

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.

110

**"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 dis-

abled 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.

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.

“So panteth my soul after Thee, O 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 Father-heart 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.

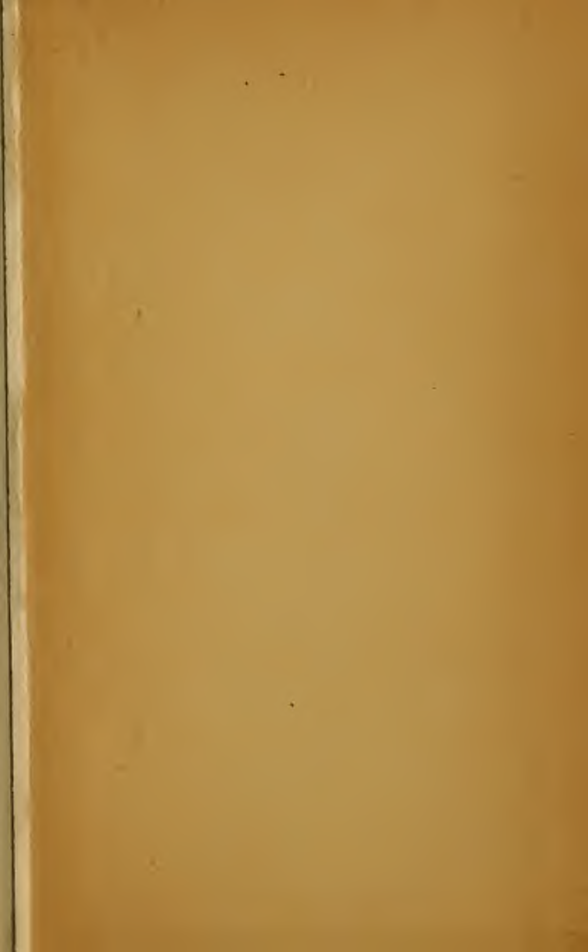
Zion is not your prayer cell. Zion is not your church building. Zion is not even your Christian association. What Israel found on Zion symbolically is for us reality in Christ; in your Vindicator and King, himself God, to whom be glory both now and forever, Amen.

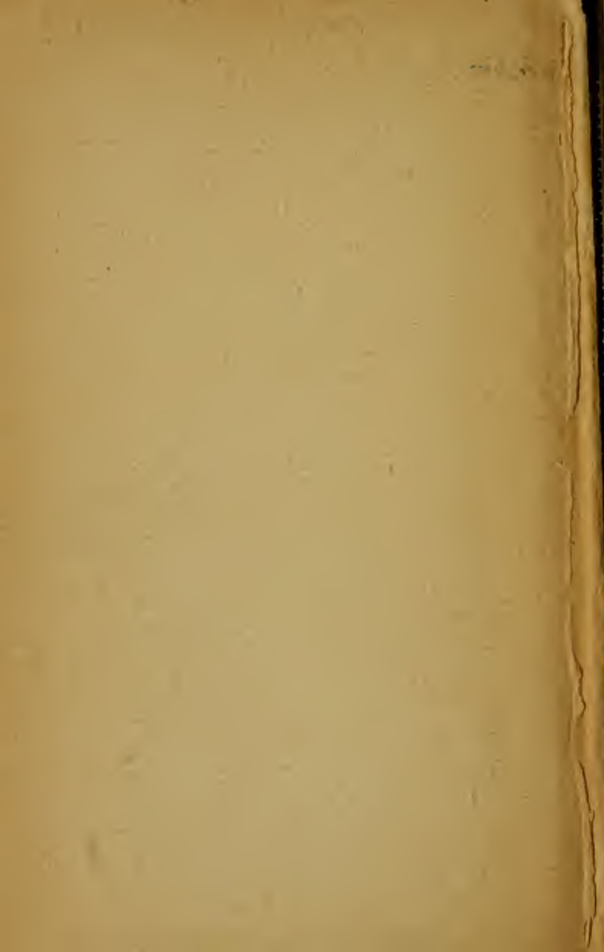
He who is redeemed is in Christ, and Christ is in him. As living member he has wonderfully been incorporated in the mystical body of Christ. His regenerated nature has most intimately become one with Christ, and in this mystical life with Christ alone, the heart that thirsts after God, drinks in the life from God, And therefor "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).

an
hin

all
ter
its
an
sta
no
th
hin
fee
he
hin
it
th
his
lat

wa
fu
to
he
ne
wo
Id
th
te
fe
in
Fo
ar
wo
fr
th





DATE DUE

~~SEP 20 1971~~

