

ing thought of the eternal goodness and care; the prayer that means the identification of the human will with the Divine will—lost in God. The worship of the Church will help us—correcting and enlarging our individualism by giving us the sense of universal and eternal relationships. Obedience will help us. Great peace have they whose obedience to the highest and best is quick and constant; who instead of getting away from things, seek rather to get right with things, to be reconciled to the Divine order of the world and life, reconciled to God. It is the peace of Jesus which the world cannot give nor take away, but which enables one to be quiet in the world, to venture abroad into all its excitements and strifes with a calm and brave heart, and while seeking things temporal to win with them and through them all the finest and most enduring things of life.

THE NEARNESS OF GOD.

BY REV. CHAS. S. ROBINSON, D. D.

Four miserable mistakes are made oftentimes by a large class of persons even in our Christian communities; any one of which would vitiate the true idea of God as revealed openly to us.

One of these is the belief that our Maker is absolutely, mechanically, remote from us; a distant monarch seated lonesomely away from any human voice or footstep. Sometimes we are unnecessarily modest in our forms of expression. We imagine we are only just suitably devout when we repeat the psalmist's reflection uttered in the eighth psalm: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers; the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" These statements are perfectly true; but there is a sense in which one may quote them to his own injury, simply misapprehending their purpose. God is mindful of man; he has sent his own Son to die for man's redemption. The dayspring from on high has visited us, and the Lord is near.

Another mistake is found in thinking that our access to God is dependent upon some grand caprice of His favor. We picture the divine Being to ourselves somewhat as Esther pictured Ahasuerus, when she was going into his presence to plead for royal relief to her endangered people. We seem to suppose there is extreme risk in approaching Him. If He shall extend the golden scepter, we are safe; but the chances are that He may not. And so, in the heroism of a fine devotion, we say, "If we perish, we perish." But Esther seemed to have forgotten that on her finger at the moment was a ring which proved she was the wife of the man she was so much afraid of. And the great God is represented in the Scriptures as bending over a redeemed soul, and saying, "Turn again, for I am married unto you." "But now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometime were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us."

Still another mistake is made when we imagine that the seasons of God's benevolent feeling toward men are periodic. Many an elderly convicted sinner unconsciously allows himself to be hindered in his surrender of his heart to Christ by the surmise that the access must be easier in times of revival. The influences of divine grace are forced to find a most unwarranted and unscriptural symbol in that ancient intermittent spring at the pool of Bethesda, under whose porches sat the lame and halt, waiting for the moving of the water. Thus many linger in prayer with a sort of discouragement, thinking the occasion may be inopportune, and many others try to make an easy explanation of their petition's failing of an answer, when all the reason there is for the hindrance is their own want of faith. Our Maker has no caprices, no moods of beneficence, no vacillations of good will. No one thing in the Bible is more clear than the representations of God's unalterable steadfastness of purpose in His love and care of His creatures. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wing shalt thou trust; his truth shall be thy shield and buckler."

But the most inveterate mistake of all is found in the notion which many cherish as to the eminent likelihood of self-deception in all attempts at amity with God. If they try to be at peace with Him how shall they know they have been accepted? A very wide experience finds its preposterous type in the hesitancy and final daring of the four lepers in Elisha's time, who sat at the gate of Samaria in the midst of the famine. They said to themselves, "If we sit here, we shall die; if we enter in, and fall into the hosts of the Syrians, and if they kill us, we shall but die." We have even put this false sentiment into a hymn, to be sung by an inquirer:

"Perhaps he will admit my plea; perhaps will hear my prayer;
But if I perish I will pray, and perish only there!"

The result of any of these mistakes is hurtful. The idea of God becomes exceedingly repulsive. He seems remote, relentless, implacable and exacting. Our notions grow vague. We cannot wholly turn away from the thought of Him, but surely there is no comfort in it. If there be any one of the old admonitions that is appropriate now it is this: "Acquaint thyself with God and be at peace; and thereby good shall come unto thee."

It is sufficient to say here that the corrective, as applied in the Scriptures, is as extensive as the mistake. In each of these four particulars the word of inspiration labors to be forcibly and explicitly clear. God seems to be desirous to have men become familiarly and intelligently acquainted with Him. While we are superstitiously erecting altars, like the men of Athens, to unknown gods, revelation speaks up boldly to us, saying, "Whom ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you."

The brief statement made in one of the ancient Psalms contains compactly the entire action of fact. "Thou art near, O Lord." God has been pleased to reveal Himself as close at hand. He has manifested Himself in the flesh. One name there is that ought to be dearest of all to every Christian—Immanuel. For it means, not a deity remote or hidden, but literally translated—"God with us."

Nor is this all; in this fine disclosure of Himself the eternal God has shown us how intensely kind are all His sympathies in our behalf. Instead of being distant or capricious, Immanuel seems to be saying, as Joseph said to those backward and guilty brethren of his before his throne when he was ruler over Egypt, "Come near me, I pray you; for I am your brother." In the person of our Redeemer the awful majesty of the Almighty becomes subdued into ineffable tenderness and good will. "The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."—*North and West.*

THE DUTY OF THE COMMON MAN.

The questions of chief interest to-day are social rather than individual. We discuss communities, classes, nations, races, not persons, when we are considering moral renewal. Problems, perplexities, perils, are thrust before our eyes from pulpit, platform and review. But they concern opposition between the rich and the poor, the strife of political parties, the contentions of organized bodies, the government of cities and of the nation. Never, apparently, was there so much work on hand for those who would do good as now. The whole church needs to be purified; social barriers must be thrown down; a class of men must be raised up with education, leisure and patriotic spirit to hold the balance of power in government. The competition for gains and honors must be checked. Systematized charities must be administered so as to diminish, if not abolish, poverty.

But work for great bodies of people must be done by organized bodies. The tasks set before us are too large for an individual even to take hold of. We are assured that, unless something is done, social revolutions and cataclysms will be upon us. What can the common man do? Will any unorganized service avail against the dangers which threaten the body politic?

We believe that the opportunity of the common man to make his life useful was never greater than now. He can do large service to his fellowmen by believing in and asserting his individual influence as against the passion of our time for merging all effort into organizations, for marshaling every philanthropic impulse under a banner and a boss. Let him realize that he has a place of his own to fill, that he cannot