

miracles, both destructive and constructive, because it was the word of the Lord.

But we need not determine too mathematically what was intended by the laying of the Lord's hand on the mouth of the young prophet. It was a symbol which might have many meanings. If God touches the mouth, it cannot be dumb; it must testify for Him and His Christ. Yet it will be dumb. God's hand closes the door against the boasting which would mar the message and the inconsiderate speaking which would misrepresent the truth. There is a correctness which the grammarian can teach and a charm like the tongues of men and angels which the rhetorician can impart; but there is a grace poured into the lips which is as far above these as the heaven is above the earth; and it is only communicated by the touch of the hand of God.

JAMES STALKER.

IDEALS AND GRACE.

WE who are the messengers of God, stewards of the message and mysteries, and upon whom is laid the tremendous responsibility of awakening dormant faith, of quieting bewildered conscience, of soothing broken hearts, of helping men to die, and what is more difficult, to live; we who have to deal with little children and feed the "little sheep" of the flock, we who know our ignorance and our helplessness and lack of inner harmony with the slowly evolving purposes of the living God concerning the world, we who are often startled with our sickening insincerity and our mixture of motive in doing our Father's will, need almost more than any other living creatures to get near to the eternal, into close quarters with God Himself. We have to speak of Him, we must therefore know Him for ourselves, we must be sure not only of His Being, but of His character, must achieve this

highest end of all philosophy, and find that He recognises us, forgives our sins, deals with us, "considers our meditation," lays His hand upon us, tells us His secret, interprets to us His Providence, sends us on our mission, and permits us to enter into His great redeeming purpose towards the whole world.

There are, however, certain stages of mental and spiritual progress which we have to take one by one, and which we must follow frequently if we would renew the strength of our best convictions and enter into the joy of our Lord.

We must pray—we must lift our hearts to God Himself, who is within us and around us, and, though throned above all worlds, is yet waiting for our cry. It is not so easy for us in this crisis of thought to pray, to speak right to the heart of God, as it has been in many other phases of thought, but there are words of prayer which, though we cannot pretend to interpret fully, may be allowed to steal into our hearts and be transferred into our own experience, *e.g.*, Ps. xliii. 3, 4: "O send out Thy light and Thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me to Thy holy hill, and to Thy tabernacles. Then will I go to the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy, and on the harp will I praise Thee, O God my God!"

In this prayer these steps up the ladder emerge out of the mist. In these magical words we discern "altar-stairs which slope through darkness up to God." They correspond with many an equivalent uplifting of the soul recorded in the holy oracles, such as, "God who commandeth the light out of darkness hath shone into our hearts to give us the illumination of the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Verily we yearn continually for light. We can understand in these days the dying cry of Goethe for "more light"; but as Christian men we crave the all-revealing light—the supernal light which makes us sure of our posi-

tion and our pathway. We supplicate the "Kindly Light," the Divinely-given illumination, which convinces our whole nature of the favour of God, of a Divine bestowment, unearned, undeserved, unbought, perfectly sufficing, flowing exhaustlessly and eternally from the heart of God. We are often weary with our search for light. Human love, and the accumulated wisdom of the ages, cheer us as we wait in the valley of the shadow for the morning to be spread upon the mountains. We know what it is to cry with bursting hearts, "O send forth Thy light."

Then, further, seeing that both mind and spirit are confused on account of the discordant voices which say, Here is the way or there, we are driven also to ask, with passionate eagerness, for God's *truth* about things, for *His* judgment and view of the world, *His* word about the life that now is, and that which will be for ever and ever even for us; and so we take up and make our very own, this same cry, "Send out Thy truth." "God's thought" is our most conclusive definition of truth, expresses the absolute TRUTH. God's thought can satisfy the hunger of our pilgrim souls, as they press on to the city of God. Send forth, we cry aloud, these angels of Thy presence, "Thy light and Thy truth." Nor is it enough that they should simply come our way, that we should mark their station and know that God has thoughts about us, and a good will towards us. The Bible and the Church, the home and the kingdom, have taught us this much. What we trust for is a higher stage of communion and a deeper understanding of reality. "*Let them lead us.*" Let heaven's *light* and God's *truth* lead us! In other words, "let these blessed visions of the Highest show us the way we should take, inspire our enthusiasm, excite our admiration, satisfy our intelligence, make perfect our definitions. May they present themselves as lofty ideals of a new science and a satisfying interpretation of all things visible and invisible!" But, alas! *ideals* have been flashing before

our troubled gaze generation after generation. From "the glory of Buddha" in the Himalayan hills it is a long cry to poor Heine, lying love-sick, in despairing sobs and tears at the feet of the Venus of Milo. Ideals have not been quite useless to Confucianist or Mohammedan, to mediæval mystic, or modern agnostic; but they have not done much to help us. They lead, it is true. But suppose we do not wish or care to follow. How to perform that which is good, we wot not. Unquestionably we need and, as Christian men, we seek, something more than ideals, even though they be as lovely, as overpowering, as the vivid portraiture of the Perfect Life. The interior mischief and misery of the *will* must be exorcised, or we shall die of the dazzling light, be confounded with the revelation of the truth of God. "Oh! Angels of the Presence, not only come forward and show us the way, but *bring* us, for ye can. Our prayer is, 'exert such power over us, that we shall most certainly follow your leading.'" We cry to Thee that Thou would'st throw the chains of Thy grace around the waywardness of our freedom, and compel us to follow the glorious vision, and yield our very selves to God. If Thou lead and bring us, then we will go—freely, spontaneously following whithersoever Thou wouldst point us. And whither? To the *holy hill and the tabernacles of God*, to the place of highest manifestation.

