

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: "O, My God, thou settest a print in the roots of my feet." This made David pray: "O 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.

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"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, who in 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