

MEDITATION A MEANS OF GRACE.

“My meditation of him shall be sweet; I will be glad in the Lord.”—*PSA. CIV. 34.*

REVERIE is at once the seductive temptation of every sensitive mind, and the subject of reprobation in our current treatises upon education and morals. These tell us that it is the dreaming of the waking mind; that its name is from the verb by which the French denote the act of dreaming, and that this has a suspicious relationship to the word “rave.” They warn us that reverie is idle, enervating, unhealthy; that it is, in a word, the rust and canker of the spirit. But, for all this, was there ever a soul that had in it the stirrings of a true manhood which has not felt the allurements of this prohibited delight? There is no youth of pith and promise who has not felt the impulse to propitiate these stern censors, asking them whether the dew of their own youth is covered so deep with the dust of their utilitarianism that they cannot recall some still summer eve, when the breezes were sighing themselves asleep, and the slant rays of sunlight lingered upon the eastern tree tops; how they sat upon the hill over against the homes of their hearts, dreamy and lapped in bliss, while the ploughman’s homeward song, the voices of the kine lowing for the folds, and the notes of the evening bird, softened to the outer ear like echoes from elf land, mingled with the tide of sweet memories upon which their souls floated at will? Have they never known this? Then let us pity them, say we, as dull souls to whom the higher teachings of nature have ever been a sealed book.

The grandest of all the human theories of reverie was that of the ancient Mystic; for this consecrated the waking dream, provided only it was haunted by the right visions, and drew its interpretation from the depths of a past eternity, in which they supposed the intellect was born from the infinite Spirit, and made it a prophecy of the ransomed immortality, when it is to

be restored to his bosom. According to this creed man is not body and soul only, but three-fold—body, animality, and intellect. And this intellect, the true personality of the man, was not born of woman, nor even created of God, but was evolved from the Infinite Spirit himself as his progeny, in the distant past, before the world was. Many blissful ages had these spirits dwelt in the ethereal spheres, until, for some sin against the Father, they were coupled with animal souls, and imprisoned in material bodies. But this habitation manacles, besmirches, and soils them with sin and sense, until the very consciousness of their birth and high estate is obscured.

What then, said the Mystic, can restore them but disengagement from animality and matter? And how can this be effected? Only by quietism and meditation upon God, assisted by solitude and those austerities which exclude sense and macerate the flesh. Even as they suppose Christ Jesus, the God-man, effected the personal union between the human reason and the eternal Word by a heavenly meditation, in long centuries before his incarnation, so intense that the human was absorbed at last into the divine; so must the Christian, to become Christ-like, suspend the life of sense, and exist only in spiritual reverie. The obtrusive clamor of the world must be shut out by the door of the hermit's cell. Animal joys must be forbidden to tempt the eye, the ear, the palate. The body must be subjugated by asceticism. Even the mind must be repressed from every activity of investigation and reflection; the attention must be held absolutely passive, and waiting for the influx of the divine reason. Let the saint do this, said they, and the human and divine intelligences will reassert their primeval relationship. Spiritual communion will be resumed. The eternal word will flow in and fill, and by filling purify, the waiting intellect. When it again shuffles off its mortal coil it will return to the bosom of God, and there be embraced in immortal bliss by being absorbed in him.

This weird and shadowy scheme implies errors fatal to almost every doctrine of revealed Christianity. It perverts and misrepresents the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures in Christ, and discards his true vicarious purchase of our souls in his sacrifice. It scouts the representative connection of our race with its head, Adam, and our common fall in him.

It represents our reasonable souls as still intrinsically pure, only soiled externally by a defiling association, and, therefore, it discards the necessity for a regeneration by grace, and makes the man his own sanctifier. It must reject the hope of the resurrection and glorifying of the body as inconsistent. Tracing sin to its wrong source, it proposes a futile remedy, and thus, while it boasts of purity, leaves men slaves to deceitful lusts. Yet has it shown an abiding potency over the human soul. Not only does Paganism confess this by the prevalence of monkery under Islam, Brahma, and Buddha, it has tinctured the Christian church in all ages, and during its darker seasons has given it the most sincere type of its perverted piety in such saints as Thomas à Kempis (whoever he was), Gerson, Molinos, Madam Guyon, and the amiable Fenelon.

