

any wish for concealment—all seemed a matter-of-course. In the meantime the housemaid had also risen, and commenced opening various drawers, from which she took sundry articles for the prosecution of her peculiar duties.

As I looked at her in astonishment her eye met mine, but there was no change of expression in her countenance, nor did she appear conscious of any impropriety in her conduct, but continued her work with perfect indifference.

“Is this, then,” I thought, “their constant practice?” but before this inquiry could be solved I awoke; and as I lay in that dozing state which is neither sleeping nor waking, musing over my dream, (for the scene was so graphically portrayed on my imagination, and the incidents were so apparently consistent with each other, that I could easily recall them), this answer was suggested: “Yes, such is the constant practice of many worshippers, not only at the family altar, but also in the house of God; and ah! must it not be added, in the closet also?”

But some one may say, “Oh! you were surely dreaming still; I never saw or heard of any one rising in the midst of private, family, or public worship, and set about their ordinary occupations.”

True, my readers, but do you remember the words of the Scripture, as a man “thinketh in his heart, so is he?” Thoughts are actions in the sight of God. We do not rise from our knees or alter our posture of devotion; we have too much deference for our fellow-worshippers to act thus. The man of business does not carry his ledger, nor the young lady her portfolio, to the house of God; but He observes the attitude of the heart towards him, and declares his verdict of approval or of condemnation accordingly. “Thou didst well that it was in thine heart,” said Jehovah to David. “I know you,” said Christ to the Jews, who were at that very time professing great zeal for the honour of the law, the temple, and the Sabbath: “I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you.”

Thus while the outward development of this inward wandering of the heart may seldom be apparent in an assembly of professedly Christian worshippers, or be only occasionally manifested by the roving eye, or the listless posture, the eye of the Discerner of spirits penetrates deeper than these external appearances; and since all things are naked and opened to his sight, of how many who “draw nigh unto him with their mouths and honour him with their lips,” may he declare, “In vain do they worship me!”

“Their lifted eyes salute the skies,  
Their bended knees the ground;  
But God abhors the sacrifice  
Where not the heart is found.”

Were it possible to write down the train of ideas which have passed through the mind of some apparently devoted supplicant during the season of private, social, or public worship, what an interlineation of worldly and spiritual meditations would appear! how many schemes of business and plans of pleasure, how many reminiscences of the past, and plans for the future, would be found intermixed with confessions of sin, pleadings for pardon, and thanksgivings for mercies; forming together such a medley of inconsistencies that none would venture to expose it even to the scrutiny of a fellow-sinner, much less presume to present it as a prayer to the holy, heart-searching God!

A striking illustration of this point may be mentioned. A Christian visitor, calling upon a dying woman, who had for many years attended the means of grace, found her quite ignorant of her state as a sinner, and of the way of salvation. Feeling that no time must be lost, he proceeded to warn her of the imminent danger of her unconverted state, at the same time explaining the nature, and urging the necessity of “repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” “This is all a mystery to me,” exclaimed the poor sufferer. “And yet,” replied her visitor, “you must often have heard these truths from the pulpit!” “Very likely,” she answered; “but my thoughts were otherwise engaged—dress and fashion filled my mind.” “As she spoke,” adds the relator, “I remembered the confession recorded in Holy Writ: ‘I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly.’”

But it is not only the careless or formal worshipper who is subject to this under-current of vain imaginations; the sincere believer is not secure against the incursions of rambling, worldly, or even sinful thoughts. These, in great measure, constitute the “iniquity of the holy things,” and cause him to cry continually, “O wretched man that I am!” These give rise to inward conflict described by the apostle Paul; for though the mind of the Christian is renewed by grace, yet still in his “flesh dwelleth no good