

“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

will come and make our abode with them" (John 14:23). And this excludes from the search after God and from being near unto him, the always killing uniformity. In this sacred domain imitation leads to nothing but selfdeceit. All mysticism of soul, which seeks and finds God, realizes that there is fixedness and unvariable sameness in God's unchangeableness, but the reflection of what is Unique and Eternal in God, which is cast into the human soul, cannot be and never is the same, because one soul differs from another soul in nature, disposition and utterance. For this reason every soul has a history of its own, from which special needs and talents arise.

Hence it is not corect to infer from Elijah's experience at the cave, that the Lord only reveals himself in "A sound of gentle stillness" (I Kings 19:12 R. V. Marg-reading). The commission that was given to Elijah, shows differently. He was commissioned to annoint Jehu, to which was added the saying: "Him that escapeth the Sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: And him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay" (I Kings 19:17). There never was a bolder fanatic than Jehu. Not in the fire, and not in the storm, but in a sound of gentle stillness, does not say by any means, that Moses did not find God in the fire of Horeb, nor David in the storm of persecution by Saul. It only states, that for Elijah, at that moment and in the mood in which he found himself, the heat had first to be cooled, and the storm in his heart had first to spend itself, before he was able to meet God in a sound of gentle stillness, and to receive his prophetic commission. On Carmel it was fire and it was

storm, and if ever and anywhere, it was on Carmel that Elijah beheld the presence of the majesty of the Lord.

The impossibility of making a rule regarding nearness to God, that shall apply to all cases, extends so far, that a selfsame rule for all of life, even with one and the selfsame child of God, is unthinkable. He who is old and full of days has known the years of manly strength, and back of these the years of youth, and back of these again the days of childhood. And let him speak, who during these four periods of his life has known something of the sacred, hidden walk with God, and he will confess that in each of these four periods it was different. In general indeed there was progress, but yet in such a way, that now as man he longs at times for the return of the days of his childhood, that he might the better understand the saying of Jesus regarding children: "Of such is the Kingdom of heaven."

This makes it such a profanation of the sacred, when we parents have no eye for the peculiar character of the life of the soul of a child, and by our heavy oppressive forms ignore the simplicity, the brightness and enthusiasm of the child. The spiritual training of a child starts with faith that God operates in the child, or at least can operate in him. But at the same time, that the Holy spirit doeth this "as he wills" (I Cor. 12:11). Without this spiritual insight it is impossible to be a mother, father, older sister or brother, yea, even a nurse-maid or a teacher of children, in its higher sense. Love of children wrongly applied blights so much in the heart of the child which otherwise would bloom

luxuriantly. And as with the child, so it is with the lad and the young daughter. In every period of life there is an own form of life of the soul with its own needs. He who understands this pleases and disciplines, supports and strengthens the child, and leads him to God, and so makes gains for God. While he who always endeavors to apply the model of his own condition of soul to that of the child mars development and dwarfs it.

It is not otherwise with the great difference which God has ordained between man and woman. There are men who make one think of a woman, and among women in our times ambition gains ground not only to develop themselves more independently, which is right, but also to obtain this development in a form like to man; which goes against Divine appointment.. But apart from these eccentricities, every one feels, and knows that the soul-life of women bears another stamp, and is differently strung of God, than the soul-life of men. Perceptions, powers, feelings, talents differ. The lily is not inferior to the palm-tree, but is has received another beauty, another glory of God. The same sun in God,s heaven works different effects upon one plant than upon another.

And so it is with regard to being near to God on the part of the man, and being near to God on the part of the woman. It is the one Sun of righteousness which works differently upon each. The mother, the father, who looks upon son and daughter as one, and does not treat them differently sometimes spoils so much which with more intelligent insight would bloom gloriously. Only

father and mother can suffice for the mixed family, and where either of the two falls away, the task of the remaining one of making due allowance for the difference of nature and disposition of son and daughter is extremely difficult. This applies as well to man and wife especially when one has made farther advances in the way of salvation than the other. The pious wife who longs to win the hesitating husband defeats her own purpose, when she aims to graft her feminine soul-life upon him; likewise the husband who for the sake of winning his wife for God tries to drive her in the spiritual yoke of his own masculine life, is himself the cause of his bitter disappointment. The husband should indeed strengthen the wife spiritually, and accustom her to storm and fire, and the wife should refine the husband spiritually, and accustom him to the sound of gentle stillness, but the fundamental trait of the proper soul-life of each must remain inviolate. The wife lives near unto God differently from the husband.

A similar difference characterizes the several conditions in which we find ourselves. Take the ecclesiastical conflict. In this struggle there is a period of necessary and unsparing resistance against everything that desecrates God's covenant. But after victory is won, there comes a time of calm and peace, of quiet work for God's Kingdom, in the struggle against sin, misery and woe. And it is frequently observed, that men who in the first period nobly persevered, and showed in themselves men full of the Holy Ghost, in the next period of rest and peace, visibly retrograded, and deserted their former spiritual vantage-ground.

And as in ecclesiastical affairs so it is in the struggle of our own life, in the difference between rising superior to one's sins and fainting in the face of too great temptation. All this creates a difference of conditions, of circumstances, of sensations, of experiences of soul; and woe to him who amidst all this, has only one string to the harp of his soul. Our heart has been richly strung of God, and for every turn in life the heart must be able to play another string, for the sake of the honor of God and the comfort of our hidden man.

The example of Elijah shows that God himself counts with this, and after the nature of our state approaches our heart from different angles. He alone who has a listening ear for this, who adapts and disposes himself accordingly, and is inwardly so richly disposed, that he seeks after God at any gate which it may please God in those circumstances to open for him, will not only feel himself "to be near unto God," in all circumstances, but will also in every circumstance enjoy it most richly. At one time in quiet meditation, at another in bitter conflict, now going out, then coming in, but at all times it will be vital, inspiring and strong.

God's seeking to draw our soul unto himself and to open it for himself, is changeable as the seasons in which nature undergoes the workings of the sun. And therefore he who spiritually knows only one season of year, becomes impoverished. He who follows after, in the changes which God brings upon him, is the rich child of the rich Father who is in heaven.

"THOU DIDST MAKE ME TRUST WHEN
I WAS UPON MY MOTHER'S
BREASTS."

The secret walk with God is not only different for one child of God than for another, but the difference is inwardly connected with individual disposition, character, nature and temperament. Where there are two persons who live close to God, one not only doeth it differently from the other, but the way and manner in it of each, is related with his condition and frame of soul and even of body. To be near unto God can therefore never be imitated. It is no lesson that can be learned by heart. Every one must seek his own way to God, until by Divine grace he finds it. To be near unto God can never be anything else than the outcome and the fruit of our own personal spiritual life. If then it shall be real, and no imitation, it is bound to assume a form of its own, which entirely corresponds to our nature, and which would not do for another.

Let this first of all comfort you and put you at ease. It frequently happens, that a dear, true but very plain child of God hears others tell of a walk with God, which he can not grasp, or that he reads of Augustine and others, who communed with the Eternal Being in a measure and form that far, very far transcends his own experience. This makes him doubt whether he will ever himself come near unto God. Such it can never be with him and yet, such the hidden walk must be. In this way Satan detains the souls of the humble. For it is not so. With