There are stages and degrees, "altar stairs," even here, and we discern the wide places of the Divine kingdom, and the inner and secret pavilions of the Divine love and fellowship. "The holy hill" embraces the conspicuous fact of the kingdom, the laws which reveal the wide methods of God's wisdom and goodness, the universal aspects of His rule, and of His righteous mercy; but in His "tabernacle" in His incarnate love, in the humanly expressed image of His glory, we find the possibility, nay, the reality of mutual recognition of a sure rest and a perfect

peace. Oh, that the light and truth of God may, not only lead us, but bring us there! We are naturally seeking what we call "the throne of grace," and the house of God. We will go under these Divine drawings, even to His *seat*. We *must* get verily into contact with God and know it.

Neither gorgeousness of shrine nor splendour of ritual, nor entrancing music, on the one hand; nor the extremity of humbleness, nor the extravagance of simplicity, nor the groan of discordant and despairing self-abasement, will be the passages and corridors which lead us and bring us to the holy hill and the tabernacle. There are special places and sacred epochs where the highest manifestations have been made to our race. God has educated mankind by great events in its history, by mighty and wise and holy men. There is the "holy hill" of light and peace and grand endeavour, and there is the tabernacle where the most glorious revelation has broken upon the eyes of our heart. "I heard a voice saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men." Verily we shall *know* when we come near our Lord. The full expression of His light and truth will satisfy us. The prayers and seeking of a life-time will be fulfilled.

But now, what was and what is the central place of access? Where did the old saints find Him? Where can *we* find the living God at His highest and best? Is it not at the altar? *Bring* me to the holy hill, and to the tabernacle within it, and then I *will* go, then I *must* go, to the *altar*, *i.e.*, to the place of sacrifice, of burnt offering, of self-surrender, of full communion with the living God. The altar of God is for us the great event in the history of the world, where the eternal harmony of an infinite righteousness and an absolute love received a perfect revelation, where what God in the fulness of His Being must have always been, and must for ever be, dawned upon the prepared intelligence and the broken heart of the world. We do not gather to the altar merely for the purpose of making our own submis-

sion, or offering up ourselves in sacrifice, or abandoning our own will to the supreme will, and thus losing ourselves in Him. It is God's own altar, Gethsemane and Calvary, where we for the first time understand the mystery of these duties, where the motive becomes strong enough to carry us through with them, where our selfishness and pride are done to death, where we are crucified with Him to the world and the world to us.

Let Thy light and truth lead us and bring us to the very centre of the Divine and incarnate love. Our passion is to be *constrained* by this supreme inducement, and to judge that if One died for all then all died, and that they which live should live no longer to themselves but to Him who died for them and rose again. Do what thou wilt, but compel us to understand Thee. This is the meaning of all our striving, of all our research, of our secret anguish, and of our burst of gladness, when some real light breaks; let us know where we may find Thee, and we then come nigh even unto Thy seat, to the centre of Thy throne, to the unspeakable glory, and to the perfect peace.

The old Psalm shows us how near the altar of God is to the object of all our search and by *it* "we have access by one spirit unto the Father." A veritable approach to the altar of the cross, to that observatory of the universe, to that central crisis of all history, to that consummate revelation of the eternal Father, assures us as no other revelation does of the nature of our God. We reach there "our God, and find our most exceeding joy." Along these lines of revelation, from the beginning until now, the Almighty and Eternal One has been the joy of those who have learned His secret, and understood what He has meant to man. God Himself becomes our most exceeding joy—a joy that has transcended all the pleasures of sense, all the rapture of every other discovery, all the exhilaration of youth, love and victory, all the mellowness of age. "Take all the joys of

all the spheres and multiply these through endless years," and this vision of God transcends them all. "Exceeding joy," or as another of these sacred Psalmists puts it. "In Thy presence is fulness of joy." The entire capacity of our nature for blessedness is filled to the full. Whatever be the weakness of our mind, and the bitterness of our grief, this fulness satisfies, compensates and completes. "I shall be satisfied," sang another of these holy seers. God is the most exceeding joy. Such a God as ours becomes the triumph of our soul. We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have received the reconciliation. But there is much to be done with such a joy as this. We cannot keep it to ourselves—and so "upon the harp will I praise Thee, oh God, my God." Our common words are all too feeble for our new necessities—our commonplace of speech is not strong enough, nor symbolic enough to give utterance to the joy which has overspread our life. We must strike the chords of our harp, we must call in the power of holy music, with its sacramental force, to set forth what God *our* God is to our soul.

The service of song in the house of the Lord proves on the grandest scale that the joy of the Lord is too great for words.

None need so deeply to come into close contact with God, into clear consciousness of His goodness and justice, His majesty and His mercy, as those of us who are called upon to deal with men in the present whirlwind of conflicting thought. Let there be no falsetto notes of confidence in that which we hope may emerge out of the loud contradictions which we cannot solve. We may prophesy, call spirits from the deep, threaten opponents with confusion, and nevertheless be far from peace. We need an overwhelming joy in God, and a harp on whose chords we may smite with all our might. We must *find* the words of the Lord and eat them. They must become a part of our very life, must

enter into our rational, emotional, imaginative processes. We must so drink the water of life and eat of the bread of life, so that we become one with it, and then there will flow forth from us rivers of living water.

Peace in believing means, as it has always done, the equilibration of opposing forces. At this moment, as at many previous epochs in the history of the Kingdom of God, the contending energies are not exactly face to face. They work at obtuse angles with each other. Until they are approximately adjusted there is no calm but wild tumultuous motion. Against our haunting fear, we must cherish an equal hope. To our sense of utter insufficiency must be borne the whisper of *grace* equal to our need. In the very throes of shipwreck will break forth the harbour light, and so on the harp will we praise Thee, O God our God.

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