But errors which have no elements of truth have no vitality; the human reason cannot openly outrage itself by entertaining them. Can this element of truth in quietism be eliminated? I answer, it is given to us in those Scriptures which, like the text, teach the exercise of adoring meditation.

Both the philosophy and the practical temper of our age are in contrast with quietism. We represent man's morality and sin as residing in his will. We regard the virtuous habitude of soul as the effect of a series of virtuous acts only. We value only what results in a palpable good; and our whole tendency is not only busy and utilitarian, but sensuous and materialistic. The popular vocabulary has few terms by which it denotes a stronger sense of worthlessness, than "muser" and "dreamer." But there is an extreme here also, and the more sure word of prophecy gives us the just mean. It recognizes not only the busy but the contemplative state of the Christian soul, and calls it to meditation upon God and joy in his perfections. The Bible, and especially the Psalms, are full of this duty. Psalm i. 2: "His delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night." Psalm iv. 4, bids you "commune with your own heart upon your bed, and *be still*." Psalm xxxix. 3: "While I was musing the fire burned." Psalm lxiii. 5, 6: "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips; when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches." This silent adoration is not the mental bustle of investigation, but the dwell-

ing of the thought upon the ascertained perfections of God, until the soul is suffused with sacred affections. It is not to have the lesser lights chase each other like meteors flashing athwart the horizon of the soul; but it is to have an absorbing and ascertained verity rise to its zenith, and dwell there, bathing the whole continent of thought with its light and warmth. This placid state of the intelligence is not the pursuit, but the possession; not the search, but the fruition of the soul.

Now, it was the mistake of the two extremes; that the Quietists represented the meditative habit as a passive state of soul; and our active temper, regarding it as such, disdains it. But I assert that true meditation is, in the best sense, active. It is not true that even idle reverie is passive. You may exclaim, "What! is there not a clear contrast between mere musing, when the soul drifts idly, with the current of thought and study, in which the will directs it along a selected line of inquiry?" There is, but it is not the contrast of passivity and activity. When the youth idly pursues his ball or his dog, in amusement, his limbs are surely not at rest? The difference between this sport and labor is, that the activities of his sport—and it is, perhaps, intensely active—are prompted by motives which meet no inward resistance, and so require no self-denial; while in labor his activity is moved by a different motive, which in controlling him conquers some competing tendency of self-love, so that his labor is a struggle and a victory. But this difference does not show amusement to be an intrinsic evil; it is only when it wastes time, or directs to corrupting objects, that it becomes such.

But holy meditation is not reverie. It does not yield the soul to the current of suggestions. It steadily directs the attention by the power of the will to a noble object. Now, is not all voluntary attention active? It is only when it is the subject of outward impressions that the waking soul is, or can be, passive. Action is its nature. Every conceptual process, however quiet, is action; for if the soul itself did not act, whence the conception, seeing its name confesses it to be from no outward source? To hold the thought fixed upon the same idea is the highest function of will; it is one to which none but the noblest souls are competent. When the wrecked mariner clings all day to the life buoy, is there no volition, no action, because there is no progress? Yea, most intense; although the man moves not, save

as he is raised by the heave of the billow. Since, then, true meditation is not a passive state, the cavils of our active theory are removed.

True, this exercise of soul is calm; it is even a quiescence, in that it stills the clamor of the senses and of doubt. But it is energy, and not idleness; calm, because it is an action which perfects itself. This bustling and materialistic age has so perverted our habits, not only of business, but of study, that we value truth only for the excitement of its pursuit, or from some application to satisfy our material wants. Some have so misunderstood the spirit of philosophy herself as to glory in this grovelling perversion as her chief honor. They would have our minds like some beasts of prey, which hunt their game only for the pleasure of the pursuit, but have no use for it when caught. When the truth is found the interest is gone, and a new race is begun for novelty. They are like the miser, who is capable of enjoying his wealth only in its acquisition; when once it is won, he cannot use it more; or if the truth acquired has any subsequent use, it is only to make him more skilful in providing for some sensual appetite. If man is something more than an accomplished beast, like the serpent, which was more subtle than the other beasts of the field; if his heritage is an immortality without an animal nature, then truth must be an *intrinsic* good. Then there must be a mental fruition, as well as pursuit. *This is meditation*, the harvest home of the mind's husbandry.

