

he needs. Not only the most-special Providence, but also the most special self-revelation of his Divine Majesty in the mirror of the life of each soul. And when it comes to this, but also only then, there rises from the heart of itself spontaneously the jubilant exclamation of worship: "O God my God."

80

### "THE LORD IS THY SHADE."

Not only the child, but also he who is older, would rather look at pictures and prints, than read; or in reading, at least, would like assistance for his representation. Hence the preference of our fathers for illustrated Bibles, and the new demand for books and periodicals with illustrations. For a long time there was little love for illustrated books, partly because the plates were poor and partly because the readers were over-wise. But since we have become a little more natural, and photography and photo-engraving in less than a quarter of a century have improved the illustration to unknown fineness and beauty, the old love for seeing is revived again, and by looking at pictures, our representation has been uncommonly enriched. And now everything is embellished with illustrations in a good way and in a sinful way. The power in letting things be seen is recognized again. Even newspapers seek strength in this. At present it is still the picture with the Word. Gradually it will become ever more picture and ever less Word, until in the end exaggeration will avenge itself and the more just relation will return.

The main point with it all is, that our nature has been so created and disposed, that it prefers immediate sight. And that it carries this even into the spiritual desire to see, rather than to arrive at insight by exercise of thought, is not a defect in us, neither is it a result of sin, but a Divine instinct. Of the heavenly glory it is not prophesied that the redeemed will be subtle thinkers, but that they manifest themselves as children of God in this particular also, that they desire to see the Eternal Being, and that they surely shall enjoy this clear, beatific vision.

Philip's request: "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us," was but the naive expression of this deep desire, and Jesus' answer to this question shows, that the entire Christian religion can be capitulated under this viewpoint of sight. The Apostles gloried in the fact that they had seen and beheld the Word of life. In prophecy the vision had prepared the way for this seeing. And when the apostles portray the glory that is to come, they prophesy that now we see as in a glass darkly, but that then we shall see face to face, and that in this seeing we shall know even as we are known. Not reading, not reasoning, no, but seeing, and clear vision shall constitute heavenly bliss. And John adds: "Beloved, it is not yet made manifest what we shall be, but we know . . . that we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is." This seeing is cultivated by picture and print, and seeing spiritual things is aided by the emblem— The Cross, the All-seeing eye, the emblems of faith, hope and love. The catacombs of the early Christians are full of such emblems.

That nature, and life itself, is full of imagery, is of still greater significance. The Bible, more than any other book, employs it, by which to show us the spiritual. Apart from picture and print, and aside from the emblem, it is this imagery which does not stand by the side of the Word, but enters into the Word, and shows things through the Word itself. The true vine, the good shepherd, the Lamb of God, the sower who sows the seed, and so much more, it is all imagery borrowed from nature and from life, which God employs in his Word, by which to bring the spiritual nearer to us in greater clearness.

The Scripture does the same thing with respect to the Most Highest, whereby to bring the view of the Eternal Being closer to us. This Eternal Being comes near to us in the imagery of: The Lord is our Rock, the Lord is our High Tower. He is our Shield. He is our Keeper. He is the Father in the house of the many mansions. He is our King, seated upon the throne of his glory. And among these images is also this beautiful one: "The Lord is thy Shade" (Psalm 121:5). Isaiah uses it when on his knees in worship he exclaims: "O Lord, Thou art my God, . . . Thou hast been a strength to the poor, . . . a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, for as heat through a thick cloud, so Thou shalt bring down the noise of tyrants" (Is. 25. Dutch version). And likewise reads the song of Hamaaloth: "The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand" (Ps. 121:5).

This figure of speech is beautiful because it is gentle and tender. It is not a revelation of power. No strong arm here bares itself. There is scorch-

ing heat such as in the desert of the East can prostrate life. And see, quietly and with majesty, a thick cloud passes over the desert levels, and sunlight no more blinds, and sunheat no more burns, and the traveler breathes again, refreshed and restored by the Divine shadow from above. Shade! We sons of the West do not know the glory of this short word to the man in the East. With the exception of dog-days, the sun is no fierce tyrant to us, to make life a burden. To us the sun is a lovely something, which we seek. The sun refreshes and cherishes us. We love his light. But in the land where prophets prophesied and psalmists sang, where Jesus walked about with his disciples, everyone seeks by means of thick walls, heavy hangings, high trees and long white garments, to escape the fierce tyranny of the sun. In hot seasons everything there burns, glows, and is scorched. And in level deserts man and beast are helplessly surrendered to the heat of the sand and the scorching rays from above. Everything calls and prays for shade. And all this, applied by metaphor to the struggle of God's people, and to the battle of life of his servants, inspired both prophet and Psalmist to refresh Israel with the glorious word of comfort: The Lord thy God is thy Shade!

Thy shade against what? Against the heat of the day metaphorically descriptive of the burden of the daily task, of the heat and fierceness with which startling opposition, adversity and persecution overtake you. The Lord is thy Shade is allied with the other image: the Lord is thy Shield, but has another tendency. When you have to do with an enemy, a persecutor, whom

you know, whom you see before you, and whose assault is upon you, you need a shield, and he who in such threatening moments has sought his shield with God, has always found it there. But it is entirely different when heat brings burnings which can not be grasped, which from the mysterious background of our lot in life, from covert opposition, as an elementary force press themselves upon us from all sides, and make us distressed, and which we can not resist. Such is the case with the Arab in the desert, when the heat of the sun makes the sand burn under his feet and the roof of his mouth to be parched. And so it is with the people of God, when opposition arises on every hand, when here it is water that threatens inundation, and there it is the whirlwind that carries everything before it. And so it is in the personal life when because of the will of God, and for his sake, one trouble brings another, and one is driven from trial to trial, and the heat of battle steadily grows in strength and at length you have to succumb.

And in such an hour when, as we would say, the water comes up to the lips, but which makes the Scripture, which is Eastern in its imagery, speak of a scorching heat from the sun which threatens utter prostration, then the Lord is the Comforter, since he is then your shade which covers you, and makes you breathe again. In accordance with the sacred imagery this can be done by means of a cloud which intercepts the heat of the glowing sun, but it can also be done in a more tender way. In the desert a father may take the side of the sun and so make himself a shade for his child that walks with him. And

this is what the Psalmist suggests, when he sings: "The Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand." And thus the Divine tenderness of highest love mingles itself in the comforting.

God leaves you not alone. The journey through the wilderness can not be spared you. The heat must burn. But the Lord looks after you. He comes to you. His approach to you is very close. He takes a stand between the heat of the sun and you. He takes you by the hand. He covers you with the shade of his majestic greatness. And so you go on your way rejoicing, refreshed by God's love and covered by his holy shade.

All this is poetry. We know it well. But though it be such, this does not make it fiction. There is that which no eye has seen and no ear has heard and has not entered the heart of man, but which, already, here God gives to be understood, to be seen and to be enjoyed by those who have been initiated into his secret walk. God can be far removed from us. He can also be close at hand. This depends on his grace. This depends upon the inward condition of the soul. This much is certain, that when he is close at hand and the heat of the day threatens to bring prostration, then he is your shade, and you feel the cool of it on your right hand. The cooling effect which the shade of God brings, must be felt. It must be felt in the soul. And if you do not feel it, may it not be because you are not near unto God?

81

**"HE INCLINES HIS EAR UNTO ME."**

The ear is inclined toward someone, either when our hearing is impaired, or when he to whom we