

times for the things that wean the soul from God and must needs impoverish it.

4

“IN THE COVERT OF THY WINGS.”

The profoundest question that governs true piety relates to personal fellowship with God. In the Psalms, which are the most beautiful utterances of a devout mind, this Divine fellowship is ever longed for and sought after. The tie is there mentioned that binds us to God as the Creator and Supporter of all things. The relation is there stated, which he who fears the Lord sustains by faith to the Holy One. But these are not fellowship with the Eternal. He who fears the Lord does not rest until he has entered into such conscious fellowship with Him that there is mutual knowledge between the two. Even the clear sense that God knows him and that he knows God.

What we call friendly intercourse among men, intimate fellowship, sympathy of heart with heart in faithfulness and love, is the meaning of Ps. 25:14: “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant.” As close friends on earth go through life together and reveal themselves to each other, and in this intimate walk become the confidants of each other’s secrets, so it is told of the Old Testament heroes of the faith that “they walked with God.” And although these are but figures and terms that are borrowed from human experiences, and although we ought not to use them ourselves when we would speak of our fellowship with God except

with greatest reverence, it is equally sure that God has pointed them out to us for this end.

To picture this Divine fellowship the Scripture even borrows figures from animal life. Jesus illustrated his tender love for Jerusalem by the figure of the hen that gathers her chickens under her wings. David boldly declared before God that he would not only dwell in the house of the Lord forever, but that he would even make his refuge "in the covert of God's wings." (Ps. 61:4.) And why not? Did not God put this tender expression of fellowship in the world of winged creatures as an intimation of what moves his own Divine heart? And is not every suggestive and touching instance of loving fellowship in the life of nature a Divinely given help to make clear to us the things which we observe and feel or only dimly sense in the mystic depths of our heart?

But even the broad creation fell short of material along this line. Wherefore the Lord has put still another figure before us by which to illustrate this intimate fellowship with himself; even that of dwelling together in one house. For the house, or with nomadic tribes the tent, is not original in the creation, but is mechanically constructed by human hands. With Jabal mankind first came upon this find, whereby the social life of man took an incredible step forward. The home was foreshadowed in the creation. Jesus pointed to the fact that foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests. And was it not a deep feeling of want that expressed itself in the words that He, the Son of Man, had no home * * * indeed, no place at all of his own where to lay his head?

Life can only be fully developed by our dwelling together under one roof-tree. The family home is the nursery of love. It is the outward encircling with the tie of the closer fellowship of life. Thus we see that in Scripture the house or tent is given us as an aid, by which fellowship with God assumes a form and an outline that makes it plain to us. God also has a house. And the idea of dwelling in God's house beautifully indicates the most intimate and tenderest fellowship with God. Purposely, therefore, the tabernacle was constructed in the wilderness. Presently it was perpetuated in the Temple on Mount Zion. It is expressly stated that in Horeb God showed Moses the pattern of the same. Hence the Tabernacle and the Temple were a pattern of what actually exists in the heavens.

And in connection with this, the deep longing is constantly expressed to be privileged to dwell in the Tabernacle of the Lord. Rather be a door-keeper in the house of God than dwell in the palaces of the ungodly. "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life; to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple." (Ps. 27:4.)

Tabernacle and Temple, however, were not permanent. They only served for a time. In the broad development of the life of faith they were transitory. When Jesus had come, it was said: "Woman, the hour cometh, and now is, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father, but when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and

in truth (John 4:21). This means worship without symbols, without outward forms, directly spiritually, from heart to heart. If then we are in sympathy with David's ardent longing to dwell in the house of the Lord, we must no longer apply this to an earthly house or visible church. For this only brings us back to the dispensation of shadows. The temple of God is no more an allegorical house of wood and stone, but the great palace of our God in the heavens. For heaven is God's dwelling place. There is the palace of his glory, the Tabernacle of his Majesty. When Jesus teaches us to pray: "Our Father, who art in heaven," he detaches the soul from every material thing, and lifts the heart on high, in order that we should no more think of the Majesty of God in terms of earth.

To dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our life means to be so vividly conscious of our fellowship with the living God that every morning, noon and night our thoughts go out to Him, that we hear his voice in the soul, that we are aware of his holy Presence within, experience his workings in our heart and in our conscience, and that we carefully avoid the things which we would not dare to do if God stood before us and spoke to us.

The Psalmist goes still one step further, whereby he clearly shows that through the shadows, the faithful under the Old Covenant grasped the higher reality. For he adds: "I will make my refuge under the covert of Thy wings." It is not enough to think of God's glory in the heavens, to dwell in his holy temple, to walk among the

angels and the saints, who stand before the Lord. God's house will afford the opportunity for fellowship with him, but in it we will look for God himself. One must live with a person in his house in order to enjoy his company to the full. But the house without him is nothing. He himself is the first interest there. Such is the case in our search after fellowship with God. Sursum Corda. Lift up your hearts. I will lift up my heart to the trysting-place of thy holiness.

Even this is not enough, nor ever can be. To find God we must dwell in his house. But there "To Be Near Unto God" is the sole end and aim of all godly desire and endeavor. To give vent to this passionate longing David boldly exclaims: "I will make my refuge in the covert of Thy wings." This is communion of spirit with Spirit. It involves the sacred touch. To perceive and to feel, to discover and to experience that nothing separates us any more from the Lord; that his arms are around us, and that as it were we cleave unto God.

This is holy ground. It is not free from dangers. Misapprehension can interpret this figurative language literally, and in an unholy sense materialize our Spiritual God. False mysticism has shown what errors it may entail. Provided, therefore, that we are on our guard, this figure is aboundingly rich and supremely glorious. To possess God, and to have made fellowship with him a reality in life is beautiful, provided that it always is in Christ. We, impure and unholy, are brought by our Savior alone, into this tender communion with God.

HE WILL REGARD PRAYER.

Does the Lord regard prayer only after long delay? Is He not omnipresent? Is not the whispered prayer known to Him before there is yet a word in the tongue? Can the All-Knowing One first stand apart, indifferently as it were, and only gradually perceive that we pray, before he regards what at first he ignores?

Such is the meaning of verses 16 and 17 of Psalm 102. The Psalmist stands outside a closed door. Out of the depth his prayer ascends. But the thorn in the flesh is not removed. The Lord does not hear his prayer. And the Arch-enemy, who does not pray, and who does not know God, is encouraged by Jehovah. God's covenant people are repulsed. God hides his face. And the Psalmist cries: "Hear my prayer, O Lord, and from me. In the day when I call answer me speedily.

This brings relief to his troubled mind. With prophetic insight he anticipates the day when the Lord will hear the prayer of his people, and inspired by this thought he exclaims: "When the Lord will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer, then shall all the kings of the earth fear him."

Thus the Psalmist was still in that period in which the Lord held himself deaf to his people, and in which the moment tarried when he would regard their prayer. And do you think that the Psalmist did not feel and know the objections that are suggested by the nature of the Divine Being against this human representation? And