

A HOUSE DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF

By Edward Arthur Wicher

A house divided against itself—this is my heart.

I seek to love the Father, and I love the world; I aspire after heavenly good, and I want the gains and pleasures of this life; I have high ideals of service for my fellow-men, but I can find no way of making them operative in the day's work.

Deeper and deeper still in my soul there is a cleavage between the man that I am and the man that I fain would be. My experience contradicts every aspiration of my soul. I long for immortality, yet am doomed to die, and everything that I behold is also doomed to die; I dream of a perfect purity, and in the next moment fall into grievous sin; I find myself stifled by the narrowness of the room in which I stand, and gasp for breathing space; I struggle for air that is free as infinity; and immediately I feel the impulsion of the next small job that nudges my elbow.

At first sight it would almost seem as though God had made man in order to mock him, so far apart are his desires and his attainments. Was it a divine irony that prompted the creation of the universe?

Nor does any worldly success which may come to us deliver us from the pressure of the human paradox. What avails the accumulation of material comforts, if the soul is not satisfied? Man cannot live by bread alone. Nor can he live by work alone. He must ask himself: "What is the value of this work for the soul?" There are multitudes of men today who are toiling successfully in the world's work, building up great commercial enterprises, amassing wealth, erecting for

themselves spacious houses, in which to dwell and display their goods, enlarging their power to the four corners of the earth, and, at the same time, hating their work, their wealth, their power, and themselves, and feeling the utter staleness and futility of their days. There has probably been no time since the decadent days of the Roman empire when so many men have felt in their souls the constant reluctance against the tasks of their hands.

The current literature of the world is, on the whole, either wistful or pessimistic. With some few brave exceptions its books are not restful or contented. Society shivers while it dances. Labor knocks at the door of the palace of the rich man; and the frightened occupants are trying to hold the handle from the inside. Some of the social prophets foresee violence, repeated under many forms, and in no form more characteristic of our day than in the endeavour of some men to partition off the house into several rooms, where the contradictory activities of their souls may be conducted without coming violently into collision with one another. The house is divided into several compartments for the several classes of business. Men who are good husbands and generous fathers are also hard and oppressive employers. Men who are tenacious of their grasp of the principles of orthodoxy are also implacable in their persecution of those who are opposed to them. One part of their heart is kind; another part is cruel. One part is upright and honest; another is tricky and circuitous. Religion is religion, and business is busi-