

## The Ambitiousness of Faith.

By Phillips Brooks.

There is a great deal of danger of our forgetting that to believe much, and not to believe little, is the privilege and glory of a full-grown man. There will come times—and upon such a time our lot has fallen—when men are led to sing the praise and glorify the influence of doubt. Assuredly it has its blessings, but while we magnify them we ought never to forget that they are always of a nature of compensation. The blessings of doubt are like the blessings of poverty, not to be chosen for themselves, but to be accepted thankfully when they come in to mitigate the unattractiveness of the condition into which a life missing its true purpose and success has fallen. There do come times when you must cut a tree down to its very roots that it may grow up the richer by and by; but a whole field of stumps is not the ideal landscape. The forest, with its wealth of glorious foliage, is the true coronation of the earth. There is a great deal of danger lest the tendency to dwell, upon the blessings and culture of doubt—may come to make a full and rich faith seem to be almost a burden instead of a treasure; a thing for a man to be pitted for, and not to be congratulated upon.

It is, I think, no very unusual thing for men who believe little to look at one who lives in the richness of a faith, full faith with something almost like commiseration, somewhat as there is a tendency in settled invalidism to count exuberant health a somewhat gross and vulgar thing; and their feeling is very apt to communicate itself to the thinking man himself, and make him half ashamed and mistrustful of his own belief.

Against such a tendency we want to warn one another, and to warn ourselves. Seek faith—as full and rich a faith as you can, and try to know all you can about God and your own soul. Count every new conviction which is really won a treasure and enrichment of your life. There are dangers in accumulation of every sort—danger lest the thing accumulated should lose some of its value as it becomes more plentiful; danger lest the sense of possession should lose for us some of the discipline that can only come in search—but these dangers are nothing to the danger of the despair of faith, the terrible danger of coming to think that God is darkness and not light, the terrible danger of ceasing to hear His perpetual invitation to His children to come into ever more trustful and certain knowledge of His purpose, of His love, and of Himself.

## A Lost Art.

Is it true that family worship is a "lost art" in the Christian Church? Has it fallen into disuse so far that its observance is the exception and not the rule? Has old-fashioned family prayer ceased in this country to such an extent as to call forth earnest words of advice and warning from Dr. Clark, the President of the International Christian Endeavor Convention? Will the time soon come when the knowledge of it will lie in the dim traditions of the past, as we read of the olden times when every respectable Christian family kept up the worship of God in the home, while they upheld his public worship and waited upon it in the sanctuary? It is sad to think of the possibility of such a state of things, but the alarm is already sounding and all conscientious lovers of Christ and the Church should take heed.

The voice of the Church in its best periods has been in favor of family worship. The altar, with its daily incense, has been kept up in every period of religious prosperity,

The time was in Scotland when there were more praying families in proportion to the inhabitants than in any other country. The Puritans of England were a people of a like mind and practice in this respect. That same spirit was transferred to this country, when the Scotch and Scotch-Irish, the Puritans and Huguenots came as the early settlers. When the Lord sifted Europe to find a people to take possession of this continent, the choice ones he found on their knees around their family altars and called them out to do special work for Him. Their homes at first were rude and bare and built by their own hands in the wilderness. The furniture was scarce and often of their own contrivance, but every house managed to have a Bible, a Bible on which the dust was not allowed to gather. The floors of the humble cabins were rough and made of split timber, from large forest trees, with no rugs nor carpets, but they were often pressed by knees of suppliants, who bowed in daily prayer. The solitude of the forest was broken night and morning by the songs of praise to God, from these devout worshippers. Burns' description of his day is the most life-like picture of thousands of the homes of the early settlers of this country:

"Then kneeling down to Heaven's eternal King,

The saint, the father and the husband

Prays;  
Hope springs exulting on triumphant wing,

That they all shall meet in future days;  
There even bask in uncreated rays,

No more to sigh, or shed the bitter tear,  
Together hymning their Creator's praise.

In such society, yet still more dear;

While circling time moves round in an eternal sphere."

