

"WITH ALL THY SOUL."

When the question is raised whether there is one that seeks after God, the Psalmist denies it and bitterly complains: "They are all gone aside, there is none that doeth good, no, not one. There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God" (14:3). But was the singer insincere when in the ear of the ages he sang so touchingly: "As the heart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God" (42:1). Or did Asaph dissemble a state of soul, which would have been self-deceit, when he said: "Nevertheless, I am continually with Thee?" (Ps. 73:23). By no means. The question meant whether by nature there was one man in whose heart the magnetic drawing is after God, even in such a degree as to overcome every resistance and hindrance. The answer to this is: no, and ever again: no. There is no such drawing in the human heart. It has been corrupted and crippled and is no longer what it was by Divine creation, but what it has become by self-delusion. The number of those who take religion seriously is small, and much smaller yet the number of those who recover the true type of piety. Take these, together with those who seem religious, and watch them and listen as they talk, and we find them superficial and mechanical to an amazing degree. We rarely meet with a seeking soul that makes it a business to draw near to God, and to find him. Even in prayer, in church or at home, the question can sometimes scarcely

be repressed: Does this man or woman, when the Amen has passed the lips, come away from God, or has the soul, even in devotions, been as far as ever away from him?

Undoubtedly there are always some who in prayer and at other times seek fellowship with God in their heart. Upon inquiry, however, we learn that the magnetic drawing did not originate with themselves, but that God drew them. We do not know why Divine power operates in the case of one and not of another. The fact remains that as the magnet draws the steel to itself, God can draw the soul. And when he does, the drawing is irresistible. And the soul seeks God because God draws it.

Is the approach of the soul to God through the understanding, will, feeling or imagination, or is it through an inexplicable mysterious working which we can not name? The answer differs according to those who give it. The one attributes it to intellectual and doctrinal knowledge of God; the other to the fellowship of love; a third to submission of the will; a fourth to visions; a fifth to inspirations, and the more people are asked, the more widely the answers differ. Here disposition and temperament play the chief role. The subtle, analytical investigator of ideas and definitions entrenches himself in strong doctrinal confessions; the man of action, in devotion to practical ends; he whose nature is finely strung, in the note of pensive longing which he elicits from his emotions; and the imaginative mind, inclined to fancies of every sort, in representations and ingenious imagery. Every one after his own kind, we may say. Such is the case now, and so it was

in times past. From ancient writings we see people of the long ago live and move before us, and things of the past appear like things of the present. All sorts of currents and schools and tendencies of thought are ever abroad, one way and the other another. Unanimity there is none. Seeking God with all the heart is unknown.

This shows that the preference for one method of seeking God bars the way to other equally efficacious methods of doing the same, and that God's children should freely employ all methods in order to be wholly free in their communion with the Eternal. God is not found by one power of soul in distinction from another, but by all the soul. God is not apprehended by human knowledge, or will, or play of imagination, but by the knowing, willing and thinking soul as a whole, in its inner unity and soundness. Ray by ray shines in, but all are caught in the focus of the soul-life in process of becoming aware of itself and of its environments, and the act of catching all these rays is called faith.

Here, too, the difficulty springs from the inward ruin occasioned by sin, which is still esteemed too lightly, because it is sought too exclusively within the scope of morals. The injury worked by sin is only fully known when its fatal effects are traced in religion. Things become far more important when it concerns our relation to God. For in connection with this everything centers in the first and great commandment: To love God with all the soul and with all the strength. This is possible. The soul was created and equipped for this. It can safely be said that when the soul operates normally it can not do otherwise than direct itself

altogether and with all its strength to God. In no other realm of life, therefore, does it show more strongly than in religion how utterly abnormal the soul has become by sin. And the worst of it is, that in this matter of religion the soul itself is so little conscious of it. He who has committed a crime knows it, and finds no difficulty on his knees in confessing it before God. With the finer forms of transgression in morals this inner sense may fail us, but with the coarser forms of sin the conscience almost always speaks in every man. But when the first and great commandment is violated, almost no one is conscious of it. Thousands upon thousands every day deny God all love, withdraw their whole soul from him, rob him of all their strength, and thus in the matter of religion they are hardened criminals, who do not even know that they sin. Even with the saved, who have confessed to love God, the case is nearly the same. For some among these give God only a small part of their soul, work for him indifferently with only a few of their powers, and as they kneel in prayer at night are quite unconscious of the fact, that they have broken the larger part of the first and great commandment.

This fatal defect shows itself when the powers of soul, which by reason of disposition and temperament are most prepared to act, and which therefore require the least sacrifice of self, are given free rein. When a man who is naturally intellectual becomes pious, he applies himself to doctrine. If to know the only true God is eternal life, he makes himself doctrinally strong. He has nothing to do with knowledge of God

that is obtained along other lines than those of close, analytical studies, and in these he is proficient. With utmost pains he traces what the great thinkers have put into their several doctrinal systems regarding the Being, Work, Person and Attributes of God. On this he ponders. To him it appeals. He prides himself on it before others. He really thinks that in this way he has acquired the true knowledge of God. No, says another, Jesus has said that he who doeth the will of his Father who is in heaven, shall know the glories of the faith. As a man of action, therefore, he gives liberally of his means, labors with zeal and enthusiasm, in which few equal and none surpass him, brings willing offerings one after another, and with all his strength devotes himself to the interests of the kingdom—but he has a dislike for all doctrinal niceties. He makes no confession with words. The all important thing with him is confession in practical life. A third has no interest either in doctrine or in works, but is emotional. He, therefore, seeks his strength in tender feelings, soulful utterances, mystical perceptions of love, and thinks that in these he comes closer to God. Imagination is the part of fantasy with another who seeks to establish his strength in visions and mystical representations, and in the contemplation of the things which his soul-eye discerns he is most happy. Did not St. Paul glory in rare exaltations of spirit and in being caught up into higher spheres? Add to these, inspirations, suggestions, experiences in which the soul is aware of sudden motions, and so much more, and it is readily seen that impressions and motions of soul differ

greatly when a man becomes inwardly athirst for God.

The pity of it is that so far from realizing that all these workings, powers and exertions are bound to express themselves in love of God, so that loving God with all the soul may become real, the children of God, for the most part, hold themselves back within their own retreat, seek God with only one power of their soul, and not infrequently criticize a brother who seeks salvation by the use of another soul-power than they themselves employ. "With all thy soul," said Jesus. "With a part of my soul," they reply. And just because they are truly pious and sincere of purpose, they do not tremble at the thought of leaving the rest of their soul inactive for God.

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I SAW ALSO THE LORD.

"And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the Only true God." But then we must not only know God intellectually, but with every power at our disposal. As knowledge it must be the result and summary of every observation and perception. In connection with this at once the question arises whether imagination, or more generally, the power of representation, plays a part in this. A superficial mind inclines to answer this Spirit means that all corporeity and materiality must be excluded from it, no manifestation of negatively. For God is Spirit. And if the word God is possible in any way whatever. If all outward divine manifestation is unthinkable, how can we make a representation of God. We can