the church, or who are brought into the church from without. No one whom God has included, may we exclude. And that this refers not merely to your salvation, but also to your fellowship with the Triune God, and to your being near unto God, clearly appears from what the apostle writes so enthusiastically, that "with all saints" ye may be able to comprehend what is the breadth, and length, and depth and height in the mystery of the grace of God.

This exposition of the sense of your sacred fellowship is deeply significant with respect to practical ends. When you accustom yourself to reduce the multitude, which no one can number, to the few Christian people whom you personally know as members of your own church, your sacred horizon becomes very small and narrow. Then the people of God slink away to a few hundreds, and all the rest of the world appears to you like lost masses. If, on the other hand, you think of the wide circle of all God's saints, those at hand and those afar off, of the present and of the past, of those on earth and of those in heaven, and of those



who are yet to be born, then all the saints of the old Covenant at once come nearer, then there is life in fellowship with apostles and martyrs, then there is an innumerable multitude of brothers and sisters above, and from the rising generation and from those that will come after them, we look for a continuous increase of the body of Christ.

Then discouragement and depression give place to a feeling of triumph and of endless glory. Your case then stands no more alone and by itself, but thousands have shared it with you, and still other thousands have been far worse conditioned than you, who nevertheless have entered upon eternal life. You experience also the glorious effect of the magnitude of the work of grace. You do not belong to an insignificant, forgotten society, but to a multitude without end, a vast company which no one can number, which now already stands before God, or is on the way to the Fatherhouse, or presently is to be born from the almightiness of God. Then God and the work of his grace assume proportions of infinite greatness to the eye of the soul. Everything little and circumscribed falls away, and the pilgrim journey is continued, not with sighings and with complaints, but jubilantly in the salvation of God and even here with the standing of the feet in the gate of the heavenly Jerusalem.

And this is the frame of mind that prepares you for the secret walk with God, and causes you to be near unto God. As long as it is only a personal dealing with God, as though you together with a few other Christian souls sought a hiding place with God, the majesty of the work of grace is lost to you, and with it the majesty of his Divine Being. The straits of your own soul's condition and of the outward needs limit also the length and breadth, the height and depth of the majestic doings of God. Thus your own insignificance is readily transferred to the Eternal. But when you feel that you are a living member of the whole living body of Christ, that you are one of the multitude that can not be numbered, that you are related to all the saints above, to all God's saints in the whole earth, and to all the saints among the children, and among your children's children, then the pinnings of the sacred tent are put out widely, your outlook is enlarged, your love is extended to thousands upon thousands, your faith is deepened and your hope begins to glisten with all the radiancy of glorious victory.

The heart of our God is so wide of conception, that nothing estranges you farther from this Fatherheart than your own narrow-heartedness. In the *Te Deum* it is sung:

"The glorious company of the apostles praise thee,
The noble army of martyrs praise thee."

Sometimes the desire comes upon one that he might have lived in the days of Isaiah, and that he might have accompanied with St. John, and might have witnessed the heroism of martyrs in the face of death. And then one thinks that all this is lost in an unapproachable past. Then, live in the sense of communion "with all saints," and they all will come nearer to you. They all are your brothers, with whom you are included in the one body of Christ.



And the nearer you come to this company of God's saints above, the nearer you will feel yourself in the presence of God, who hath included you "with all saints" in the self-same bundle of life.



**"THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST,
AND THE LOVE OF GOD, AND THE
FELLOWSHIP OF THE HOLY GHOST
BE WITH YOU ALL."**

The apostle from whose hand the richest epistolary legacy has come to us, was in the habit of opening and closing his epistles with a blessing. The one he used in opening was almost always: "Grace be with you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ." And the prayer with which he closed mostly read: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." It was truly exceptional, when at the close of his second epistle to the Corinthians he so far departed from his usual way, that he expanded his prayer, and said: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with you all." This closing prayer is particularly noteworthy, because the church of Christ almost everywhere has used it as the apostolic benediction at the close of public worship. Millions upon millions of times these sacred words, so rich of content and so tender of purport, have been repeated, after the departure of Paul, and it is for a large part now that congregations of believers return home from the place of worship under the impression of these words.

In this habit of St. Paul of opening and closing his epistles with a benediction one can observe the aftermath of the manner of the East, and on this ground take it merely as a phrase, and merely as a formula of good breeding, which as such has no spiritual significance, at least to us. But is not this unspeakably superficial? Is it true that from of old, and even to this day, it is customary with people in the East, in meeting and in taking leave of one another, to use fairly lengthy formulas of salutation, and this salutation and farewell consists mostly of prayers for blessings from on high. But how can it follow from this, that such prayers are nothing but empty phrases? Is not throughout the whole Scripture the selfsame use in application? Did not our Lord himself appear to his disciples with the salutation of blessing: "Peace be unto you!" And again has not this constant use in the apostolic writings given rise to the adoption of this ancient custom as a true integral part in mutual Christian fellowship? Adopted not merely in the church of the East, but transferred to the church of the West, and there also consecrated by the usage of nearly twenty centuries? And if, moreover, as for instance in Jacob's blessings of his sons, even prophetic revelation has employed this benediction, by which to throw a beam of light upon the future, is it not superficial and



thoughtless, to see in such a prayer for Divine favor, nothing but words and sounds, and to deny it all real significance?

By the side of blessing stands the curse, and this also in Scripture is deeply significant. Not in every case. Not the curse of hatred and anger. Not base meanness, which uses the curse as a poisoned weapon to wound. But the curse of him who is authorized to pronounce it, the curse of a father, or of a mother, or of one who is clothed with spiritual authority. Such a curse was valid as spoken under supreme responsibility, under inspiration from above. And such a curse came true. And where by the side of the curse there stands an equally sharply outlined address of blessing, which also derives its words and significance from the person, from the position and the occasion whereby and under which it took place, it is evident, that in this most noteworthy phenomenon of blessing and of curse, there hides a spiritual utterance for which in our Western lands and in our unspiritual times appreciation and receptivity have all too far been lost. Of the curse there is almost nothing left among us, save the blasphemous language of profane persons who abuse the holy name of the Lord as expletive and as an expression of anger. And of the prayer of blessing little else remains than good wishes at New Year, at a birthday, or at the solemnizing of marriage.

But in this mighty difference between a wish and the ancient address of blessing the weakened and abated character-trait of our utterance of life delineates itself. Even upon the deathbed little more is heard of such blessing of one's children. At present the only particular of a death that is mentioned is, that the patient passed away quietly and calmly, i. e., without any perceptible death struggle. In most cases nothing more is heard.

