

"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

spirits. Along the way of ordinary knowledge and discovery we can not find God. Contact of soul with God takes place in a spiritual manner. It takes place of itself in Immanuel.

When in foreign parts we unexpectedly hear our own language spoken we feel at home at once. This is because we feel that this language is common property between us and our fellow countrymen. In it we live. By it they come closer to us than others who only speak a foreign tongue. This is still more strongly felt with regard to animals. Highly-organized animals come very close to man. There often is a remarkable understanding between a shepherd or hunter and his dog, or between a rider and his horse. But close as this approach may be, an altogether different and far richer world opens itself to us when we meet a fellow man. He is flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone, with a soul like our own. And this creates fellowship which is far more intimate and tender, especially when the people we meet are of like tastes and aims of life with ours. There are classes, social distinctions and other divisions in the world of man. And if anyone would become more closely acquainted with us and invite mutual confidence, he should be one of our class and be embarked, as it were, on the sea of life in the same boat with us. And this is the meaning of Immanuel.

In the Babe of Bethlehem God draws near to us in our nature, in order presently in our language, through the medium of our world of thought and with the aid of our representations to make his presence felt in the heart, in accord-

ance with the perceptions of which it is capable. He draws near to us in our nature, so that in order to find God we do not need to go out from our nature and enter upon a purely spiritual existence. Desirous to bless us, God from his side makes the transition which he spares us. We do not go to him, but he comes to us. We need not raise ourselves up to him, but he comes down to us that afterwards he may draw us up to himself. He enters into our nature. He assumes it and cradles in the Bethlehem manger with an existence which human nature brings with it. Here the distance between God and us is removed. The tension and effort to understand it purely spiritually is spared us. What we perceive is human nature. What presently we hear is human speech. What we observe are utterances of human life. An unknown brightness plays and glistens through it all and behind it all, a mysterious higher something, a something altogether holy. But now it does not repel, but it attracts and charms because it approaches us in our own human nature. The human nature of Immanuel is not merely a screen to temper dazzling glories, but the means and instrument to bring Divine life unaffectedly and intimately near to the heart. It is as though human nature in us unites itself with human nature in Jesus in order to bring God into immediate contact with the soul.

We do not say that this was necessary by itself. The fact of our creation after the Divine Image seemed to give us every requisite for fellowship with God. But we must ever remember that sin ruined this Image. In this weakened and

ruined estate nothing short of holy grace could fill the gap. This was done in Immanuel, in the coming of God to us in the garb of human nature. Idolatry proclaimed the need of this when it imaged the Lord of heaven and earth after the likeness of a man. Hence Christianity alone can undo idolatry and paganism, since in Immanuel it presents the true Image of God anew. The result itself has sealed this. In Christ alone pure fellowship with the living God has been realized and gloriously celebrated in Psalm and hymnody. Apart from Immanuel we have philosophy about God, denial of God, or at most idolatry and cold Deism. In and through Immanuel alone there is life in God and with God, full of warmth, elevation and inspiration. In Immanuel God draws near to us in our own nature and through Immanuel the soul mounts from this nature spiritually up to the Father of spirits.

In Immanuel we have the way, but not the goal. It begins with Jesus, but in the end the Father himself makes tabernacle with us and the day breaks of which Jesus said: "In that day I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father himself loveth you." Then also the abundant activity of the Holy Ghost will unfold itself, even of the Comforter who could not come until after Jesus had been glorified. Let there not be anything artificial therefore or conventional in our seeking after God. No wilful, premeditated going out after Jesus to have fellowship with God. Immanuel brings us reconciliation, so that we dare to draw near again. He brings the Divine in human nature so that we can draw near again. We owe him the Word, the

world of thoughts and representations, the blessed results of his work that are showered down upon us, and the supply of powers of the Kingdom which inwardly renew us. But underneath it all, personal contact, real fellowship with God, is always a hidden, spiritual motion, so that inwardly we hear his voice and we can say with Job: "Now mine eye seeth thee." This is fellowship with God as man with man. As Jacob at Peniel.

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"IN THE LIGHT OF THY COUN- TENANCE."

In moments of intense joy the human face is radiant. When the soul is depressed, the face is sad, the eye is dark and it seems that instead of showing itself in the face and speaking through it, the soul has turned it into a mask behind which to hide itself. We see a connection therefore between joy and bright colors; between sorrow and half-tints, until mourning expresses itself in black.

The same antithesis meets us when we enter the world of spirits. Satan is pictured in somber colors, while good angels are always seen as kindly appearances of light. In the house of many mansions there is everlasting light; for Satan there is outer darkness. The righteous shall shine as the sun in the firmament, clothed in garments of light. On Patmos Christ appears to John in blinding glory.

This beautiful thought of light as the expression of things that are pure and true and glorious, was bound to present itself in the world of