

that while on one side he still sinks away in misery, yet under it all and with it all he remains conscious of the blessed presence of the Holy Ghost. That the Holy Spirit does not go away, that he does not allow himself to be sent away, that he does not give us up, but continues to dwell with us, and to take us as we are, is his infinite, his Divine love. That he did not merely "turn in to tarry for the night," but that he abides with us forever, is our joyous bliss, and the glorious richness of our comfort.

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### "ACCUSTOM NOW THYSELF TO HIM."

The exhortation that we should accustom ourselves to God, carries a reproach that brings shame. It is as though one would say to a child: "Accustom yourself to your mother!" This might be said with regard to a stepmother, stepfather or stepbrother, but we do not accustom ourselves to our own mother, who has carried us under her heart. We love her with all the fidelity and affection of the heart of a child.

We only accustom ourselves to what is strange to us, or what by estrangement has become so. When, therefore, we are exhorted to accustom ourselves to God, it implies that our Father who is in heaven has become a stranger to us; that this estrangement is still a barrier in the way of our fellowship with God; and that we should endeavor, the sooner the better, to accustom ourselves again to God, in order that this obstacle might be removed.

With God, of course, this does not mean, what it does with us, when we speak of becoming accustomed to one. We speak of it most frequently when we first come in touch with some one who acts strangely, a man of strong peculiarities, who is unprepossessing. Then it is our duty not to be repelled by him, but indulgently to seek common points of interest with him, and to adapt ourselves to his strange manner. We also speak of accustoming ourselves to one, who either by a difference in development is far above us, or who by social difference has another outlook upon life. For this makes a difference in inclinations and sympathies, in mental activity and choice of vocation in life. He is interested in what does not interest you. And in the great drama of life you play in an altogether different act from his. Thus to accustom oneself to another, in all such cases, means, that we restrain ourselves, that we smooth down the sharp edges of our own character, and that constrained by the dictates of love and the necessity of social intercourse, we enter into his life, in order to understand him, to sympathize with him, and gradually to adopt him into the circle of our affections.

All this of itself is entirely different with respect to the Lord our God. With him we have to do with our God and our Creator, with our Lord and our King, with our Father who is in heaven. Everything in him that appears strange to us is our own fault, our own sin; it is sign and token that we are wrong; that we are corrupt

in our sensations and feelings, and that we are astray in the deliberations of our hearts. If we were what we ought to be, there would be no estrangement from God, and no need of the exhortation to accustom ourselves again to God. Hence the saying: "Accustom now thyself to him," is a judgment that is passed on us, a complaint against our mode of life, and at the same time it is a sacred admonition to become a child again in fellowship with our Father.

What is unbelief in these our days? From what cause is the quiet, firm confidence in what God has revealed unto us, shaken with many, even among the faithful? One first speaks of impenetrable secrets; then of problems which defy the understanding: gradually it is doubted whether revelation is correct, until, at length, in the face of Scripture and experience the human interpretation of life is boldly posited as the only valid one. What this amounts to is, that feeling strange to God and to his Word, there is no willingness to get accustomed to him, to his doings and to his Word. On the contrary it is demanded that God shall change himself and show himself to be conform to our thought. If we accustom ourselves to him we must change and reform ourselves until we are meet for God. But doubt and unbelief demands that our confession of God shall be modified in such a way, that it shall turn out a God for us who shall suit us.

This struggle was not so sharp and bitter at one time, because at least in its main outlines

the Bible interpretation of life was counted valid in science, in public opinion, and therefore in education, and in the better forms of social intercourse. He who in those better days believed, was carried by the general tenor of life, and there was no occasion for offense, not even among the younger people. But all this has changed. Every fundamental idea about God, creation, the fall, the Atonement, life after death and the last judgment, which was once common property, has been given up by science, has become uncertain in public opinion, has been banished from education, and dismissed as topics of conversation from among more serious-minded people. And not this alone, but gradually an entirely different system of fundamental ideas has been put in place of it. An altogether different confession has arisen, a different catechism has found entrance. Broadly ramified, the rationalistic interpretation of life now stands in public opinion side by side with the Christian Confession.

Thus to the estrangement from God which is occasioned by sin, a second estrangement has been added, which tempts us to adopt an interpretation of life, which openly conflicts with the plan, doings and wisdom of God, as revealed in his Word. Everything in God has thereby become strange to many people. In no single particular do they feel at home with God or in his Word. The child has ceased to know his Father. Hence the call: "Accustom now thyself to God" is most serious and doubly significant. It now means: Disen-

gage yourself from the tie that binds you to the wisdom of the world, and with all your mind and heart enter again into the plan and most holy thoughts of God.