In the face of all this the church usage has stood firm, and the congregation of God gathers in the sanctuary with the holy salutation and returns homeward with the address of blessing from the Lord. For this closing benediction the congregation even stands, or kneels, and reverently bows the head, and in quiet seriousness listens to the words of blessing, presently closed with the Amen. This is most encouraging, and the minister of the Word will do well to heighten this last act of dismissal by restful, calm and solemn tone. The preceding utterance of the words: "And now, receive the blessing of the Lord," is an introduction which tunes the heart and mind and consecrates and exalts. For what else utters itself in this salutation and final benediction than the glorious perception that the church of the living God stands in living contact with an higher order of things from what this world offers, and with him who has founded his throne in it. He who stands in the faith knows that he lives in a twofold world. In the common world together with unbelievers, and in the higher world with the saints around God's throne, with the good angels, with his Savior and King, and in Christ with his Father and his God.

These two worlds are dove-tailed into one another. From the higher order, grace, peace and life, power and might have come down into this visible world; they have attached



themselves, and now cleave in Christian lands to all sorts of Christian ordinances and usages. But the real meeting of these two spheres takes place only in believers, who still live in this visible world, and yet carry the higher world in their heart; the latter expressing itself in their communion with the Holy Ghost. And as often as this preponderance of the holy in believers comes to a clear expression through the word, there is the holy salutation, and presently at parting, the address of blessing.

But this gives rise in life to a twofold sphere. The sphere of the unbelieving world, and the sphere that is breathed upon from the higher order of things. You are at once aware of this by the difference in your feelings as you move among children of God, or among children of the world. In both circles, in both spheres a different tone prevails, different language, different love. With the children of the world the flower of one's inner nature inclines to close itself up; with the children of God this calix opens itself. This is no reason that one should withdraw himself from the visible world. On the contrary, God has given us here our calling and our work. We should even be on our guard, not to lift ourselves up in spiritual pride before the children of the world. What better are you than they, and what is your higher life other than pure grace? You should never be unmindful even to give yourself to this world, like your Savior to serve it, to bless it with your love, and to work for its good.

But our spiritual saving of life is always to be fully aware of the antithesis between the world and the higher order of things, and always to foster fellowship with that higher order of things, to strengthen it, to feed it, and to remove everything that might hinder or weaken it out of the way. This power and ability does not come to us from ourselves, and not from one another, but solely and alone from God. That which maintains our vital connection with that higher world is exclusively the grace of Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost. And for this reason, as often as the congregation assembles, the minister of the Word salutes it with this assurance, and at the close dismisses it with the same in the name of the Lord.

To be near unto God is the vital strength of all believers. That alone and nothing else. He who wanders away from God, and becomes estranged from him, weakens himself, disturbs his inner life, and is lost again in the world. On the other hand he who continues to be near unto God and lives in secret fellowship with God, drinks in the powers of the kingdom each morning anew, lives in spiritual realities, and is breathed upon from on high. And this salutation of blessing and this dismissal with blessing is the constantly repeated assurance from the Triune God that his grace, his love and his fellowship continue to incline toward you: that God will be near unto you, in order that you may be near unto him, and that it is your sin alone that deprives you of this blessed communion.



"I, THE LORD THY GOD, AM A JEALOUS GOD"



Say to my people," said the Lord to Ezekiel: I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them" ([Ezekiel 11:5](#)). Hence also he knows what should, but does not, come into it. Neither the all-seeing eye nor the all-hearing ear of the Holy One of Israel are ever impeded. The sight of that eye penetrates into everything, and no vibration escapes the hearing of that ear. In one of the marble tombs at Syracuse the tyrant Dionysius was able to build a wondrously far-carrying echo, that he might overhear the conversations of his captured opponents. Even now this echo clearly returns the crackling of a sheet of paper at a distance of several hundred feet, and as the story runs, nothing kept these prisoners in check like this so-called "ear of Dionysius." They could not put it out of mind. They thought of it with every word. It ruled their spirit and their life.

This is what these wretched prisoners did for the sake of the ear of a man. And what do we do about the holy ear of the all-hearing God? What do we do for him who does not only see and see through everything we do, but to whom also every word is known before it passes over our lips. Yea, who moreover scans the thoughts, which we will never put into words, and who is aware of every impulse, every motion every vibration, which will never crystallize itself within us into a thought, but which nevertheless comes into our mind. He who does not believe, experiences no impression, no influence, no governing power of that all-knowing and all-hearing character of the perceptions of God. He acts, speaks, thinks and allows his inner life to operate as though there were no God who watches him, who overhears him, and whose eye inwardly searches him.



He who believes can not act thus. With him the fear of the Lord is identified with every awakening in the life of his soul; and when he thinks of God, he refrains from the evil deed for the sake of God's holy will; he shrinks from the unbecoming word, suppresses the unholy thought, and represses everything sinful or demoniac that would enter into his spirit. But alas, his soul is far from being always as fully awake as this. During long periods of his life, his faith, as it were, slumbers. Then he does not think of God. He does not concern himself about God. And he is almost indifferent to what God observes in his inmost life, of his doings and of his omissions, and all this leads to sin, until the conscience begins again to operate, and God awakens him. Is, then, our life of faith from fear only? No, it is through that fear from love. From Horeb it was announced to the people of God: "I, the Lord thy God, am a zealous, i. e., a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children" ([Exodus 20:5](#)).

It is our blessed privilege, that we may be near unto God that we may enjoy his presence and his fellowship, and that we may taste his secret walk. But to our spiritual perception

responds a perception from the side of God. To him who loves us more tenderly than a father, it is a Divine delight, when his child is mindful of him, thinks of him, goes out to him, and seeks his holy fellowship. On the other hand God's love is wounded when his child can forget him, and not think of him, and be engaged in mind with everything save him; when, as far as it depends on us, he is the forsaken one. For, in order deeply and strongly to impress upon the heart the outgoing of the Fatherheart of God after love's fellowship with his child, God in his word does not shrink from representing this love to us in the image of conjugal affection.



In the description of connubial love in [Ezekiel 16](#) it is constantly declared that God hath betrothed himself unto Israel. In the image of the church as bride, the passionate love which unfolds in the relation of husband and wife, is repeatedly applied to God and his people. As a bride lives solely and alone for her bridegroom so must God's people live solely and alone for God. And as desertion on the part of the bride or wife deeply offends the heart of the bridegroom or husband, wounds and bruises it, so that envy arises irresistibly, even jealousy burning like fire so the Lord our God declares that he is moved by holy envy when his people can forget him when his redeemed ones can wander away and desert him in his love. Yea, then, even the anger of quick jealousy can not be restrained. "Who visiteth the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation."

