

## “SONGS IN THE NIGHT.”

Night is a mystery. For most people sleep is a going out from life, in order, in the course of seven or eight hours, to come back to it. When they fall asleep, they are gone. And when the hour-hand on the dial points, say some seven or more hours further on, they arise and resume their part in life. There is at most an occasional remembrance of a dream, but for the rest it is all a blank. A third part of life is spent in sleep. At thirty years of age a man has practically lived but twenty. The remaining ten years have passed away in unconsciousness.

But sleep serves a purpose. We retire weary in body and mind and with new strength we arise. As far as we know, we were inactive in sleep. We did not think, nor observe, nor will, nor work. This entire cessation of activity is the real ordinance of night. As long as we are in health and in full possession of our powers, and not overburdened with cares, we sleep, undisturbed by outward things, in this way and in no other.

Why this has been so ordained, we do not know. For though we say that we become weary through work, that our strength is exhausted and demands rest to recuperate, it means nothing. For at once we ask: Why this exhaustion of strength? He, after whose Image we are created, never wearies. The heavenly hosts of angels do not sleep. Of the new Jerusalem we read: “There shall be no more night.” We can imagine a being, who does not exhaust his strength and therefore needs no sleep. Why God appointed life for us with the

continual exhaustion of its powers and their restoration by sleep remains a secret. But though no one understands it, this Divine ordinance has not gone forth without a purpose and a wise disposal. Does not the Scripture say that in the night our reins instruct us, and does not this impart an higher significance to sleep? Undoubtedly such was the case with David. But this is by no means an ordinary experience. And even if this were the case, yet for the sake of spiritual instruction in the soul, this regularly returning period of seven long hours would be out of all proportion. Only think how large a part of the day it is from nine o'clock in the morning until four in the afternoon. And yet it comprises but seven hours, and these we sleep away out of every twenty-four.

This is modified by sickness, by pressing cares or old age, three causes which either shorten, disturb or delay sleep, so that a part of the night is sleepless. By either of these causes night obtains a different significance, but only because sleep can not be courted, or is too much interrupted or too early ended. Hence dreams are not without some significance. Dreams can discover us to ourselves. They can suggest helpful thoughts of life. They can afford us moments of fellowship with our dead, which gives us melancholy delight. God can reveal something to us in dreams. In spite of all this, most dreams are forgotten on waking. And when at rare times they leave a memory, nothing but vague, vanishing and mixed images float before the mind. Even the petition from the old evening song, "In sleeping let me wait on Thee; in dreams

be Thou my joy," does not determine, save in rarest instances, the content of our dreams.

This does not deny, however, that without our knowing it, and even while we sleep the Spirit of God ministers to our spirit and builds up our inner life. Also, in connection with this, the mystery of our existence by night includes certain effective ministries of God. But we can not deal with them, because they go on in our unconsciousness. At times, on awaking, we may be able to solve certain difficulties which troubled us the night before, and he who fears the Lord will thank him for this. But even then it is always a work of God, which we do not understand, and of which we can only say with the Psalmist (118:23), "This is the Lord's doing. It is marvelous in our eyes."

Our existence by night only obtains a conscious significance when, through sickness, care or old age our sleep is broken. With respect to this the Scripture declares: "In the night our reins instruct us." Says the Psalmist (77:6), In the night I commune with mine own heart. Isaiah adds (26:9), With my soul have I desired Thee in the night. And Job declares (35:10), God is my Maker, who giveth songs in the night. This provides a school of learning which we should take more seriously into account. Sleeplessness is a trying experience, which affects all of the next day. But it is a discipline which leads either to sin or to glory. It all depends upon the manner in which these sleepless hours are spent. If wakefulness leads to nothing but gloomy and peevish complaint by day and to a rebellious turning over of self on the bed by night, it works sin. But when such sleepless hours are spent in the

endeavor to confirm and make more real the fellowship with God, the inner life of the soul is strengthened and upbuilt. Moreover, such godly motions are medicine against sleeplessness itself, while rebellious restlessness fosters and prolongs it. To fight God in such an hour makes restlessness, it gives rise to feelings of oppression and renders sleep more and more impossible. While fellowship with God at such a time brings rest and calm to troubled minds and sleep to weary eyelids.

But this is only a by-product. The main point is that a sleepless night is the time in which to seek the Lord, and to test the word of the Psalmist: "It is good for me to hold me fast by God." The strenuous activities of life, the constant noise on every side, and the absorbing occupations of the mind by day, hold us off and estrange us from God. But in the quiet hours of night nothing at all diverts us. The darkness is restful to the eyes. The stillness of night puts the ear on the retired list. No work of any sort engages us. Hurry has given place to calm. Nothing, indeed, diverts. There is no one near to trouble us or to detain us. All the conditions are there for undisturbed fellowship with God. Such hours of night invite us, more than any other, to enter into the sanctuary of the Most High. The midnight watch has something of Sabbath stillness about it, which is inaugurated by the evening reading of God's Word, and by the evening prayer, when on bended knees the soul was poured out before God. At length we are at rest. And now the cares and anxieties of the day must either be resolutely put aside or we must enter

upon such close fellowship with God that he carries them for us.

All this, however, is not entirely in our own hands. It is not enough that we think of God and make our approach to him. Communion proceeds from both sides. Unless God draws near to us, we can have no close fellowship with him. To think: God is ever ready to wait on me, it merely depends upon me whether or not I will meet him, does not indicate sufficient humility or sense of dependence. Thinking of God is not fellowship with God. True fellowship is far more devout and far more intimately personal. And as often as we have true fellowship with God, it is a grace and a benefit for which we owe him thanks. It is not that we are so good and so devout as to lift up our heart unto God. But it is rather Divine Compassion that condescends to us to bless us and to make us rich with the experience of his presence.

If before sleep the latest feeling is one of delight in the tenderness of the Lord, and if the first conscious thought on awaking in the morning of itself goes out after God, the gain is very great. This makes us to be accustomed to God, and prepares us for the night of the grave, when there shall be no more interruption in our fellowship with him.

At night, on our beds, when we can not sleep, we feel our helplessness. Much more so, indeed, than when by day garments adorn our person, when our word makes our influence a power and when we labor to make or maintain our position in life. We lie prostrate on our bed and stand no longer upright. We are well nigh motionless.

And this very insignificance of our appearance there renders us but the more fit to meet our Lord.

And then God becomes great to us. We realize his saying that he is Our Maker. His faithful-nesses present themselves to us. The arms of everlasting compassion support and encircle us. Sadness of heart gives place to joy. Anxious thoughts become calm and glad. The soul becomes attuned to the worship of the eternal love of God. And when his Holy Spirit thus ministers to our spiritual needs and imparts his quickening touch, the hymn of praise rises from the heart and with us it is literal fact that God, our Maker, giveth us songs in the night.

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“I CRY, BUT THOU HEAREST NOT.”

To get no hearing, as one stands at the closed door, and it is not opened, makes one anxious. He then knocks harder, and when this brings no reply, he calls, and calls louder and louder. And when still no sound is heard, and there comes no answering voice, fear strikes the heart lest some accident has befallen child or brother whom he knows is near.

To get no hearing, when in distress one has called for help, and has waited and waited for a response and it did not come, how often has it turned courage into dismay.

To get no hearing! What restlessness it brings when fear is harbored whether it is well with child, or brother far off, and one writes and writes again, and no reply follows, and a telegram is sent with prepayment for an answer and no answer comes.

To get no hearing! It makes the heart faint