

and like Job out of the whirlwind receives the answer from God himself, and now learns to understand that the government of God covers all suns and stars, all hours and centuries, and causes every creature to revolve itself about him, the Eternal, as the one and only center, for the sake of his majesty and honor; that therefore his council and plan are as high as heaven, and far exceed our comprehension; and that not the verification of his Council, but the entering into the life of it, whether through joy or whether through sorrow, is the honor and self-exaltation of the soul.

This breaks the passiveness which made us numb, and awakens again the impulse to willingly drink the cup; to drink it with heroic courage and not allow it to be forced upon us. To will to drink it even as Jesus willed to die on Golgotha; with a broken heart to co-operate in the work of God, and in this passive co-operation with God, who slays us, to find eternal life. It is even as the sentinel who lets himself be shot down at his post, and in dying receives the look of approval from his general, which exalts him, because he knows, and now understands, that he who exposed him to death, yet loved him.

35

“I LOVE.”

At times there is something so overpowering, extravagant and unreasonable in the early love of a youth for the maiden of his choice, and of the

maiden for the elect of her heart, that we feel that there is a mysterious, inexplicable power at play. This is not always so with those who are betrothed. Eccentric tension of the mystery of love is rather the exception. Neither should this doting, intoxicating love be associated with sensual inclinations or voluptuous desire. "The ecstasy of love" in question here only shows itself with those who are in love, and while it pervades the soul and body both, even in our sinful state, it can well be free from sensual propensities.

When this rapture is equally warm and true on both sides, the world hears nothing of it. Near families and friends alone are in the secret. Frequently, however, it reveals itself in a tragic manner, as when the young maiden discovers that her ardent love finds no equally ardent response in the heart of her lover. Scarcely a day passes that the papers do not report the case of some girl, in the home-town or abroad, who was betrothed and passionately in love, and who upon discovering that her lover was untrue to her, found life itself too heavy a load to carry, and preferring death to life sought it in suicide.

"Ecstasy of love" is a high-strung degree of affection which takes the person whom it masters out of his normal self and transports him into an excited state of mind, which though it is not insanity, shows signs that are similar to it. Therefore we began by saying that it is outside of reason. One who is in this state of ecstasy can not be advised nor reasoned with. As Burger in his *Leonora* tells the tale so graphically, for those

who so love, there is only one of two things thinkable; either they must be loved with equal warmth in return, or they can find no rest until they find it in death.

This should not be taken too ideally. It does not follow by any means that such a young maiden stands exceptionally high as a woman. Rather on the contrary not infrequently such ecstasy takes hold of girls who are very ordinary otherwise, sometimes even very egotistical. In course of time also in many cases this ecstasy entirely passes away and nothing remains save a very ordinary, and sometimes a low-lived person. In the ordinary sense it is not passion that overpowers such a girl. And this ecstasy may be best explained as an inclination bordering on insanity to identify her life with that of another. It is a noteworthy phenomenon. An overpowering desire in the heart, which when doomed to disappointment makes one quickly and resolutely seek death, is an utterance in human life which deserves attention.

The Song of Songs describes this ecstasy of love, and aims to outline an image of the love of the soul for God. The whole Scripture stretches the canvas on which at length the Song of Solomon embroiders the image in vivid colors. Human marriage is the embodiment of the tie that binds God and his people together, God and the individual soul. Jehovah calls himself Israel's husband, and declares that he has betrothed himself to Israel in righteousness. Infidelity against the Holy one is called a whoring in idolatry.

Thus it is ever the God-given love between husband and wife, which in vivid imagery is the standing expression of the love that binds the soul to God. In the New Testament this is applied to Christ. He, the son of God's good pleasure, is called the Bridegroom of his Church, and his church is the Bride, who invokes him.

When Jesus analyzes the great commandment of love, he turns to the Eternal Being, and outlines this love in terms which describe the ecstasy as in life. To love God with all the heart, with all the soul, with all the mind and with all the strength, what else is this than to be entirely lost in, and consumed by, a higher drawing, which makes us ignore every other consideration, in order to know and to find and to enjoy the object of our love, in which to lose ourselves altogether? The deep significance which the love between husband and wife should always have, and which it frequently still has, can only be explained from the fact that in this love God has imaged forth the highest love between himself and the soul.