Thus to be near unto God has its terrible other side He who is not near unto God, is near unto something else, inclines his heart to something else gives his love to something else. And this provokes Divine jealousy. Whether in that case you pawn away your love to your own self, or to a man as your idol, to the world, or to demoniac spirits, the Scripture always and unconditionally condemns this as a drawing away of self from God, as a violation of faithfulness to God, as a wandering away from the Holy One, and as a desertion from him who alone is worthy of all love. There is here no neutral ground. It is always engaging the heart with something, surrendering the heart to something, or a coming into the mind of something which does not reach out after God, but after God's creaturely competitor, and which within the sacred domain of Divine love is on this account an enemy and an opponent.



And this arouses holy jealousy. Not, indeed, as though there were passion in God, but in place of it there is sensitiveness in God, which with respect to power of operation, far exceeds all human passion. With conjugal love only what is known and observed offends, but there is so much that is not known and that consequently does not offend. With wedded love there is also misleading and deception. But even this does not offend so long as it is not known. No bridegroom on earth can scan his bride to the roots of her inner life. This leaves a wide margin which is not taken into account.

But all this is unthinkable in the case of the Lord your God. In all you do and leave undone, in all your thoughts and speech, in all your inner ponderings and perceptions, nothing

escapes him. He enters, restlessly, more deeply into your inner most being than the brightest beam of light into the bedding of the stream. And here no misleading avails, no presentation of self other than you are, and no hypocrisy. His all-penetrating glance puts every cover aside. And these two taken together account for the fact, that sensitiveness in Divine love is far more strongly moved to jealousy, than strongest human passion can ever arouse brooding envy.

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When we are not remembered by our friends it troubles us. But it troubles the bridegroom far more grievously when he perceives that his bride is filled with other thoughts than of him. Tenderest love demands that we are continually engaged with one another, that during temporary separation we live together in thought, and that while the separation lasts, we cherish no other desire than to meet one another again, to be near one another again, and in each other's company to feel rich and happy and blessed. Apply this to your love for God, to your confession that it is good for you to be near unto God. For this love, too, is unique. It is no love by the side of another love, but one which far excels, and is bound to govern every other attachment, every other affection, every other union of soul. It is not loving wife, child, church, country and God, but it is loving God alone, and from this love have the cherishing affections flow forth, with which you also love your wife and child, your church and native land.

And is it then too much for God to ask, that you will always be engaged with him, that you will always think of him, will always let the heart go out to him. and that you will repress everything that enters into your mind to lead you away from him and to induce you to forsake him? Is it not God's jealousy of your love, your honor, your highness and your glory? And is it no violation of yourself and of your God when you discard this holy urgency of love, and play with it, and for the sake of religious recreation spasmodically return to it, only to withdraw yourself presently from it again, that in your innermost soul you may engage yourself with all sorts of things except God?

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The wound which this inflicts upon his holy love would not be so grievous if God could forget you for a time, even as you forsake him. But God can not do this. Before there is yet a word in your lips, behold, he knows it altogether. As God himself declares: "I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them." Thus, also, let us repeat it: does he know every one of the things that ought, but do not come into it. He knows and mourns every moment that you do not think of him, that you are not engaged with him, that you do not seek him, do not desire his nearness, and shamefully live apart from his secret walk. And when in spite of all this you still sing with the multitude: "But it is good for me to be near unto God!" is there then not something of a provocation on your part which offends and which is bound to wound God?

And if this is the reverse of what it is to desire to be near unto God, confess, does there not spring from this an entirely unthought of new impulse to make your seeking after God's

nearness an ever deeper reality in your life? As long as you view nearness unto God from your side alone, you can comfort yourself for any temporal loss of it by considering the compensating, unspeakable riches of the single moments of its enjoyment. But when you consider nearness unto God, thinking of God, being engaged with God, from the side of God who loves you, an entirely different note mingles itself in this love-song. Then you can not and will not grieve the Holy spirit. Then it is not your soul alone which seeks God, but far more yet, it is God who awaits the love of your soul. It is your God who with holy jealousy is angry every moment that you withdraw yourself from his seeking love.



"THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES."

Times differ. They are not age upon age, one monotonous sameness. They are rather continuous succession and restless change. And even of a century, which has just closed, and which as "the nineteenth century" almost imagined itself to have been the discoverer of the abiding light, it can be said in the words of the Psalmist (Ps. 102:26): "It shall wax old as doth a garment, and shall be changed." From this difference follows the "difference of signs," not unlike the difference in weather. Sea- and landman, who are both dependent on the weather for sailing and agriculture, have learned from their youth up how to observe these signs. Not as wonderful signs that had never been seen before. But even as the preacher at Jerusalem taught: "That which has been is now; and that which is to be hath already been" (Eccl. 3:15).

For the most part these "signs of the times" show themselves even as the signs in weather, solely in different degrees of strength with which ordinary phenomena appear, and consequently in their mutual relation. Whether in the evening the sky shows itself bright or dull red, depends upon the greater or lesser density with which mists or vapours place themselves between our eye and the red glow of the setting sun. And so in the world of spirits, an entirely distinct constellation exhibits itself, according as the cloud of religion pervades life with full weight or remains suspended, light and extremely transparent, over the waters of life.

The difference in this respect between age and age is evident. In the age of the Reformation the vast plea of religion filled almost all of life. In the court room, in the cabinet of princes, in public opinion, in the pulpit, in the market place and especially in the family, religion was more than anything else the decisive factor. From every side it appeared in the heavens clear, fiery red. Now compare with, this the eighteenth century. How dull its red was then. All its brightness had waned, all warmth of religion was withdrawn to a single mystical group, and in public life religion was debased to trivial reasoning, to ignorant self-conceit, laughter and scorn. Then came the nineteenth century, brought to higher seriousness by revolution and Napoleonic wars, and in the religious domain it furnished us three signs: 1°, in the Christian domain and in a very limited circle the Reveille; 2°, as a new find the quickly exhausted modern theology, and 3°, by the side and on account of this, in the broad domain of science, endless doubt and proud materialism, and among the upper classes, cold unbelief, a break with all religion.