Do not take this in a philosophical sense. Interpret it practically in behalf of life. Especially with regard to the mystery of suffering, to which Eliphaz applied it, even though mistakenly, in the case of Job. Suffering would be no mystery amid the hardships of life, if it were always carefully measured out to individuals, according to their misdoings against God or man. For then nothing would be evident in suffering save righteous retribution, and for the rest every one's lot in life would be alike. This thought certainly implies the unchangeable fact of eternal retribution, in accordance with every man's deeds, whether they be good or evil. The mistake, however, is, that this retribution of eternal justice is confused with the mystery of suffering here on earth; so that suffering is taken individually, and estimated by each personal manner of life and behavior. This makes us stumble on the hard fact, that we are offended at the godless man who prospers, and even worse, that our soul smarts with indignation at the sight of a true child of God, a noble character, a faithful servant of Christ, who, as we would say, did nothing wrong, overwhelmed by waves of affliction. That men might do so, we understand. When a tyrant honors the godless, and harasses the children of God, we think it dreadful, because it is always

God who allows it; but we can submit to this. But that God himself inflicts this in sickness, and by means of cruel death, is and remains at this viewpoint a stumbling block which one can not get over, and which has killed much rootless faith. What accounts for this, save that God's thoughts are entirely different from our thoughts, and that instead of accustoming ourselves to his plan, we stubbornly maintain our interpretation of suffering in opposition to him.

With God, individual retribution is connected with the last judgment, and not with sentence passed by an earthly judge, and far less still with suffering, which he brings upon us. According to the teaching of Scripture, sin is no evil that cleaves to single individuals, but a poison that has entered into our whole race. The creation of man was not individual, but in it was created a race, all mankind, which, in all ages and among all nations forms one whole. Not a large number of people that only afterwards by laws and other ways are counted as one whole, but our human race; from which individuals proceed, and to which they belong as twigs and leaves to a tree. And to save the race of man which he created, God brought suffering into the world of men, as an antidote for the poison of sin. With him suffering is a cup of sacred medicine which he administers not to the individual person, but to our race, in order to counteract the poison of sin. And now he selects priests and priestesses who are called of him, to administer the sacrament of

suffering to the world. If he elected godless people only for this purpose, they would harden themselves against suffering, and the godly would pride themselves on being spared. The medicine would do no good. It would bring spiritual petrification. It would bring loss for gain.

No, to bear suffering, he calls first of all upon the best, the most godly, the most noble, his prophets and his martyrs. Thereby the holy operation of the medicine goes forth and accomplishes that whereunto he has appointed it. The Cross explains it. God so loved the world, that he gave it his only Begotten Son. Personally Jesus stands entirely outside of sin. He is not only the most godly, the noblest, the best of the children of men, but he is the Son of Man, and upon him comes the burden of suffering as upon no other man. And from no suffering among the children of men has there gone forth an operation unto salvation as from his Cross. And therefore, the Cross expresses the thought of God, the appointment of God, the wisdom of God. Whosoever would understand his own sorrows and the suffering of the world, must accustom himself to this appointment, to this thought and to this wisdom of God. And he who does this has heavenly comforting, yea, he can give thanks that the cup of suffering has not passed him by. He feels that he is himself a priest, in order that following after the One High priest, he may, in the name of the Lord, administer the sacrament of suffering.

“THE SPIRIT OF MAN IS A CANDLE OF  
THE LORD.”

To be near unto God is a luxury of soul which by grace can be our portion also in unconsciousness. When a child of God that enjoyed the secret walk is put under an anesthetic for the sake of an operation, it does not break fellowship between his heart and God. The same is true of a swoon. In high fever when the heated blood over-stimulates the brain, and delirium ensues, the relation with God remains equally intact. Even sleep, which for many hours deprives us of self-knowledge, may not be taken otherwise, and this entirely apart even from our consciousness in dreams. And yet in each of these conditions, from our side, as far as conscious life goes, being near unto God is inactive. But consciousness of fellowship with God is not, therefore, lost. Being wakened by a gentle touch, it is felt again and resumed. Consciousness of this fellowship has only become inactive. It is with this as with our capacity of sight. This, too, in sleep is not gone, but its at rest. Electric light illustrates this clearly. When the button is turned, everything is light, and when it is turned again, everything is dark. The power remains the same. It only draws itself back from shining.

From God's side, on the other hand, fellowship with the soul of his child operates continually; even under narcotic influence, in a swoon