Is the field of divine knowledge an *arena* only, furnishing strife, dust, emulation, and exercise, but no fruit, save for the body,—like the Olympic stadium, where the sole prize was a fading wreath, and the applause the only real end? Surely, no! Truth ascertained is a possession of the soul. The end must ever be better than the means. The artist who has given the last touch to his picture lays down his brush and stands silent, drinking in, by happy contemplation, the joy of the beauty he has achieved. So every lover of truth knows something of that calm delight, better than the interest of inquiry, which arises upon the view of results determined. Sir Isaac Newton was justly celebrated for his powers of concentrated reflection. Who can doubt that, at the conclusion of one of those immortal processes by which he evolved the principles which rule the planes, he returned again and again to hang with quiet rapture over the

grand result? It was not a problem which then entranced his intellect, but a solution; not a doubt, but a certainty; not curiosity, but satisfaction. But was his delight caused by the thought how these principles might so interpret to him the signals of the stars as to assist him to steer the ship freighted with his lucre more cunningly to its market? No; while his philanthropy did not despise the slightest utility which attended upon his discoveries, it was the intrinsic beauty, justness, and harmony of the truth itself which satiated his soul.

If there is such enjoyment in the fruition of scientific truth, what shall we say of that higher realm of spiritual truth whose chief objects are God, his perfections, his law, his works, and his redemption? There the mind is fed with most perfect verities, the conscience is filled with moral complacency, and the heart satisfied with love. Not one, but every power of the soul is here provided with its appropriate good. God himself is the uncloying object of meditation, full orbed, many sided, of manifold and infinite perfection. Let men call the meditative Christian a dreamer. It were better for us to sleep in this world of sin and sense, if only we dreamed of him.

I prove the excellence of this exercise of soul by the fact that it is the great characteristic of our heavenly state. The vision and fruition of God are a part of its bliss. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." (Matt. v. 8.) "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." (Ps. xvii. 15.) "For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know, even as I am known." (1 Cor. xiii. 12.) Then our doubts will be solved, our inquiries will be ended, and heavenly intuition shall take the place of curiosity. But will the glorified saint thereby become any the less an intelligent being, or will his rational activity be impaired?

But I have a proof even higher than this. God, the "Father of spirits," the infinite intelligence, never investigates. There is with him no pursuit of truth, no inquiry, no doubt, because there is no ignorance. "His understanding is infinite." His knowledge was always omniscience. If God has, in the lapse of time, deduced or discovered anything, then before that discovery or inference was made, he knew it not. He who always knew all things searches not. Therefore it must be that his cognition is

intuition, his thought all simple contemplation. Is God any the less the highest intelligence; and are his intellectual blessedness and glory thereby impaired? Our perfection is to be assimilated as much as may be to him; so that the quiescent contemplation of holy, spiritual truth must be the highest and healthiest exercise of the human mind. Let us, then, trace some of its valuable effects.

1. The meditative temperament is often reviled as inert. But I assert that it is the very one from which to expect the noblest action. For it is this brooding upon great and assured objects which fires the soul with those intense sentiments that incite exertion. Such is the testimony of history. What more energetic than fanaticism? If there have been human beings who have approached a satanic strength and activity in blighting the earth with mischiefs, they have been fanatics. But fanaticism is the child of solitude. The hermit's cave, the monk's cloister are its native homes.

The fiery energy with which Mohammed inspired his hordes, and by which he founded at once an empire and a faith, was bred in the caverns of stony Arabia, where he had fasted and dreamed day dreams of angelic messengers and heavenly revelations. It was the hermit Peter, whose ghostly ardor, nursed in deserts and cells, set Europe on fire with crusading fury.