In our twentieth century, however, the table turns again. There is once more a reveille, but not in the Christian domain. It is far more a reveille of mystic, religious feeling, entirely independent of Christianity, for the most part rejecting the way of truth and seeking ways



of its own, and thus of itself falling back into ways which man had discovered in earlier times. Spiritism, theosophy, Buddhism are now the desired articles. A few, though these are exceptions, even turn to the Crescent again. What is not observed, is return on a broad scale to the Man of Sorrows. People want to become religious, but they must be allowed to remain anticlerical. In the eighteenth century the slumbering. In the nineteenth the pouring out of the spirit of deep sleep. In the twentieth century a gradual awakening of religion, but still dozing in false, mystical dreams. The Christ and his Cross are passed by.

The Pharisee does not observe such "signs of the times" (see [Matthew 16:3](#)). He thinks and continues to think that everything within his narrower circle is good and sound, and everything outside of it evil and unholy. And he does not surmise even from afar the influence which the change in the spirit of the times exerts upon him and upon his circle. The true disciples of Jesus do not do so. They know better. They feel and understand that in the spiritual domain also the waters of life continually merge into one another. They notice it in themselves and in their families and in their associates; they see how the general conditions of spirits work effects on every side. And with every new change they ask themselves what criticism this demands at their hands, and what duty this lays upon them.

They maintain their stand. They do this by the grace that is within, and by the spiritual impulse that operates in them. Though they should have to die for Jesus, they can not forsake his Cross. With ties that can not be loosed the Cross lies bound on their heart. They feel themselves as in an oasis, around which as far as eye can see grins the grey spiritual barrenness of the desert. In this oasis they rejoice. There they drink from the fountain of life and enjoy the bread, and shade of palm trees. They make their children enjoy it with them. They give thanks, they glory, they jubilate. But nothing in them makes them boast of it. God Almighty has brought them to this oasis. Not because of any good there was in them. They know themselves in no particular better than anyone else. Each day, rather, they dress again the bleeding wound of their own heart. It is grace and nothing but grace. Grace, which in its entirety, never was anything but grace.

But the desert, round about this oasis, still concerns them. The sand waves from it fly upward. The hot wind travels through it. And they who wander in this desert, are they not in many instances their fellow countrymen, not infrequently of their own family? Sometimes their own friends. And apart from this, what talent, what civic virtue, what noble sense glistens among these wanderers. Much that is low, much that is common, much that is rough, it is true. Such are the masses, but all are not such. And prayer in behalf of these wanderers, involuntarily, ascends from their troubled hearts.

Even in the deepest parts of their inward life they undergo the noticeable influence of this change in the signs of the times. To be near unto God and to continue there is far easier when everything around you warmly calls for the honor of God, than when the spirit of the times opposes everything holy. This was the holy secret of a long period in the middle ages,



the secret also of the fifteenth and a part of the sixteenth century. Almost everything pressed after God's nearness. Religion was the atmosphere which was breathed of itself. Hence the overpious traditions from both these periods. But the thermometer has since gone down. First it became cool, then cold, then shivery. Everything broke down, everything obstructed the way when the soul went out to seek God's nearness. O, so much that blossomed before, now froze. Hence the search after God and approach to his nearness demanded effort before unknown. It became a struggle. A climbing with hands and feet in order to ascend the holy mountain. And in addition to this, what mists still intervene that cut off the outlook, what effort it still takes to keep oneself standing above it. And above all, what painful distance extends between this high mountain top and the world below at the foot, which is still your world, and into which your daily task calls you.

True, there is gain. That which results from this continuous, serious, and holy effort, goes deeper, is more enjoyable, and affords tenderer blessedness. He who in spite of current and storm drops anchor in the harbor, has higher joy than he who has drifted with weather and wind and tide. But it brings weariness. It wears on the mind. And the aftermath of this exhaustion involves the danger that the spirit of the world outwits you, and makes you dread still more a new course, which is attended with danger, perhaps of death. If, then, forsooth, being near unto God at such times is more blessed, the joy of it is less permanent. And more times follow of wandering away and of estrangement in between.

This unfavorable change in the signs of the times also brings new duties. The captain who safely made the harbor through current and storm, can not be indifferent to the other sailors, who, less fortunate than himself, outside still struggle with death. Or, he who has reached the oasis, and quenches thirst and feasts, should not be indifferent to the long caravan that still wanders amid mortal dangers in the desert. And you, who by grace, and nothing but grace, refresh yourself in the nearness of God, you should not, can not, if rightly disposed, be selfishly indifferent to the thousands and thousands who, lost in byways, do not know Christ, do not understand the cross, and therefore live without God in the world. No hardness therefore for them, but Divine pity of soul. No pity that spitefully scorns and repels, but pity that by courage invites, and as a sacred magnet attracts. Never hide nor cloak your religion. Never indulge in guilty silence or behavior as though you were one of them. Never practice cowardice that deems itself love. But understand them. Enter into their condition. Show them not your own wisdom, but your heart. Always let them feel that you care for their eternal welfare.

In order that you may do this, do not separate yourself, but take part in actual life. Be at home in what the things of the world, under God's providence, provide of interest and beauty. Always keep open a space where you can meet worldly people, discover yourself to them, and talk with them. Truly, their estrangement can become ill will and resistance. A moment may come, when, by forgetting yourself, you might turn the holy into ridicule. And



then breaking away may become duty. But even as on the way to the cross your Savior ever had his eye on the world, and on the cross still prayed for forgiveness for those who knew not what they did, so should the eye of your seeking love be upon, and your prayer continue in behalf of, those who have wandered from the fold of God. In this seeking love and in this prayer you will have the surest sign that you are not mistaken, but that you yourself in all reality are near unto your God.

"WHEN I WAS A CHILD."

Our secret walk with the Eternal does not follow a fixed, uniform model. That which presents itself in this exceedingly holy and deeply spiritual domain in an imitated form, arouses the suspicion of insincerity. Even in human fellowship all friendship of a more intimate sort struggles to free itself from the stress of conventional usage. Uniformity only prevails, and only may prevail in human intercourse when contact in broader circles is superficial, which brings the kindly smile to the face, but does not evoke it from the heart. Our life with God can not subject itself to the mechanical. Even as in nature, the utterance of life in the spiritual realm is organic. And as every tree unfolds a different leaf, and every stem a flower-bud of its own, so every human heart discloses itself to God in its own way, sings an own song unto God in an own tune, and in the secret walk with the Almighty tastes an intimacy of enjoyment which corresponds to the proper need of its own inner existence, and can not be enjoyed in just that way by any one else.

