

"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, experi-

ences 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 D'vine 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 innermost 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.

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?

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.

106

### “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