The strength derived from meditation has also been potent to bless. To this are due the evolutions of the greatest truths of philosophy and religious freedom which form the heritage of civilized man, as well as the noblest exploits of arms and policy. The authors of human progress have not been your self-styled "practical men," whose only notion of activity is change; whose only energy is restlessness; who see no end for truth save its immediate application to corporeal good. Let not these say that they can well resign to the man of meditation the shadowy glories of philosophy, since the arts are theirs which supply men's practical wants. They cannot even do this; even in their own poor, materialistic sense. But for the nobler dreamers, they could not have taught us to navigate ships, to spin calicoes, to compound drugs. Where would be your dexterous man of arts, your navigator, your chemist, your machinist, without the musings of a Kepler, a Bacon, a Newton? No; your merely practical man is not he who descends into the central caverns and primeval abysses of nature, to mine for us the golden ore of truth and

right ; he is but the trafficker, who circulates it from hand to hand, and who tarnishes and wastes it in his traffic.

The men who have changed the face of the world have been the reserved, the meditative ; men of profound insight, wont to retire into the depths of their own consciousness ; men who receive the beautiful and the good with a poet's intense appreciation, and hold them with unwavering grasp of mind and heart. See King David, warrior, conqueror, legislator, busy founder of a polity and dynasty ; he, more than any other inspired author, delighted in holy musings, and satisfied his soul with midnight meditations, as with marrow and fatness. See the man from whose giant will proceeded, more than from that of any other man, that revolution of thought upon whose swelling tides we are still borne, after more than three centuries, whither, we know not. Luther burst upon Europe as teacher, preacher, critic, poet, musician, statesman, ecclesiastic, polemic, patriot, and filled it with the din of his activity. It was amidst the musings of a convent and the reveries of his prison at Wartburg that the fires of this will were kindled. And this is what one should anticipate. Man *feels* as he *sees*, and acts as he feels. A great purpose is only formed when a great idea is kept in contact with the soul, by prolonged communion with it in the depths of its own conception. The mind which has basked long in the light of some quickening truth, like the tropic earth, bursts with the most vigorous and fruitful germs of purpose.

2. The habit of silent adoration is a fountain of happiness to the soul. "I will be glad in the Lord," saith the text. There is immediate pleasure in the sight of a material object of taste. We pause instinctively over a flower. We stand before a masterpiece of art, and crave leisure to enjoy it, deprecating analysis, criticism, and even converse, that the soul may silently imbibe the happiness of its perfection. When we look up, and see the moon walking in brightness, and the stars shooting their radiance from a stainless and unfathomable depth, we receive a spell of peaceful joy upon our hearts. But most happy are we when our meditations are charmed by the beauty of holiness and our eyes filled with the perfections of God ; for there are the transcendent glory and symmetry to satisfy the intellect, the taste, and the conscience at once. What thought can be as sweet and grand as that of the Christian's God, infinite in being, in dura-

tion, in knowledge, in power, in holiness, directing his boundless kingdom with the calmness of infallible might, and yet with the beneficence of infinite love communicating himself as widely as his universe, and "opening his hand to satisfy the desire of every living thing," to creatures like us, tossed amid vanities, cares, and change? How full of calmness is the thought of a Being sufficient to himself, as unchangeably blessed as he is excellent? In this vision of God are merged our noblest conceptions of the stability of the spheres, the purity of the fields of azure, the duration of grandest cycles, the might of all elements, all creature beauty, all good, all power, all wisdom, all blessedness; all are in him, even as one drop is in the sea; and the more the soul expands towards the thought the more are we assured that everlasting intuition will never exhaust nor even comprehend its glories.

3. But the Christian's adoration includes a richer element than the sense of intellectual and æsthetic joy. This divine object is the image of perfect moral beauty, the supreme object of moral complacency. And this is at once the highest and purest sentiment of the soul, in which reason and heart and conscience find their supreme satisfaction. I have admitted that a thing of beauty is an immediate joy. But how poor are its charms beside those of a pure and lofty virtue! No eye can refuse to dwell with pleasure upon the stalwart grace of manhood in its symmetry of health and vigor, or upon the softer beauty of woman adorned with the glow of youth, gentleness, and sensibility. But look now upon the face of the dying patriot soldier, toil-worn and sunburned, but beaming with the heroic purpose which yields his life a willing sacrifice for duty and native land; or upon a Christian mother, pallid it may be, or even haggard with watchings and tears, bending with ineffable pity over the anguish of a reprobate son. Beside the moral beauty of these faces, reflections of heaven's light, how paltry are those material charms which pleased you just now! Ah! now your eye has passed from the brightness of a lamp which man lighted to the radiance of the skies; and the other, which before seemed splendid, is, in comparison, murky and dim.