If anywhere, the apostolic word applies here: "With one after this manner, and with another after that." Sex exerts influence on this, and temperament, conditions of life, nationality, nature, disposition and character. And even where these data show themselves almost exactly alike in the members of the same family, there is yet such a great difference in what is personal that two brothers or two sisters only very rarely exhibit entire likeness of appearance in their mystic, religious nature.

A sharply marked difference with respect to this shows itself not only between two or more persons; a similar difference also shows itself with the selfsame person. Your own sacred sensations in your search after nearness to God are by no means always of like nature. It is evident that they differ moreover in degree of distinctness of impression. But that is not all. They also differ in character and nature. They are altogether different in moments of intense joy from what they are in moments of dire need and great anxiety. Robust health or wasting disease imparts an altogether different stamp to your inner existence. After victory over self in the hour of temptation your fellowship with God is of an entirely different nature from what it is after fainting in sin and fall. Under all this the heart is always the selfsame organ, but entirely different combinations of registers are opened every time, and constantly changing is the chord. And this continuous changing and becoming different must every time be pointed out, because death reigns supreme in imitation, in sameness, in uniformity, and rich, full, blossoming life of godliness only revels in endless variety and uniqueness.

One difference can not be emphasized sufficiently: to-wit, the difference in age. The apostle describes it so accurately: "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child" ([I Cor. 13:11](#)). But it did not continue so. Later it was altogether



different: "When I became a man, I put away childish things." Consider carefully that the apostle mentions this difference between the existence of a child and that of a man, when he treats of the personal knowledge, which we have of our God. The working of this difference, of course, is far more delicate. For the sake of brevity the apostle merely places the child by the side of the full-grown man. It needs but a reminder, however, that the lad and the young girl exist differently from the youth and the young maiden. That the man in the strength of his life is different from the man in his declining years, and that at the end of the pilgrim journey the grey old man again presents an own image with own needs of soul. And all these transitions in age and conditions of soul exert of themselves a necessary influence upon our communion life with God. What comes, develops itself from what went before. Thus with the regular, undisturbed development of person there is a continual enrichment, strengthening and deepening of personality. Moreover every new phase of life adds to what went before a newness of utterance, even in such strong measures that the old man finds it difficult to think himself back in the threatening struggle of passions, in which he had to defend or to recover his fellowship with God. But though modification, change and reforming of the secret walk goes on until the end, Christ himself indicated that with respect to this there is a striking difference between the child and the man, which lends an altogether proper type to the inner existence of each; and neglect to recognize this radical difference frequently ruins fundamentally the Christian training.

Provided the family and other surroundings do not from the first choke the seed of religion in a child, the mind of the child is religious. Not by pretension, but by receptivity for holy impressions and by silent reverence for the Eternal Being. To teach a child how to pray, when it is done under Christian guidance, and in no mechanical way, is a beautiful and tender delight of soul. This is not so because of his knowledge of the holy. But because even when the child can not yet read, and is far less able to follow the catechism, let alone to understand it, he stands instinctively related with the world of hidden things. He can give himself no account of this. He is not conscious of it, and therefore can not explain it. But it is evident even from his fear in the dark, or at strange sights and sounds.

This fear shows that the child knows and perceives the existence of another world from that which he sees with his eyes. Hence his faith in the reality of the phantoms that create his fear. This sense of the existence of a mysterious world, and the perception that this mysterious world can unveil itself, immediately governs the mind of the child. His delight in fables and fairy tales is directly connected with this, and imparts to the soul of the child that intensity and depth which addresses you so alluringly from his eye. And by this same trait the child instinctively opens his heart to religion. It is an unseen working that goes out from the unseen world upon the heart of the child. It is God himself who plays the tender harp in the child heart. This natural religiousness of the child is more closely related with the life of the blessed than the religion of us who are full grown. With us a whole world of



thought, of reasoning and consequent doubt enters in between, which is only lifted out again at our death. Hence the word of Jesus, that "to become as a little child" is regeneration of our person which alone admits us into the kingdom of heaven.

Nothing therefore is more cruel and painful than to see a child abandoned to leading and training which has no understanding of this, and which treats the child as a small adult. This kills and destroys the childtype in the childheart. Cruel and painful is the artificiality which teaches the child to pray, but with a voice without tenderness, as a something that must be done, without praying with the child, so that the child feels more disturbed in his religious impulses than led and helped. It is equally cruel and painful, in the presence of the child, to be unsympathetic, rough and hard in holy things. This hurts the heart of the child, and then it does not take long for the tender germ of religion in the heart of the child to be choked. It is cruel also to let the years of childhood pass without training the child in holy things, and to think that religion will come somehow to him later on. The early years of life are the appointed time in which to let the foundation of all religion, which is fellowship with God, crystallize in the heart of the child.

In the childheart there is natural receptivity which, when it is led and trained in a reverent way, imparts a bent to the heart whose effects will be beneficial for all of later life. On the other hand, if this is not cultivated, and this first receptivity is destroyed, even though the religious sense may awaken later on, it may always lack that fervor and tenderness which Jesus demands in our childlikeness.

This danger can only be averted by bringing the child at once, in his own way, after his nature and type, into fellowship with God himself. The child should learn to know sacred history, the sacred truths of the faith, and hymns and sacred songs. All this is excellent. But this will not avail unless first of all the child's instinctive perception of a mysterious world unfolds into an immediate perception of his fellowship with the all-seeing, all-knowing, omnipresent God.



"MAKE ABODE WITH HIM."

The sublime note of joy with which the apostolate went out into the world, concentrated itself in the confession: "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." The Gospel did not first come in Bethlehem, it resounded already in Paradise, and both Moses and the prophets are ignored, when the gospel of grace is said to have begun with the Apostles. Nay, rather the Israel of the Prophets had the selfsame Gospel as we. You need but turn to the writings of New Testament evangelists and apostles to find yourself again and again referred back to the Old Testament, to see the proof of the truth drawn from this ancient source, and to find sharply outlined, and to us frequently surprising, indications that the treasures of the new covenant have been deposited ages ago in the old covenant, even though at first in germ form.

