

are inclined to accept the sacred mysteries, provided they but discover that sacred power goes out from you. When they see no such power; and perceive that fruit remains wanting; that there is no higher seriousness of life; when they hear on the contrary, of hypocrites who behind fair exteriors prove themselves inferior in character to unbelievers, they are offended, and this keeps them back from Christ.

Such was the case in the days of Samuel, when Hophni and Phineas transgressed in holy things, and Eli lacked moral courage to make serious protest. Such is the case now when he who calls himself a believer appears to be at heart a child of the world. Then the struggle becomes very fierce. O, that the children of God might understand their sacred calling, to confess their faith heroically, but above all else, by means of their family life, of their social activities, and of their seriousness of purpose; in brief, in all of life, to be preachers of Jesus Christ.

68

“THEY MAKE HIM A WELL.”

In countries like ours, where water abounds, it is difficult to form an adequate idea of thirst. Hence words of Scripture like “thirsting after righteousness,” or “thirsting after the living God,” are ordinarily taken in far too weak a sense. On a hot day, after a long walk, or in times of feverish emotion, we may reach out eagerly after a cup of cold water, but this is by no means yet the thirst that overtakes people in mountainous districts, when not metaphorically, but actually, the tongue cleaves to the roof of the mouth, the

last drop of saliva is dried up, and the swollen throat with difficulty allows the breath to pass through. With such a thirst it becomes a serious, and ever more anxious longing for moisture, and passionate craving for water; and he alone who so understands it, fathoms the depth of the longing after God's presence, which is so often expressed by the congregation in worship of song or reading of the Psalter, without real appreciation of the panting of the hart after water brooks. In like manner, who knows anything now, of "thirsting after righteousness" such as a St. Paul, a Luther or a Calvin knew it? Even when the cup filled with righteousness is placed before us, much is made of the fact that more than one stretches out a heavy hand for it, and slightly moistens the lips with it. But thirsting after it, calling for it, inability to longer go without it, a weeping after God, where do we see it? There are still those who thirst, but has not their number diminished? And is not this very lack of real thirsting after God and after righteousness the banal danger of our times?

This is occasioned by sin. Sin is the cause that, unless God shows mercy, the stimulus of this thirst scarcely operates. At times it requires special grace strongly to revive it again. Such grace operated in the days of the apostles, and again in the days of the Reformation. In these times this thirst operates, O, so weakly; and O, among so few; and even with these, so faintly. Let us be grateful to God, if at any time in our own heart we perceive something of this real thirsting after the living God. Thousands upon thousands live and die, without ever having

known anything about it. How great then is the grace that has been shown to us!

Prophets and Psalmists, Jesus and apostles lived in a mountainous country. This accounts for the frequent references in Scripture to water and thirst. "With Thee is the fountain of life." "All my springs are in Thee." "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the Waters." "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst." Such is also the striking saying, regarding the valley of mulberries in Psalm 84. Mulberries ripen most lusciously in hottest, sunniest spots. Thus the valley of mulberries is the image of those conditions in life, when everything in us languishes, makes us apprehensive, and chokes us with grief. When the heat of day and the heat of battle make us pant for air and breath, when we can do nothing more, and fear overtakes us, lest, unless God helps us, we shall faint by the way.

There is certainly abundance of water in mountainous districts which flows down from the snow-fields and leaps down in murmuring brooks. But it is unequally divided. At one time it threatens to drag one down in its wild course; while again one travels a barren path for hours, without finding a single drop. And then there is but one relief, which is a tiny stream that trickles down the mountain side. The traveler refreshes himself with this, and as he goes on again, his burning thirst is quenched. Hence in the valley of mulberries the Psalmist speaks of two forms of relief. One is that in the midst of scorching heat one comes unexpectedly to such a little stream. The other is that rainclouds gather overhead,

which cast broad shadows, and so afford the traveler protection from the heat of the sun. Thus it is in the valley in the midst of the mountains, and metaphorically for God's child in the midst of troubles. When, languishing and hard-pressed he can do nothing more, God is a fountain to him, and it is God who stretches out broadly the rain-clouds over him, which cover him with their shade. "When they pass through the valley of mulberry trees, they make him a well; yea, the raincloud shall cover them with blessings" (Psalm 84:6. Dutch version. *vide* R. V.).

Thus to worship, in the living God and in his Christ, the Fountain of life, has become our comforting manner of metaphorical speech. And in order to grasp the rich significance of this metaphor, one should see for himself what, in mountain villages, the village fountain or well is. In these villages, which are mostly very small, there is generally only one well, one fountain, in the midst of the village. From this single fountain every villager drinks. In the morning and at sundown every person comes to this well, to fill his pitcher with water, and carry home the precious supply. Horses and cattle are driven thither to drink from this same well. Soiled clothes are carried there, in order, after being washed clean, to be taken back home. This makes the village well the center of the entire village life. Everyone gathers around it. At that well people meet one another. There they converse together. There the common life is lived. And thus the whole community feels that this single well is indeed the fountain of life, for the entire village.

If in such a place the Psalm is sung, that God is the fountain of life, everyone understands it, the delightful imagery appeals to them all, and the pregnant thought enters into every soul, that without God we would perish in our miseries from thirst, and that God alone is the center, in whom all they who fear his Name are one, and together live one life.

This has been brought closer yet in Christ. In Christ the Fountain of life has been borne into human life and into human nature. There are no two fountains of life, one in God and the other in Christ, but it is the one Fountain of Divine life, which springs up in the Father, has come close to us in the Son, and by the Holy Ghost flows into our heart. When therefore Christ is not surely worshipped as God, and knees are not bent before him as God, Christianity is gone. This One Christ is the Fountain of life for the entire, large village, if we may so express it, of the Church of the Lord on earth. No one has the water of life in his own home, but every morning and every evening every child of God must go out to this one fountain, which is in Christ, to fill the pitcher of his soul against the long day and the long night. This Fountain never disappoints. It always flows. Water of life is there to be found every moment with fresh supplies. There is never a shortage of it for anyone. There is abundance for all. And though our eye does not see it, invisibly throughout the whole world every true believer's thirst is quenched from this one Fountain.

Thereby this one Fountain of life in Christ is and remains the center for the life of all people and the fellowship for all hearts. All sorts of

distances and separations in society and churches hold us apart; but spiritually and unseen, all that are born of God, gather together day by day at this One Fountain of life. And it is the one Christ who from his abundance quenches the thirst of all. And from being really one in Christ, and from this real life from this one Fountain, in spite of differences, believers on earth derive each day anew, the power of unity by which to realize and to work out the kingdom of heaven on the earth.

But it must be an act of faith. It says: "They make of him a well." It does not go of itself. Thousands upon thousands, alas, come and go, without ever having known, admired, and quenched their thirst from, this Fountain. The act of faith alone brings one into fellowship with this Fountain. Christ wants to be accepted. By faith we must make him our Well. It is with this also as it is in the mountain village. Sometimes there lives a rich man in such a village. He has dug a well in his own yard for himself. He has no need, therefore, mornings and evenings to go to the village well. But the others, the poor people, have no such well of their own. Hence it also applies here: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they go out after the Fountain of life, hence theirs is the kingdom of God.

69

"BY MY GOD I LEAP OVER A WALL."

When God had created the first human pair, no dangers threatened them in Paradise. Neither the elements of nature, nor wild animals, nor climate, nor any disease, exposed them to any