

unsanctified utterance, which is observed in you, and then falsely and slanderously saying all manner of evil against you. To be near unto God and to bear this trouble, belong together. In such a way however that it must never be courted; the world must never be incited to it by your desire after the martyr crown. Only what is altogether natural and springs up of itself is inwardly true and has merit before God. And then blessedness ensues not only later on but is already tasted in the midst of oppression, and then God's angels see and God's children perceive already here, that in the midst of trouble the Spirit of glory, the Spirit of God resteth upon you.

88

ONE AFTER THIS MANNER, AND ANOTHER AFTER THAT.

There is an evil among devout friends of the Lord, which must be resisted. In spiritual things each desires to impose a law of his own upon the other. Piety is said to be bound to a given form. One's own way of piety must be the standard for every one else. Minor differences may be tolerated, but in the main the same sort of piety must manifest itself in all God's children alike. And so it follows that the piety which they practice is the standard for all their spiritual examination and criticism.

That pride may have a part in this, can not be doubted. But in this instance, at least at

the beginning, pride is not the motive. It is rather that a beginning is made from the earnest desire to belong to the people of God, partly as an assurance of one's own salvation, but more for the sake of taking an active part in the work of sanctifying the name of the Lord, and of advancing the interests of his Kingdom.

In the family circle, or outside of it, one meets with those who carry the impression of tender piety, and who are reputed in general to be very godly. Such people are envied. O, if one could only himself be such. And so he sought their company, watched them, observed what they did, and what they did not do, listened to their conversation, and so gradually formed an idea of what he himself should be, in order to be initiated equally closely, as one of God's dear children into his secret walk. Thereby a definite type of piety was brought before his mind. According to this fixed type, he sought to reform his life in the world, his life before believers, and his life before God. And when he finally succeeded in this, he rejoiced as one who had gained a prize, was over-rejoiced when he became adopted by "the pious" as one of their own, and now is fully convinced that every one else must come in the selfsame way, must correspond to the selfsame type, must have the selfsame experiences, yea, that in their language and expressions they must manifest the very thing which as an ideal had long escaped the censor himself, but which at length he had obtained.

Our fathers used to say, that this is putting oneself in the place of the Word of God. Not from oneself, nor from any saint whatever, but exclusively from God's Word the standard must be derived which determines genuine childship, and the true gold of our godliness. These censors did not deny this; only they tried to show that God's Word posits the claims and marks of true grace, which they themselves imposed upon you, and which they sternly applied in their own circle. But one thing they forgot, and this became the cause of all this injurious spiritual unnaturalness; they did not see, that God's word, as in every thing else allows play-room in the spiritual life for very great diversity, and in this very diversity seeks strength.

This does not mean to say, that the Scripture acknowledges two classes of spiritual children. There is but one class, but in this one true class the Scripture aims at an almost endless diversity, an ever new variegation, an ever surprising individuality, change and modification in all sorts of ways; not only in the groups, but in each separate child of God. It is with this as in the world of flowers. The rose constitutes a class of its own. No one will mistake a rose for a lily, or take a field violet for a rose. To be a real rose, it must exhibit certain characteristics, or else it is not a rose. But what endless variety there is between the monthly rose and the swamp-rose, the tea-rose and the Alpine-rose.

What varieties again in each of these groups what difference again in growth, leaf, color and in fragrance. Does not every more richly developed rose address us as a something by itself, with a charm and beauty all its own?

Such is the case in the whole creation of God. He calls every star in the firmament by name, and this implies the expression of an own being.. And on the earth every mountain-line differs, and every animal, even every insect, as well as every vegetable and food that springs from the ground. And in like manner every one of the children of men is "after his own kind;" every race, every tribe, every people, every family and every family-member differs from every other. No mother is ever mistaken in her children. And so it is also in the spiritual. The Holy Spirit divideth to every man severally as he will, (I Cor. 12:11) or to express it still more strongly: one can not be a standard for an other. Paul who was himself an Apostle refuses to be this. And he declares with utmost emphasis: Every man, i. e. each individual, hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that (I Cor. 7:7).

