

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.

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“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 anti-clerical. 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 them-

selves 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.

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"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

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