Such scenes were reproduced in almost every cabin home in those early days. The first churches of this country were organized by such people as these, who first set up the family altar and then met together with this consecrated spirit and set up a public altar for God's worship. These were the people that laid the foundations of this government and without whom the battles of the Revolution would never have been fought to success. In the dark days of one hundred years ago, when piety had declined in high places under the baneful influence of French infidelity, religion was kept alive in this country, as the godly persisted in their family devotion, bringing their daily sacrifice before God and thus holding fast to Him till He returned in mighty reviving power.

What do we think of those days of old and of the way in which our ancestors served God? Do we not rejoice in such forefathers and in their spirit and practice? There are those who will read these words and have precious memories revived and will say this was the life that was lived by my parents and grandparents.

Are there any disposed to cast aside this time-honored custom, as antiquated and useless, in this progressive age? Think of all the Bible teaching to enforce this most reasonable duty? What advantages must come to parents. What greater advantages arise to children trained up from infancy under such hallowed influences! What blessing may come in this way to friends and occasional visitors! And what help would arise from it to the Church of Christ!

How has it fallen into disuse till we speak of it as a lost art? Are we too busy in this hurrying, bustling age? Has the head of the house no time to gather his family around him to perform his Christian duty? When the father dies, shall the family altar be permitted to perish? Cannot the mother or some child in the home keep up the altar and see that the daily incense arises from it? Blessed is that home where the altar of prayer is maintained from generation to generation, one voice becoming silent and another taking up the service, but the Lord

always having one to stand before Him and minister in his name.

When a home is set up is the proper time to arrange for an altar that must never be forsaken. Or if any have suffered the altar to fall down, let them hasten to build it up again. A custom that has been so blessed cannot be abandoned without the decline of religion that must soon follow. There is a call for a general awakening of the Christian conscience on this all-important subject.—The Presbyterian.

## Personal Communion With God.

This is the secret of spiritual growth and even of spiritual life. To become a Christian is to enter into it consciously. Those who are not Christians but are aware of an inner restlessness and longing, bidding them to pay heed to the welfare of the soul and identify themselves with the work of uplifting and saving humanity, really are but becoming aware, more or less consciously, of their need of personal communion with God. And when once the consciousness of this communion has become established in the heart, life is different for ever after. It may be allowed to become dim, but what is is never can be forgotten, and what its possibilities are never can be estimated.

It often is difficult to be maintained. The cares of daily life, the temptations which beset even the best of us, the vicissitudes of every one's experience, the bewilderments and anxieties which harass even the most carefully sheltered life, all co-operate to interfere between our Heavenly Father and ourselves. They take off our attention from Him and seek to focus it on worldly interests. Sometimes they even tempt us to believe that communion with Him is but a dream. Yet, if once we have known it, nothing ever can wholly blot out the conviction of its genuineness and power. The richest blessings of life are due to it. We may attain the success for which men commonly strive. Wealth may not come to us, culture may not be attained, honors may pass us by. We may not even be able to feel ourselves conspicuously useful in our own spheres. Positive disappointments and distresses may harass us, grave disasters may crush for the time. Yet, whatever happens, the soul that has once known true communion with God is able in and through it, and in spite of every hindrance, whether of prosperity or adversity, to keep in touch, if it will, with its Father.

And thus it is able to draw upon His spirit, to reap the blessing of His peace, to serve with something of His strength and to be assured with great rejoicing that He has fulfilled His promise to come and dwell in the human heart and make it the abode of positive happiness which no calamity can wholly dispel. Let it be added that no argument nor any appeal in behalf of Christianity is half so powerful as the witness, invariable and inevitable, given silently and even unconsciously, yet always perceptible, by those who maintain true communion with God. It radiates from their lives in a manner not to be concealed and is impressive with the power of the divine. It is the more effective because of its unobtrusiveness and is a testimony to the truth and the desirableness of the religion of Christ which nothing can shake.—The Congregationalist.

Teach me that harder lesson, how to live  
To serve Thee in the darkest paths of life;  
Arm me for conflict now, fresh vigor give,  
And make me more than conqueror in the  
trifles.  
—Burman.