God is Light. A Homily.

BY T. ALLAN HOBEN.

We have no definition of God nor even of life and love. Our attempted descriptions often reveal the poverty of our own souls more than the Father's glory. How pathetic has been man's effort to picture to himself the Divine One! From the charm to the idol and from the idol on the hill top to the overarching heaven, there to behold no more than the gold or silver of his garments, has been the age-long course of man's thought. If ever we saw him we of necessity fastened upon him the reflection of our depravity and human limitations; so that, in tracing the history of our idea of Deity, one might almost ask the impious question, "Has God made man or man God?

Now when John says that God is light we think of him as the revealer of truth. When we enter consciously into the presence of God, or of him who was the likness of the Father, we are prostrated by the vision of our moral deformity. Self-sufficiency dies, pride vanishes and we are ready to receive the blessing of those who are poor in spirit. But the light which shows the soul's ugliness is that which reveals also its worth and promise. The light by which we behold the ugly mass raked up from the ocean ooze is the same which, when admitted, reveals the shell's iridescent beauty or the value of the inlying pearl. God who breaks over the soul as a prostrating deluge of light is he who sets hope's rainbow in the sky. How like light is God also in his giving of healthful life, in his generosity and in his purifying power. Just as in continual darkness vegetation fades and perishes, so by the persistent exclusion of God, spiritual life pales and dies; and does not the cause of our sickly and unfruitful Christian lives lie in the fact that they are not open to the free incoming of the vitalizing God?

A child of the tenements carried home from the Sunday School a little plant, her teacher's Easter gift. Placing it in the window of the dingy room she instinctively took the corner of her apron and cleaned part of a pane so that her little charge might have the needed light. That done, it was not long before she was dissatisfied with the rest of the window, for the one bright spot put to shame its dim surroundings. So the window was cleaned. But the clear rays thus admitted condemned the dusty floors and openly disgraced the untidy corners. Nothing would do but a thorough house-cleaning such as is somehow related to good health and good morals. You placed a tiny plant of love in the darkened window of another life. But the love-plant must have God or die. God was admitted with the deed of love and the life began to lose its sordidness, its stains, its gloom. Some day, although it still is plain, it may be white.

Here is the poor man's cottage; yonder is the palace; but the light in its generosity knows no difference. It pries into every crevice, seeks entrance at every opening, and cannot be totally excluded. Every soul has at least a moral twilight forced upon it and may open to the joys of the eternal morning, or closing, find the blackness of eternal night.

"Light!" says the city reformer, "Give us light!" "For the darkened rear rooms are the haunts of crime, disease and death." Some of the buildings are torn down that others may have a share of that purifying mystery, God's sunshine. The air that circulates through the cluttered alleys purifies the surroundings but is thereby charged with disease, the water that flushes our cities becomes poison, but the light that shines upon the festering sores of our crowded civilization and with unseen hands bears away the poisonous product of greed and inhumanity remains as pure as the rays that give their morning kiss to an Alpine peak. Is not this God—God who touches the fever and the sin-stains of the world, heals its leprosy, hushes its curses and retains the spotless beauty of his holiness?

The light deposited through past ages shines again from candle, lamp, gas-jet, carbon and wire. God is literally invested in the world and needs to be unearthed. He is not lost, only buried beneath the earthy debris of accumulated selfishness and awaits the invention and adjustment on our part whereby we may be the instruments of his self-manifestation. At best we can be no more than mediums for his self-expression; and this is true whether the light break from within or be but the reflection of an external glory. Whether the window of your earthly cottage sends forth its kindly home-light into the night or by day gives back the glittering sheen of the mighty sun is all the same, for in either case it is God—God within and without, God all and in all. Everyone who has ever stood as a beacon light on life's rough coast has stood as an expression of God. He may not have known it, he may have denied it, but nevertheless all fidelity to truth, all philanthropy, all heroism, all human love are but the shining of God.

He then is Godlike who reveals truth and exalts hope, whose love is generous and impartial, whose presence invigorates and purifies, who mingles with men of sorrow, depravity and vice and who keeps himself unspotted from the world.