So it is, and so it must be, because our spiritual life, if it shall be real, is not our work, but a work of God. It is a difference as between writing and printing. What comes from the press is in all the copies of the same work precisely alike. Every man's handwriting on the other hand exhibits a character of its own. It is the difference between the products of nature and the

factory. A factory manufactures after a fixed model, everything alike; in nature in which God works, everything differs and everything exhibits a something of its own.

If now the spiritual life of piety is forced into a selfsame mould, the work of man counteracts the work of God; then there ensues spiritual unnaturalness, painted flowers, but no real flowers; then no virtue goes out from it, and this sort of imprinted piety does not bring one nearer to God, but rather builds up a wall of separation between the soul and God. Then there is spiritual dullness, depression and gloom, whereas God's children should glory in their freedom, and by reason of this free, happy feeling of the breaking of bands they should jubilate with a song of angels in the heart. The lark which meets the sun with a song, not the snail which marks its slimy track on the hard clay, is the image of the redeemed in Christ.

Only let not liberty here be mistaken for license. Every bird sings with a voice of its own, but received that voice from God. And so has God, who created you, implanted and increated in the hidden depths of your being that peculiar something from which your character, your person and likewise your own form of childship springs. Everything in us also is organically connected. The mingling of blood, the sensitive life of nerves, the relation between understanding and imagination, the stringing of the heart, the embroidery of tendencies and sympathies, the

tone-scale of the conscience, susceptibility to emotions and sensations, education, environment, business, all this together puts a peculiar stamp upon our whole spiritual being. One is after this manner, and another after that. And in connection with this the Holy Spirit divides his spiritual gifts, without mistake, and not as we would have it, or as another would suggest, but even as he wills. Spiritual uniformity after a given pattern is here unthinkable. As God clothes the lilies of the field differently, so he weaves an own spiritual garment for each one of his children. Uniformity must be discarded, and our spiritual robe must unfold itself singly before God and men.

As every precious stone has a light of its own, and no jasper can be an emerald, so in one's heart the diamond of childship must sparkle with its own brightness. Then only will the secret walk with God be free, and rich, and broad, for only so do we appear before our God and Father in the form, in the spiritual robe, and with the spiritual jewels, which he has given his children. To draw near unto God is not going in with the crowd, but it is the approach to God in this own, this particular, this personal, this peculiar way, which God has appointed for us. A mother knows each of her children by their own voice, even when she does not see them; and so does our Father in heaven know each of his children by their own voice, which he draws out from the soul.

“A SOUND OF GENTLE STILLNESS.”

“To be near unto God” is not alike in every case, but, even as with everything else that touches life intimately, it is with “one after this manner, and with another after that.” They who have drifted away in the stream of methodism, have not realized this, at least they have not acknowledged it, and hence the danger in methodism of barrenness in spiritual things. Always doing outside things, always zealous labor and toil for Jesus, but so little sound of gentle stillness, in which the secret walk is enjoyed.

Because of our sin there is always danger of fatal onesidedness, even in holiest things. There is sickly mysticism, which sits down by itself and accomplishes nothing. And by the side of it methodism, which is never at rest, and which in being over-busy at length has neither ear nor eye for the inwardness of the holy walk of a saved soul with God. And therefore, the mystic has something to learn from the methodist, and the methodist from the mystic. Only from the impulse of both does blessed harmony arise.

By itself a mystical search after the Divine is by no means yet Christian. The heathen in Asia practice it, even on a large scale, and though it has mostly disappeared from Islam, it has been practiced there, and it is still known among the Sufi in Persia and by the Dervishes in Asia Minor. But to bear the Christian stamp nearness to God must be through the atonement and relation with the mediator. “The Father and I