

dashes the little eddy of goodness which is just now covering up the undertow of selfishness that imperils his soul. If then he is not melted into tears at the disclosure of his heartlessness, that prayer probably ends in a clouded brow, and a feverish, querulous self-conflict.

A *vengeful* Christian prays that he may have a meek spirit; that he may be harmless as doves; that the synonymous graces of forbearance, long-suffering, patience, may adorn his life; that he may put away bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, with all malice; that that mind may be found in him which was also in Christ. At the moment of this devotional episode in his experience, he feels, as Rousseau did, the abstract grandeur of a magnanimity like that of Jesus. There is no doubt about the fervour of his theoretic love of such an ideal of character; and he is about to take courage from his rapture, when his conscience becomes impertinent, and mocks him, by thrusting upon his lips the words which are death to his conceit—"Forgive me as I forgive." If then he is not shocked into self-abhorrence at the ghostliness of his guilt, he probably exhausts that hour of prayer in palliations and compromises, or in reckless impositions upon the forbearance of God.

A *luxurious* Christian prays, in the good set phrases of devotion, for a spirit of self-denial; that he may endure hardness as a good soldier of Christ; that he may take up the cross and follow Christ; that he may be ready to forsake all that he hath, and be Christ's disciple; that he may not live unto himself; that he may imitate Him who went about doing good,—who became poor that we might be rich, and who wept over lost souls. In such a prayer there may be, consciously, no insincerity, but a pleasurable sympathy, rather, with the grand thoughts and the grander feeling which the language portrays. The heart is buoyant with its gaseous distension to the bounds of its great swelling words.

This lover of the pride of life does not discover his self-inflation, till conscience pricks him with such goads as these: "Are you living for the things you are praying for?"—"What one thing are you

doing for Christ which costs you self-denial?"—"Are you *seeking* for opportunities to deny yourself, to save souls?"—"Are you willing to be *like* Him who had not where to lay his head?"—"Can ye be baptized with the baptism that He was baptized with?" If, then, this effeminate one is not roused to a more Christ-like life by the uncovering of his hypocrisy, what a sickly murmuring of self-reproach fills his heart at the collapse of that prayer?

Such is human nature; such, but by the grace of God, are we all. We must be dull inspectors of our own hearts, if we have never discerned there, lurking *beneath* the level at which sin breaks out into overt crime, some single offence—an offence of feeling, an offence of habit in thought, which for a time has spread its infection over the whole character of our devotions. We have been self-convicted of falsehood in prayer; for, though praying in the full dress of sound words, we did not desire that our supplications should be heard at the expense of that one idol.

Perhaps that single sin has woven itself like a web over large spaces of our life. It may have run like a shuttle to and fro in the texture of some plan of life, on which our conscience has not glared fiercely as upon a crime, because the usage of the world has blindfolded conscience by the respectability of such sin. Yet it has been all the while tightening its folds around us, repressing our liberty in prayer, stopping the life-blood and stiffening the fibre of our moral being, till we are like kneeling corpses in our worship.

That is a deceptive notion which attributes the want of unction in prayer to an arbitrary, or even inexplicable, withdrawal of God from the soul. Aside from the operation of physical causes, where is the warrant, in reason or revelation, for ascribing joylessness in prayer to *any* other cause than some *wrong* in the soul itself? What says an old prophet? "Behold, the Lord's ear is *not* heavy that it cannot hear; but your *iniquities* have separated between you and your God. Your *sins* have hid his face from you. *Therefore*, we wait for light, but