This lends an holy and exalted character to this high-strung love. This accounts for the fact that when this love develops harmoniously and nobly, it creates the purest happiness on earth; that in its sensual degeneration it works ruin and corruption; and that when suddenly and inharmoniously it takes hold of a receptive mind, it wrests the intoxicated soul away from itself and leaves it a prey to semi-frenzy. For back of it all operates the higher love, which God has formed in the tie between himself and his

creature, and it is only the sinful character of our earthly existence that unites what does not belong together, makes soul and body part company, and breaks the equilibrium of the inclinations, so that what is best and holiest turns itself into sensuality or frenzy. Like the snow-flake, which comes down from the clouds pure white but is soiled through contact with the impurity of this world.

Nevertheless, if we would understand what our love for God should be, we must come back to conjugal love. In the authorized version Psalm 116:1 reads: "I love the Lord." In the original it only states: I love. We would say: I am in love. It is an utterance of the soul when it perceives that the power of love has irresistibly taken hold upon it; when it feels itself inwardly moved as never before, and driven by an unknown inward pressure; perceives and knows that this is love, and in ecstasy exclaims: "I love, I love, I love." And as this wonderful inner motion of the heart transports the maiden with delight, when this love directs itself to the young man of her choice, so here the same irresistible pressure operates, only in an entirely holy manner, lifting the soul above every other thought and directing it to God. With the young maiden it was but the faint impression of the highest; here it is the highest itself. Eternal love, which at last moves the pure tie between God and the soul to operate fully and harmoniously, and makes the soul to love with all the intensity which human powers can command.

This is not the mysticism of imagination. It is

not knowing God by the acts of the will. Neither is it knowing God through the analytic studies of confessional standards. It is the close approach to God with the warm, tender feeling of the throbbing heart that craves to be cherished; it is to have longed and languished for what can quiet the burning desires of the heart; to have tried everything that can be tried; to have suffered disappointment with it all, and now at last to find the true, perfect and holy object of the love of the heart; to receive God himself in the soul; and in this love to be supremely happy.

The difference is perceived at once between this love and what is commonly passed as loving God. Who does not love God? Every one indeed, who is not out and out an atheist. Why should he not be loved? In him everything is pure and holy and exalted. There is nothing in him why he should not be loved, and every one feels that he is worthy of the love of all. The masses in general love God. They have nothing against him. In God they find their ideal of what is beautiful, right and good. Therefore they can not do otherwise. Even as they love virtue, and right, so they also love God. But in this Platonic love glows no tiniest spark of personal relationship and attachment. It is called love for God, but God has no place in the soul or in the mind. The inclination and drawing of the heart do not go out after him. There is nothing in this love of a burning thirst after God, such as makes the heart pant after the water brooks.

By the side of this cool, measured, pseudo-love of the world, which is heartless, the Scripture

places the utterance of tenderest piety that seeks after God, and finds him, and is aglow with warmest love for him; can not do without him; of itself thinks of him; is continually busy with him; and directs every utterance of the soul to him and to him alone. And in this love there is a knowledge of God, which no analytical study, no work of the imagination, and no power of the will can bring us. It is to love, and in this love itself to enjoy eternal life. And thus to know God with an intimacy such as you would deem would not be seemly in a creature. Until in the hereafter every wall of separation shall fall away, and God in us and we in him shall be the perfection of highest Love.

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“THOU HAST NOT LAID ME UPON
THINE HEART.”

To the superficial mind nothing seems so easy as to love. Of course, one loves himself. It is not at all difficult to love God. The only trouble sometimes is to love one's neighbor as oneself. Even this is not because there is no will and no power to love, but because at times this neighbor makes it almost impossible.

This is altogether a mistaken view. To love God is far more difficult than to love one's neighbor. It can safely be said that where there are ten who love their neighbor, there is at most only one who is consumed with love for God.

Jesus, therefore, has put love for God in the