

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 whereby 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 unflinching 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 aboundingly 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 night-bird 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 wanes 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 viewpoints—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.

15

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

75