So to be burning and shining lights for thee, O God, is the highest, holiest gift we crave; that through us who have no virtue in ourselves may shine the warm radiance of thy loving heart. Take from us all that hinders or dims thy shining and through our lives bring under thy healthful influence many who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death. Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee. Break through the clouds that close around us. Show us the path of duty and of service, and by the way that thou shalt choose, whether over the hills of hardship or by the still waters, bring us at last to the eternal home; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

For It Is Great.

In the twenty-fifth Psalm David says: "For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is great." When we ask our fellowmen to pardon us, it is on the ground that we are innocent, or that our offense, if real, is trivial. Not so here. The Psalmist pleads the magnitude of his sin as a reason why God should forgive it. We think, as we read those words, of a man in agony bordering on despair. He is conscious not only that he is sick, but that he is nigh unto death. He cries: "O doctor, help me, or I shall die; help me quickly, for you are skilful, and I am in need of the utmost that your skill can do." David begins by saying: "For thy name's sake." He realizes that God is infinite in mercy, and that his grace will be magnified by saving one who is utterly hopeless and lost. He says in substance: "O divine Physician, mine is a case worthy of your attributes. A great Saviour is for great sinners."

This prayer is not recorded to be used only on special occasions, when we have been tempted to some fragrant violation of the law of God. It is a prayer for every day, for we all sing daily, in thought, if not in deed. And every sin is great. It is rebellion against God. It is high treason. Covetousness is idolatry. Anger is murder. He who breaks one of the commandments is guilty of all. The trouble with us is that we do not realize the exceeding sinfulness of sin. We do not look upon it as God does. Hence our penitence is superficial. We do not go in prayer with broken and contrite hearts. The preparation for true prayer is twofold a deep sense of our guilt and ill desert, and a high, grateful appreciation of the infinite mercy of God in Christ. They must go together. We must say: "For thy name's sake, pardon my iniquity, for it is great." I quote the comments of two wise and good men on this passage:

Leighton says: "The greater the weight of misery under which you lie, the more need you have of mercy and the more will be the glory of it in you. It is a strange kind of argument used by the Psalmist, and yet a sure one. It concludes well, and strongly: 'Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is great.' The soul, pressed with the greatness of its sin, may make that very pressure an argument to urge the forgiveness of it at the hands of free mercy."

Dr. Alexander Maclaren says: "Good people sometimes wonder and sometimes are made doubtful and sad about themselves by the abiding and ever-increased consciousness of sin. There is no need to be so. The more our lives are brought into fellowship with the perfect life, the more shall we feel our own shortcomings. Let us be thankful if our consciences speak unto us more loudly than they used to do. It is a sign of growing holiness, as the tingling of a frost-bitten limb is of returning life. Let us seek to cultivate and increase the sense of our own imperfection, and be sure that the diminution of a consciousness of sin means, not diminished power of sin, but lessened horror of it, lessened perception of right, lessened love of goodness, and is an omen of death, not a symptom of life."

Yes, David's prayer shows that he had risen, by grace, above the earthly mists in which sin seems a little thing, a mistake, a misfortune. He beheld it in the light of God, and hence, like Job, he abhorred himself. Yet he felt that the more guilty he was, the more full and free would God's forgiveness be, if he was truly penitent. But he could not repent truly until he apprehended the greatness of his iniquity.—C. E. B., in Herald and Presbyter.

In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.—I Thess. 5: 18.

You who have sought to know God's will—give thanks.
Life's pathway glows with blessings from His hand,
While pain and loss assure us of His watchful care,
And that He has not yet forgot our highest good.
Thy sorrow calls for thanks no less than keenest joy.
He knows the gracious end of all life's discipline,
And with a Father's love holds not this blessing back.
Give thanks—it is the will of God concerning you;
Send up the offering of a humble, broken heart
Sweet with the fragrance of true thankfulness.
Be glad the Word says no whit less than "everything,"
And with a trusting love, give thanks in everything.
To know the will of God, is no mean thing on earth;
Accept His will concerning you—"Give thanks."

ANNIE R. FITCH.

The Bane of Apathy.