No, the difference and the antithesis between what lies before and after Bethlehem consist in something else. There is undoubtedly a positive and an absolute difference between the gospel before and after the manger cradle. But this difference does not consist in greater or lesser riches of the Old or New Testament gospel. No, the old and new covenant only differ in this respect, that the Old Testament lacks the reality of the New Testament. This was generally indicated by speaking of the dispensations of shadows and of fulfilment; but this statement is far too weak. The difference can be expressed more accurately by saying, that in the Old Testament the image is shown, but in the New Testament the reality itself has appeared in the person of Christ. "The law, which is given by Moses" ([John 1:17](#)) does not refer to the ten commandments. The law here is the name of the whole Old Testament, taken as an instruction, a revelation, a word of God addressed to Israel. This word, revelation, instruction which God gave in figure, began to assume a form with Moses. But when Bethlehem sees the birth of the Holy Infant, something entirely different appears. It is no more instruction and announcement, but it is truth that is given. And in this connection truth means what we call reality. The image is not the truth, the shadow is not the truth. Image and shadow in themselves are unreal. That which is true only comes, when in tangible reality he appears, whose image has been seen from afar, and whose Divine shadow has fallen upon Israel.



Therefore the Apostles emphatically declared that they had seen Jesus, that they had heard him, that they had handled him. They emphasized the fact that now the Word has received flesh, i. e., reality in the earthly. This emphasized no less the fact that Jesus has been foretold that he has appeared at times, and that he has vanished again, but that at last he has come in full reality, and that from Bethlehem to Golgotha he has dwelt among us.

To dwell in a place is really and permanently to tarry there. Not merely to come, but also to stay. Not to turn in for the night a single time, but continuously and permanently to reveal one's presence in one place. God dwells in heaven and his abode is in the light. But though the Scripture declares that God dwells in the high and lofty place, it immediately adds that this same God looks down upon the children of men on earth. Heaven and earth are not intended to be separated, but to form a higher unity, so that the Lord our God dwells simultaneously both in heaven and on earth. It began like this. God dwelt in Paradise and originally the fellowship of man with God and of God with his creature was very real and unbroken. The separation only came when by sin man expelled God from this earth, drove him out of his own creation and from fellowship with his own most exalted creature. But God takes no pleasure in this. Expelled by sin, he returns in seeking grace. "Adam, where art thou?" is the call of God, with which he returns, and claims his world again.



At length God regains his abode on the earth. Provisionally in the cloud, in the column of fire and in the tabernacle, but fully symbolical on Zion. "This is my habitation. This is my rest," said the Lord, "here will I dwell" (Ps. 132:14). Zion by the side of Bashan indicates that God is still expelled from the world at large, but that in Zion he has prepared a place of rest for himself, an oasis of grace, a habitation of his own. This sacred symbolical return of God to this world prophesied age upon age in advance the glorious Bethlehem event. And when at length the fullness of time is come, and the Babe is born in Bethlehem, God no longer dwells symbolically in Zion, but in full reality in Christ. And therefore the Apostles preach with so much delight that God has been revealed in the flesh, and that revealed in the flesh, i. e., in reality he has dwelt among us.

Hence Bethlehem is the real and actual return of God to earth, in order here on earth permanently to dwell with us and among us. This is the restoration of what was real in Paradise. And does this end with Golgotha, or if you please, with the ascent into heaven? By no means. For God to dwell on earth is only possible in the fullest sense through Golgotha and the Ascension. Between Bethlehem and Golgotha there was real dwelling of God upon earth, but in the most extremely limited sense. A dwelling which was confined to one people, and which among that one people was limited to the narrow circle of those who followed Jesus. The promise, however, ran, that God would dwell on earth among all peoples, in all parts of the world, and that he would be approachable from age to age by every soul that feared him.



And this full, extended, unlimited, permanent, ever continuous, and ever self-expanding dwelling of God among the children of men was only possible when Jesus was no longer seen and heard, and handled among one people, in a narrow circle, but when he was elevated to the throne of grace and glorified. From thence he could extend his working to every people and to every heart. For this reason he declares in the hearing of his disciples: "It is

expedient for you that I go away," and also adds: "When I shall have gone away, I shall come again, and with the Father make my abode in you" ([John 14:23](#)).

Thus there is a threefold dwelling of God on earth. First, symbolical in Israel on Zion. After that the reality of the flesh, when Jesus walked about on the earth. And now, in the third place, the dwelling of God among us and in us in all parts of the earth. Our heart is made a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Our heart is the real Zion, and therefore our redeemed human heart is the temple in which he dwells. Sin expels God. In grace, God resolves to come back and to dwell again among us and in us. This constitutes all the mysticism of real, godly religion. Religion does not begin with this. It rather begins with an outward confession; with knowing God only as one who lives above, and is always conscious of a fatal distance between self and the Most High God.

But grace for grace gradually works modification in this, and makes internal what began with being external. To have the Spirit, is to have God himself in one's own heart, to carry him about in one's own soul, and the new commandment of brotherly love is nothing but the commandment, that as you carry God about in your own heart, you should discover that same God dwelling in the heart of the brother, and that you should join heart to heart, because that selfsame God fills the heart of each. But although this is so, most people are afraid to face it. Though God dwells in their heart, they every time put him back into the corner of their heart. Thus they become aware again of distance, and for the greater part withdraw their heart from God. And this is the sin of the saints.

But grace holds on. God will not let you go. From the corner of the heart in which you hold him back, he comes every time again to capture a part of your heart, till at length you throw up your hands, open your whole heart to him, and now experience with joy that he really in Christ has made his abode in you. This is the continuous Christmas gospel. Not a Christmas gospel that remains standing by the manger, but such an one as passes over from the manger into your own heart. First the jubilant note of the apostolate: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." And then the song of praise on the part of God's saint: "The Word was made flesh, and has taken up his abode in mine own heart."



"WHOM HAVE I IN HEAVEN BUT THEE?"

Refreshment of grace is particularly rich when also in departing from this world the soul is privileged to be near unto God. On the death-bed highest bliss has often been enjoyed. Many have departed, not only strong in faith and in higher clearness of mind, but also with the foretaste of heavenly joy. No rule can be made for this. A blessed death-bed is not always the reward of holier-mindedness and of deeper spirituality. A death bed that enhances the glory of God has not infrequently been the portion of one who in life had wandered far away from his Lord. And on the other hand painful distress has been witnessed on the part of those who for many years had known the secret walk with God.

As a rule this depends upon all sorts of things that have nothing to do with a devout frame of mind and heart. First upon age, temperament, the nature of disease, degree of weakness, state of nerves, freedom of speech or diffidence, and upon the longer or shorter period of dying. In part, it also depends upon the physician. Whether he conceals the certainty, or at least the probability of the approaching end, or whether frankly and honestly he acquaints the patient with the exact state of things. Again it depends upon family and friends, and upon those who care for the sick, whether they are spiritually inclined, and assist the patient in holy meditations, or whether they provide so-called diversion and vex him with multifarious earthly concerns.

