

But it cannot be too strongly insisted upon, that the Christian ideal cannot be realized at all unless in all our seeking we are seeking after God. Without the spirit of Christ the care of the body will be used as a cloak for self-indulgence, and for the neglect of our higher duties; without it increase of knowledge will only minister to self-conceit, and put in our hands a more powerful engine of evil. The study of social laws we may wrest to our own destruction and the injury of others, by using our knowledge to play on the passions, the weaknesses and the follies of others. Literature and art may become for us but food for an all-pervasive vanity, or they may be employed to titillate our mental palates, as the epicure dallies with the delicate bouquet of a rare and choice wine. Thus we shall sin against the Holy Ghost, and crucify the Lord of Glory afresh. When the higher gifts of God are made panders to selfishness, a man's soul becomes the home of unclean spirits. Let us hold before our eyes the cross of Christ. "He that loveth his life shall lose it." Let us strive in the strength of God to keep ourselves free from vice, free from self-indulgence, free from self-righteousness. We must not forget that we may be weak and selfish in our thinking as well as in our ordinary duties. We are all agreed that no man can live the higher life who sins against the great moral laws, and violates the "tender charities of husband, son or brother." But we are apt to under-estimate the more subtle temptation that comes to the solitary thinker in his search for truth. Here, as always, we must be scrupulously veracious. We must follow truth wherever it may lead us, not adopting rashly any new or popular view, but trying all things and holding fast that which is good. Thus "we shall know the truth, and the truth shall make us free." We must beware of insincerity in our thinking, no less than in our doing. No untruth, however venerable it may be by age, or with whatever false brilliancy it may seem to shine, can ever really tend to the glory of God. Such perplexities as are incidental to the quest for truth, especially in a critical age like this, we must be prepared to face manfully, as we would face the other trials of life. As time goes on life in some ways grows ever sadder and more solemn, but it may also hold in it the sacred joy of a life that is "hid with Christ in God."

There is a great word of Browning which I commend to your careful reflection:—

"I think this is the authentic sign and seal  
 Of Godship, that it ever waxes glad,  
 And more glad, until gladness blossoms, bursts  
 Into a rage to suffer for mankind,  
 And recommence at sorrow: drops like seed  
 After the blossom, ultimate of all.  
 Say, does the seed scorn earth and seek the sun?  
 Surely it has no other end and aim  
 Than to drop, once more die into the ground,  
 Taste cold and darkness and oblivion there:  
 And thence rise, tree-like grow through pain to joy,  
 More joy and most joy,—do man good again.