

but he gets farther and farther away from it. The transition is continuous from night into clearer day, until at length there is fellowship with God, which the world neither knows nor understands, but which to him is highest reality, the source, the ever free-flowing fountain of the strength of his life.

Many Christian people, alas, after conversion love to remain in slumber, and consequently lose the joy of this closer communion with God. They are the sick ones among the brethren, from whom no virtue can go out. There are others, however, God be praised, who know nothing of standing still, who enter ever more deeply into the secret of the infinite, and now waken every morning with God, labor all day long with God, and lay themselves down at night to sleep with God. And they are the salt of the earth, and of God's church among the saints, and they keep the church from desecration and from languishing away in death.

“WITHOUT GOD IN THE WORLD.”

Not only with individuals, but in broad and influential circles denial of God breaks forth, stalks abroad, and puts every mask aside. This was different even twenty years ago. Individual atheists openly boasted of infidelity, and thereby aroused aversion, which with many turned into abhorrence. Many people were done with religion in any form, but to be taken for atheists was considered an insult. They were not atheists. They had broken with traditional views of Divine things, but the eye of their soul was open to the eternal,

so they said, and their heart still went out after the unknown Infinite.

Now another step is taken. Even the appearance of godliness can be laid aside. Atheists have discovered that especially among cultivated classes they are represented by more people than they had dared to surmise. They observe that when they confess their denial of God, public opinion takes it calmly, and at times hails it as an evidence of honesty. Even among the faithful we have become so accustomed to the growing numbers of those who deny God that we are scarcely aware of the trembling which it occasioned in better days.

This is significant. When a child for the first time hears his father or mother evilly spoken of, he resents it. But when in the course of ten years he has grown accustomed to such talk, and can listen to it calmly, he has suffered moral loss. This applies to a nation with respect to its sovereign. When violation of royal dignity first begins, indignation will be general. But when this violation is continued, and royal defects form the topic of daily public talk, people cease to be affected by it. Respect for what is high becomes outworn. And in the same way a people has lost something of the gold of its wings, when in its best circles it has become so accustomed to the language of atheism, that it raises no more protest among them. Especially along this line evil communications corrupt good manners. Here a poison works unobservedly that extinguishes higher aspirations and unnerves the elasticity of confession.

“Without God in the world” is not the most

dangerous form of atheism. Many are atheists from sheer indifference. They care for nothing. Others are atheists, because in their career of sinful pleasure they will not brook trouble from their consciences. Others again are atheists, because in their own wisdom they are too proud to bow before God. But each of these three groups maintains discreet silence about God, rather than that from enmity it would seriously oppose the faith. They live "without God in the world" but they are no fanatics, who strive to banish God from the world. When it comes to this, spiritual infatuation reaches its highest degree, and every prospect of recovery is cut off.

That this atheistic fanaticism obtains public hearing from time to time, and that tracts, bearing the most shameful titles, are broadcast through the land, to slander faith in God and to make it appear ridiculous, is most dangerous for the life of a nation. For it betrays the presence of a poison in national life that is bound to work harm and to break national elasticity. Even among the heathen, slander of the gods was made punishable; and almost every nation that was great at first and then went down, shows in history this sad process, that it began with wealth; that wealth produced moral decay; that moral decay led to religious indifference; that then in more cultivated circles people lived "without God in the world;" and that at length fanaticism broke out against all religion, whereby at last the people became wholly degenerate and were overtaken by disgraceful ruin.

In the days of St. Paul like conditions of ungodliness prevailed in Ephesus, and of the con-

verts there to Christ it is said that at one time they themselves were without hope and without God in the world (Eph. 2:12). And this states painfully what we see all about us. With differences in degree many live year after year who think no more of God, and speak no more about him; no more religious books are found in their homes; they never pray, and their children grow up without religion. Baptism is no more known. They marry outside of the church. They bury their dead as we bury a dog. Their lives without God in the world, as such, are perfect.

But most people have not gone such lengths. At marriage they can not dispense with the solemnity of the church service. Many have their children baptized. In times of serious illness they still call upon God. Some do not consider religion superfluous in the education of children, and allow their servants time to attend church. But apart from these minor exceptions they live for the rest altogether in the world without God. And the worst of it is that they can live in this manner year after year, and not feel unhappy about it. The sense of need of communion with a higher life is almost wholly lost from their hearts, and they do not miss life with God. Living in the world without God has become their second nature. When it is over, all is done. No more voice in the soul speaks of desire after higher things. From one pleasure they go to another, and however little religion we would measure out to them, it would not satisfy them, but prove a burden. The same tenor of mind and heart which was abroad for two thousand years in the declining world of the pagan Roman Empire has made

itself master of these present-day out-and-out people of the world. They still strive for higher things. They are lovers of art. They are zealous in works of philanthropy. They labor for general culture as they understand it. At times they dote with ideals that awaken the poetic talent in them. But far from being led thereby to worship, this higher, more ideal life is the ground from which they explain the superfluity of religion. Religion may do for the lower classes of society. They have outgrown it. To live without God in the world they consider a means by which to secure high places of honor in the life of this world.

Love alone can save the world from these conditions. At Ephesus there were people who at one time lived without God in the world, but who by hundreds were turned to God, not by reproaches and uncharitable criticisms, but by the love wherewith the apostles approached them. In this apostolic love the reality of life in the world with God was luminous. This thawed out hearts and captured them. This reality is not devoid of creed. There is no greater witness for the truth and the facts of the Gospel than St. Paul. This reality of life with God is not without forms. Preaching, Baptism and Holy Communion stand ever in the foreground. But the power behind the creed and the service of forms was the work of the Holy Ghost, his indwelling in the heart, and life in constant fellowship with God. If then the church of God would raise a barrier in the way of increasing atheism of our times, let her hold fast to her confession, and honor the sacred services of the sanctuary. But above all things else, let her guard the essence that is behind these forms, and

cultivate with young and old the supreme reality of life with God.

This requires effort. We must live in the world. God only calls us out of the world at death. And almost everything in the world draws us away from God. Not only wealth and temptation, but also the incessant activity of life, labor that is strenuous, multiplicity of interests, much trouble and sorrow. Among confessing christians there are all too many, therefore, who count themselves christians and can live for hours and for days at times without a thought of God, who are distracted in mind even in their prayer, and who are scarcely aware of what it means to be "near unto God" and with him to live in constant fellowship of the Spirit. This lack can not be made good by sound creeds, nor by constant bearing witness. Life with God in the world can not be replaced by much activity and good works. The lamp can not burn unless it is continually fed with oil. Not in us, but in God alone is the power and the might, that can break unbelief in the world. And in this conflict we can only be instruments in the hand of the Lord, when his power inwardly animates us, when his Spirit inwardly impels us, and when "to be near unto God" and in the midst of the world to live with God, has become our second, our regenerated nature.

65

"I WILL WALK AMONG YOU."

Vital fellowship with God can not merely be personal. It must also be collective. Whatever touches merely the world of our own heart is personal. And whatever we go through with others, who are