If it happens that all this co-operates for good, and that he who is about to appear before God lies for a few days at least with a waiting heart at the gate of eternity, watching for its opening unto him, and meanwhile bearing witness to the power of everlasting life, sometimes in terms which far excel ordinary speech--then special grace operates in such a dying person. The Lord truly imparts this special grace to comfort his dying saint, but mostly to glorify himself, and to cause a testimony of striking power to go out from so glorious a death-bed.

The desire to pose as a saint is a sin which in its more refined forms cleaves to all religion. It has even been observed in martyrs. This desire would be more generally in evidence if the Lord God did not prevent it by weakness and disease. And in this prevention of making a show of one's piety we are bound to appreciate grace. But sometimes dying grace shows itself in a higher form, when something of almost prophetic inspiration takes hold of a dying saint. This was strongly evident in the case of Jacob the patriarch. But though in lesser measure, occasionally such higher inspiration is still witnessed among us when it is not merely a dying in faith, not merely a falling asleep in Jesus, but when fully awake and with open eye it is a triumphant passing through the gate of eternity. In such a case there is clear consciousness, and from it a holy testimony, because he who dies knows and feels until his latest breath, that he is near unto God.

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But from this it may not be inferred that a less triumphant death implies that the soul was deprived of God's nearness. Bodily weakness all too often affects the mind, so that little is observed from without of what inwardly takes place in the spirit. God is able to do, O, so much in and for the soul of which a third person can have no knowledge. When an infant is carried from the cradle to the grave, no one can say that God was not able to minister grace to him. But no one saw anything of it. The little one himself knew nothing about it. The same can take place in sleep. Would anyone say, that while we sleep, God's ministry is excluded for seven or eight hours from our heart? In great sickness sometimes one can be unconscious for several days together. Would God, then, all those days stand powerless before this disabled soul? The point in case of the infant, in sleep or in sickness is, that gracious ministry can take place on the part of the Holy Ghost, which through physical causes can not be observed from without, but remains concealed within.

This physical hindrance occurs in most cases by far when the end draws near. Most strongly in the case of those who die unconsciously in a swoon; sometimes very strongly with the sick, whose pulse is almost gone, and whose breath can scarcely be felt. And of these no one may say that, on account of this, their soul passed away in secret, and was estranged from God. Omnipotence and grace are able to do in holy secrecy what can not be observed by human eye or ear. The consciousness of him who died depended from the nature of the case upon the strength that still operated in his brain. But suppose the brain refused, should the inner life of the soul on this account be deprived of grace? Presently the brain shall refuse to function altogether, when without a clouded mind the soul shall know and glorify God. "To be near unto God" in dying, even if not discerned by any outside person is nothing else than already an entrance here in part upon that which after death becomes altogether and wholly so; the beginning of the new condition, when separated from the body, entirely incorporeal, our person is and companies with God.

But apart from this, while we continue our pilgrim journey on earth, the Divine ministries in behalf of the dying are deeply significant to us as a *memento mori*. This is what Asaph's message implied: "Whom have I in heaven but Thee?" (Ps.73:25). By itself this means to know nothing in heaven but God. which is quite the same as to love God with all the mind and soul and heart. But Asaph's question puts the matter still more clearly before us. The struggle of our heart on earth is, that it goes out after all sorts of things, including God. This struggle is laid upon us, inasmuch as God himself has related our heart to all sorts of persons on earth, and has endowed it with powers to appreciate the glories of nature, and has imparted all sorts of inclinations and callings to us, which go out after visible things. The Stylist who withdraws his eyes from all earthly things, so that with nothing about him but air he might seek after God, evades the struggle and becomes unnatural. The holy art of the child of God is to possess things that are seen and handled in such a way, that he can truly say, that nothing on earth pleases him but God. This only means to say, that he only regards all

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visible things as things which are of God, and exist for the sake of God, and must serve God. Thus his pleasure in God embraces and includes all these other things. But in such a way that they are only considered insofar as they are subjected to God, and as they reveal his Divine power.

Whether in deed and in truth this is the case with us, becomes evident only in dying. For then all these things fall away from us, and God alone remains. It has been tried to transfer earthly desires into heaven, by picturing all sorts of other persons and means of enjoyment there by the side of God. Mohammedans go farthest in this. But among Christians not a few regard heaven first of all in connection with their own dead, that there they might resume with them the former life. Thus even in heaven they imagine a whole world again by the side of God. This confuses the spirits. For he alone who in dying expects nothing in heaven but God, shall also find in the Fatherhouse, through and under God, that other holy fellowship. But this shall have no other purport than the better to glorify the God and Father of all in Christ.

This same thing must here be applied to our secret walk with God. We must frequently ask ourselves: If you had nothing, absolutely nothing aside from God, would your soul be perfectly satisfied? When you seek and endeavor and strive to be near unto God, is it that you might rest in him with all your heart, or is it perhaps merely that you might find in him the helper, who can give you all sorts of other desired things after which your heart goes out really the more strongly? Let no one complain that he who has God and him alone, has nothing but God. For he who has God in him has everything. But that you might test the sincerity of your own personal piety, you should know for yourself whether you are so concerned about God, that though all other things are added, you are intent upon him alone. Or, whether your heart really seeks the other things, and in addition to them God, through whose help you might obtain them the more surely. Or finally, whether you want to become a partaker of God and with him of the other things?

And in behalf of this test, anticipation of the hour of death has uncommon value. That you imagine to yourself the moment when everything on earth shall fall away from you, and as far as you are concerned, shall cease to exist. That whether, when you enter upon the thought that you will have nothing in heaven forever but the Triune God, it lifts your heart up to the highest foretaste of holy joy, in the sense that in all honesty you can say that it is good for you "to be near unto God," because you have nothing beside him in heaven, and because you desire nothing beside him on earth, all the days of your pilgrim journey that still remain.



"AS THE HART PANTETH AFTER THE WATER BROOKS."

More than twenty centuries have not been able to darken the golden glow of the immortal song that has come to us in [Psalm 42](#). And with all the bitter estrangement from God that characterizes human life, the priests of art still unite with the redeemed of the Lord in giving the song of "The hart that panteth after the water-brooks" a place which is far above every other lyric that voices the deep longing of the human heart after the fountain of all blessing. The passion that thrills in this Psalm, the enthusiasm that breathes in this glorious song is striking. Our most blessed experience is "To be near unto God." And in the face of distraction and temptation, our fainting soul can turn away from the world unto God, inasmuch as a voice whispers within that he who forsakes God robs his own heart of peace.