There is nothing perhaps, that stands so much in the way of advancement as apathy. And it is in the way of advancement that it is found. There is no apathy in evil. Its disciples are always alert, its master is always on guard. It is in regard to the good, to the upward trend of things, that apathy creeps in. That thought was in the apostle's mind when he exhorted the Galatian Christians to "Be not weary in well doing."

What is the bane in all political reform? It is apathy There are other things that conspire against its success, but the principal barrier is builded by apathy. Inertia in all matters is the hardest thing in all the list of hindrances to overcome. Why was reform snowed under at the last municipal election in Philadelphia? Principally because of the apathy of those who profess to believe in it. In many cases it was the storm that was made the excuse, but apathy was the real cause. It was the latter, rather than the former, that in a fashionable apartment house in West Philadelphia, containing forty voters, kept all but the bell-boy from the polls. What is it in many of our churches keeps back growth and enlargement, and stands in the way of a hearty co-operation between pastor and people for the intensifying of every spiritual force? What is it that when the gospel is preached keeps so many who hear from its hearty acceptance? It is apathy more than anything else. Subtly, slowly, paralyzingly it comes, and before one knows it he is in its grasp. A most telling advertisement is that of a certain cotton thread company, wherein a host of pygmies bind thread by thread, into absolute helplessness, a huge giant whom they have found asleep. It is suggestive as well of the method and result by which and to which this apathy works in church and state.

How shall we mend this condition? How shall we throw off the fettering bonds? To indicate the fact of its existence is of little use if we cannot at the same time point to some help. We want from the doctor not only the diagnosis of the disease, but also the prescription of the remedy.

Well, to recognize it as existing will help in its removal. If we can only make the one suffering from the effects of some deadly poison realize the necessity of keeping awake, we have gained a great ally. The ignobleness of it must be pointed out. No one wants to be ignoble. No one wants to be numbered with Meroz when by most the battle triumph is being sung. No one wants to be counted among those who stay rather than help to start the Lord's chariot wheels. Just what they are doing needs to be pointed out to them. But there wants to be inward force, and that will bring all the rest. There was no apathy at Pentecost. There was no holding back when the Spirit of God swept over the valley of dry bones. There will be none in nature soon. There will be an inward power there at work, and in blade and plan and tree, beauty and life will force themselves to the front. Oh, for something of the same in all realms of political, and moral and religious life! Then apathy would give place to enthusiasm, and the barrenness of the one be dethroned by the beauty of the other.—Baptist Commonwealth.

Honoring Home.

There are many homes where the parents have no need of the money of their children, or the things which money can buy, because they have abundance of the world's goods, but all the more there should the debt of honor not remain unpaid. The best way in which sons and daughters can honor their parents is by doing all honor to them. Every son when he goes away from home carries with him the honor of the home to which he belongs, and he may either enhance or dissipate it. If he does well, his success is doubled, for it is not only an ornament to himself, but a crown of honor to his parents. There is nothing in this world more touching than the pride of a father or mother in a son's success. Many a student, in the rivalries of academic life, is thinking about this more than anything else, and on the day when he is being applauded by hundreds he is thinking of hearts that are glorying in this honor. On the field of battle this has often been the inspiration of courage, and in the battles of life in a city like this there are multitudes doing their best, living laborious days, shaking off the tempter, and keeping straight in the middle of the narrow way, for the sake of those far off whose hearts will be cheered by their well-doing, and would be broken by their ill-doing. I do not think there is a sight more touching than when a youth, who has been away in another city or in a foreign land, and bears in his face and demeanor token of his well-doing, comes back on the Sabbath to the church in which his boyhood has been spent, and sits again side by side with the proud hearts that love him. Where is there a disappointment so keen, or a disgrace so poignant, as he inflicts who comes not back because he dare not, having in the foreign land, or the distant city, soiled his good name, and rolled the honor of his home in the dust.—Dr. Stalker.

Often precious stones are put into the fire. The Oriental cornelian and Brazilian topaz change color in the burning, and the black spots of the amethyst and hyacinth can only be removed by heat. Thus God's jewels are purified; all that can stand the fire must pass through it, and in the fierce heat of trial many a commonplace Christian begins to glow with new hues of grace, at which men greatly wonder.—W. Y. Fullerton.