



The Sacredness of Common Things.

The place whereon thou standest is holy ground.—Exod. 3: 5.

Last week I tried to draw your attention to the divine "splendor" hidden under the surface of common things; to-day we go a step farther, opening our eyes to the truth that what God has made is not only splendid but also "holy." Moses and Joshua were warned to show the outward sign of reverence because they were standing on "holy ground"—and what made that particular spot holy? Surely it was because GOD was there. Can we find a spot in the whole universe where He is not? Therefore, I say solemnly to you who are reading this paper: "The place whereon thou standest is holy ground." It may not seem holy to you, for, though "earth's crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God," only he whose eyes are open bows down in wondering adoration of soul. The rest, as Mrs. Browning declares, "sit round it and pluck blackberries," quite unconscious of the Divine Presence in their midst. We call Palestine "The Holy Land"—why? Simply because the footsteps of our Incarnate God sanctified it. But His Incarnation has made not only Palestine, but the whole earth "holy ground." The first Adam was made of the dust of the ground, and the ground was "cursed" for his sake, but the Second Adam reversed the curse. His body also is made of the dust of the earth, and everything with which the Holy One is organically united must be holy. He has carried up into highest heaven the body which still links Him indissolubly in a very special way with this planet and everything in it. It may be—as Bishop Brent suggests, in "The Splendor of the Human Body"—"that the reach of the Incarnation knows no limits, and that the farthest star is touched by and gathered into it not less than our own special world." When the Most High stooped in wonderful condescension to link Himself organically—as every child of man is linked—"with fish and bird and beast," that Divine touch made everything holy. We need not wait for a future heaven, for heaven must always be where God is—and He is here. If our eyes are only open to see the Vision of the Almighty, we cannot fail to bow before Him in a lowliness of spirit that lifts us ever higher—as Browning grandly puts it:

"I but open my eyes,—and perfection, no more and no less,
In the kind I imagined, full-fronts me,
and God is seen God
In the star, in the stone, in the flesh,
in the soul and the clod.
And thus looking within and around
me, I ever renew
(With that stoop of the soul which in
bending upraises it too)
The submission of Man's nothing-perfect
to God's All-Complete,
As by each new obeisance in spirit, I
climb to His feet!"

No mind of man could have conceived that perfect ideal of God in Man which we find in the Bible, and which meets and fulfills our highest aspirations. It is as natural for the soul of man to reach out toward God as for a plant to climb up toward the sun. Close beside me, as I write—in my favorite conservatory-study—are three healthy sprays of the Virginian creeper, which have come up between the floor and the wall, forcing their way to the light through cracks less than an eighth of an inch wide. So it is with the soul—health, wealth, fame, even earthly love, can never meet its infinite craving after the Infinite. But when we grasp even the hem of Christ's Garment we know that at last we have found what we hunger for. Even then we must hunger on—hunger for the full vision of His face, for the sound of His voice and the touch of His hand—for hunger is a sign of life

and health. It gives pleasure rather than pain when it is being constantly fed with the true Manna, the Bread which came down—and is constantly coming down—from heaven.

"Tis the weakness in strength that I cry for! my flesh that I seek
In the Godhead! I seek and I find it."

The soul must go on seeking until it does find the Christ—the Man who is also God—and, when He is found, it must cry out in its joy to other seeking souls: "We have found the Christ! Come and see!"

Our Lord's hallowing touch has transformed the commonest acts of life into parables and sacraments. The day begins with the morning bath, which cleanses and invigorates the body as the water of Baptism the soul. Then comes the daily round of work, for which the body is strengthened and refreshed in the same way as the soul. The children of a common father gather round him at his table from time to time, eating and drinking together in a holy communion and fellowship. The whole day is filled with sacraments. The woman working up her bread knows that the "sponge" must never be allowed to cool, and in like manner the Church must never give her Lord reason to say: "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." The bread will not be a success unless most of the material is worked in at the first kneading, and a good bread-maker knows that she must not spare herself in the matter of energetic hand-work (machine-made bread never has quite the right flavor). She also knows the absolute necessity of a judicious "letting-alone," so that the leaven may work secretly under the surface, raising the sponge everywhere. But, though "let alone," the rising sponge must never be forgotten. So also the Church will fail unless she takes care to educate the children, she also knows that societies cannot take the place of hand-work—individual teaching—and she, if she is wise, will hide the leaven in the meal and then stand aside, leaving the Holy Spirit to do His secret work. She will never hurry the leavening process, and will always remember before God the souls she is trying to raise. The woman knows that her sponge will sour unless, from time to time, she gives it fresh material to work on, and so the Church reaches out in eager missionary zeal, trying to leaven all the nations with the knowledge and love of Christ, knowing that when her part is done and the whole is leavened, her absent Lord will return. (This is not addressed to city housekeepers who know little of the mystery of bread-making.)

But I have no time to speak particularly of the many parables of daily life—especially farm life—which lift common things into a clearer, holier atmosphere, ending with the evening cleansing of the weary soul from the stains of the day's sins when the Master Himself stoops to wash the feet of His weak but penitent disciples. Then comes the breaking of the New Morning on the shore of the eternal sea, when we shall lift up our eyes to our Lord's face and enjoy the heavenly meal which He is preparing for the disciples who have toiled all night in the attempt to draw other souls to His feet. Those who work patiently and prayerfully under His directions will not draw empty nets to the shore. He who wishes to tread on holy ground need not take the long journey to Palestine, nor shrink away from his fellows for fear of contamination. The only holy Man was—and still is—the Friend of publicans and sinners. By His kindly human touch He inspires us with a desire to be holy too—kindness is a mighty power for good, because it is the outward sign of a loving heart within. The place whereon thou standest is holy.

"Seek JESUS in all things, and in all shalt thou find JESUS."

HOPE.

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