We have often turned to God and have knocked at the door, to be admitted again to the secret walk with God, after we had made the discovery in hours or days of wandering, that the joy of the world is vain and that its glory is deceptive. At another time we have, as it were, allowed our heart to be taken to God by one who "holy and humble of heart" allured us back to God. At another time again, either a wounded heart or some great anxiety, or want in which we almost perished, impelled us to seek aid and comfort with God in his holy nearness. The paths by which the heart comes to God wind themselves through all the parts of our life. And however often they are abandoned, these paths every time disclose themselves anew. But in all this there is no play of sacred ardor. In such moments if left to itself the heart would rather not incline toward God. And it is either an inward necessity or a stimulus from without, that drives the half-unwilling and self-sufficient heart to God.

But in this Psalm the heart drives itself. Irresistible longing after the living God arises not from without, but from within the heart itself. It is not from an accidental circumstance, not from a cause which operates from elsewhere, not from the promptings of conscience, not from urgency of need, neither from prudence nor calculation, but from the new nature itself, from the regenerated nature of the heart, that the longing after God, the sense of inability to do without God, the impetuous hastening after the living God, springs. Even Augustin's exclamation: "My heart is restless, till it rests in thee," pales before this fervor. For here it is thirsting. Here it is thirsting after the living God, even as a man or a brute, whose blood through exhaustion is dried up, not merely calls for moisture, but cries out aloud for the same, as far as the parched palate and husky throat still allow this to be done with audible sound. The figure is borrowed from the animal-world, where mention is impossible of a moment's consideration, pious purport or intentional calling. From the hart, which exhausted



and disabled cries as in despair, because having at last reached the stream-bed finds that there is no water there, and which now, from the mere impulse of nature, because it is ready to succumb, and is unable longer to go without drink, breaks the air with its desperate cry for water in the dried-up bedding; because presently it must faint if water does not come.

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This impulse of nature, this passionate desire, this almost dying of thirst after God on the part of the soul, this consuming longing after the living God, is the exalted, striking, enchanting character of this Psalm, which at the same time puts us to shame. For how many have been the moments in your life when, without the pressure of need, or solicitation from another, or sting of conscience, from a purely natural impulse of soul you have thirsted after the living God? You feel and appreciate, in listening to these moving tones, in singing yourself this glorious song, that not only at times, but always, this ought to be the state of the heart; that God created you for this purpose; that his plan concerning you intended such glorious longing in you after God; that every time this plan ceased to operate in you, you fell from the heights of your nature; and that you sin against grace, when at least in your reborn nature this pressure, this thirst, this intense longing for the living God can be silent.

As through exhaustion blood cries for water, and utterly fails unless relieved, so we have received a nature from God which, normal and unhurt, must cry after God or faint. Piety which at times imagined that it already stood strong and secure, here feels itself sink away, because it has so seldom attained unto this passion, this consuming longing after God. It is your holy exaltation, a solemn seal upon your human nobility, that your nature has so been created that such may be the case and can be. It is at the same time a deep humiliation that this nobility of higher origin so rarely exhibits itself in the fullness of its strength. But it is also a stimulus which leaves you no rest, which makes you turn in upon yourself and think, and which, under these changing perceptions, makes the thirst after the living God to be felt, and as soon as it is felt, makes its quenching to be experienced in O, such a blessed way, because God draws near unto your soul.

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"So panteth my soul after Thee, God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God." That "living" also is here an image of nature. There is stagnant water, which is dead, and becomes marshy and poisonous, and is unfit to refresh man and animal. The hart therefore panteth not merely after water, but after the water-brooks, i. e., after the fresh, murmuring, flowing water that lives. "And thus," says the Psalmist, "panteth my soul, yea thirsts my soul after the living God." Not merely after a confession of God, not merely after a representation of God, not merely after a reminder of God, not even after a Divine majesty, which far removed from the soul stands before it as a God in words or in phrases, but after God himself, after God in his holy outpouring of power and grace, after God who lives, after God who in

his life inclines himself toward you, who with his life pervades you, and who in holy manifestations of love reveals himself to you, and in you, as the living God.

You realize that here all learning falls away; all dogma, all formularies, everything that is external and abstract; everything that translates itself into words, that in the word it may dry up and wither. It is not your idea, not your understanding, not your thinking, not your reasoning, not even your confession, that can quench this thirst. This ardent longing goes out after God himself, until in your soul's transport of love, you feel in your own heart the warmth of the Fatherheart of God. It is not the name of God, but God himself whom the soul thirsts after, and of whom it can not bear to be deprived; God himself in the outshining of his life. And this outshining of his life must permeate you. It must be assimilated in the blood of your soul.

The Psalmist sought this in the Sanctuary. He was from Israel. And in Israel the clear, rich, full enjoyment of God's presence was confined to Zion. God had chosen Zion as the place where he would give himself to be enjoyed in this fullness by his people. At that time the life of the world drew itself too mightily away from God. Idol upon idol filled the world. And therefore the presence of the Lord was symbolically centered between the cherubim on Zion. To transfer this to the congregations in church-buildings in our behalf is to cut the nerve of this Psalm. For though there is indeed much in our sanctuaries that draws us to God, and much in the world and even in our homes that draws us away from God, this again would prove itself to be the stimulus from without. And what this Psalm intends, is thirst in the heart itself, which from the blood of the soul cries after God.

Zion is not your prayer cell. Zion is not your church building. Zion is not even your Christian association. What Israel found on Zion symbolically is for us reality in Christ; in your Vindicator and King, himself God, to whom be glory both now and forever, Amen.

He who is redeemed is in Christ, and Christ is in him. As living member he has wonderfully been incorporated in the mystical body of Christ. His regenerated nature has most intimately become one with Christ, and in this mystical life with Christ alone, the heart that thirsts after God, drinks in the life from God. And therefore "to be near unto God," yea, the drinking in of the life of God with all the passion, all the thirst of our soul, is not bound for us to any place, to no presence of others, to no day, to no altar and to no priest. Every place, wheresoever, can at any moment become a Zion to us. It but depends on this one thing: that God is approached in him in whom alone there is access, and who ever liveth to make intercession for us ([Hebr. 7:25](#)).



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