Now, every virtue of holy creatures is but a reflection from the perfect holiness of God. This glory, which is in them a slender, refracted ray, is in him an ocean of light. Let us learn to

look up from even Christian excellence as it is disclosed in history and experience to the holiness of God as it shines in the history of his law and works, and our souls may rejoice as he who hails the day after a starlit night.

4. The crowning good of a meditative spirit is that, as it dwells upon God, it is sanctified by its converse with the divine idea. But let us not babble the nonsense of the ancient Mystic, as though the soul could disengage itself from sin, by its own agency filling its thought with his image. Our corruption is within, and not without; the soul is not only besmirched with the soil of its encasement; it is sick. The will itself, which is thus vainly expected to embrace the image of perfect purity, is perverted, and obstinately in love with evil. The new birth must precede; we must obtain the answer to that prayer of Psalm cxix. 18: "O Lord, *open thou mine eyes*, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." Then the cleansing light finds access, and the vision of God becomes a potent instrument to purify the soul. Adoring meditation beholds the perfect model which both incites and instructs the longings of the heart after righteousness, while it imbues it with his temper. Thus "we all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Cor. iii. 18.) Is not the vision of God in Christ one of the means which we shall employ in heaven for perfecting our nature? "We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

This truth has to us, under the second dispensation, a sweetness which the psalmist could not taste in it. In this, as in other things, our Father hath favored us with a privilege which prophets and kings desired, but never saw. The immediate object of our meditation is God in Christ. Messiah hath come, and hath displayed to us his lovely person, saying, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." He is "the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person." Our adoration is assisted by having its object both softened and defined for us, so that its severer glories are veiled without observing them, and adapted to our feeble eyes.

This text, with its kindred ones, teaches us that the Christian life must have its seasons of quietude and calm meditation. Too much of even a religious bustle is unwholesome for the soul.

Time must be allowed in sacred seasons for divine truth to steep the heart with its influence. Our hurry and externality has impoverished our graces. Solitude is essential to the health of the soul. Is not our modern life far too hurried? Surely we are in too much haste to be rich; we are too strange to self-communion; our very education is too stimulating and mercenary; and while we degrade the heavenly minister, science, to material uses, we teach our young men to forget that the true, the beautiful, and the good are in themselves the happy heritage of the soul. The clangor of our industry and the dust and glare of our skill have repelled the heavenly Dove and exhaled the dews of his grace out of our life. How woeful is the waste of our holiness and happiness by this mistake! Let us, then, learn to commune with our own hearts and be still.

Sacred meditation explains the delight which every true believer takes in prayer and praise. These acts of worship are sweet to him, because they are simple and direct acts of communion with God; because they present his perfections as the immediate objects of adoring thought and love. And the indifference of the major part of men to these exercises shows how shallow and external is their religious life. Unless the acts of direct homage to God are rendered tolerable by the material charms of music, they are regarded as but irksome preludes, detaining men from the sermon (the only part of the service which concerns them), hindrances which they must endure as decently as they may. In these simple ascriptions to God of his known perfections, there is nothing to *entertain* them, nothing to pique their curiosity, nothing upon which the edge of their acumen can be whetted, nothing of which to prate after they withdraw. Had these men stood where Isaiah was when he heard the Seraphim proclaim, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory," while the temple was filled with smoke, and the solid pillars of its door vibrated with the thunder of their tones, they would only have said in their hearts, "Well, what of that? We knew it before." The triteness of such a doxology would quite have fatigued them!

Yet is praise the occupation of heaven, and its words, if only the heart make melody along with them, are the noblest utterance of the human tongue. If they are level to a child, they are also the highest language of angels.