

THE EVIL OF ISOLATION.

HE THAT SEPARATES HIMSELF FOLLOWS AFTER HIS OWN DESIRE, BUT AGAINST ALL SOUND WISDOM HE SHOWS HIS TEETH. Proverbs 18: 1..

From the value of friendship is a natural and easy transition to the evil of isolation. We must try to fathom the profound meaning which is hidden under this simple but striking proverb, To begin with, what are we to understand by "one that separates himself?" The scripture speaks of the relationship of Saul and Jonathan, 2 Sam. 1, 23 "in their death they were not separated." There was a togetherness which accompanied them to the grave. On the other hand, there are people who shun all togetherness in their lives,-- they are voluntarily, deliberately separated from their kind, and they seem for the first time to blend with their fellows when their undistinguished dust mixes with the dust of others in the common grave. We are to think of a person who has no ties with any of his fellow-creatures, who has broken such ties as bound him to them, or is of that morbid and unnatural humour that makes all relationship with others distasteful. We are to think more especially of one who elects this life of solitariness in order to follow out his own desires rather than from any necessity of circumstances or disposition; one who finds pleasure in ignoring mankind, The Misanthrope is one who has no faith in his fellows, and shrinks into himself to escape them; who pursues his own private ends, avoiding all unnecessary speech with those who are around him. Sometimes he lives alone, sometimes he dies unobserved, and except for the mischief which, consciously or unconsciously, he does to those who survive him.

Of all the accusations that can be brought against mankind no is as condemning as the indictment that a human being-- is himself alone.

I consider this indictment - the father of evils because - in truth every man is not only a "self" a personality, but he is a very complex being made up of many relations with other men. He is a son, a brother, a friend, a father, a citizen. In the same way, a woman that is neither daughter, nor sister, nor wife, nor friend alone but a woman that deserves the grand name of a woman is all of these. The most appalling thing about our generation is that multitudes have become mere selves - hungry, hollow, thirsty, shrivelled selves. An old Greek saying declared that one who lives alone is either a god or a wild beast.

The sound wisdom against which the isolated rage is nothing less than the kindly law which makes us human beings and ordains that we should not live to ourselves alone, but should fulfil our noble part as members one of another. The sound wisdom is the wisdom of the Creator, who from the beginning determined that it is not good for men to live alone, and marked His conception of the unity which should bind them together by the gift of the women to the man, to be bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.

Neighbourliness is the larger part of life; we are not to go to our distant "brother's house in the day of our calamity, for better is a neighbour that is near than a brother far off. Our life is rich and true and helpful just in proportion as we are entwined with those who live around us in bonds of mutual respect and consideration. I am not including the busybodies, tattlers, and whisperers in this category of neighbours.

And thus from the cradle where the home prepares us to live in the larger state, or the social circle - beginning at the cradle and ending at the grave no man should live alone. No one should live to himself; all should live and rejoice to live, in the great cooperative society of the world, in which personal interests are mutual interest and the gains of each are the gains of all.

We can hardly probe the depths of this Proverb without becoming aware that we are touching on an idea which is the mainspring of Christianity on its earthly and visible side.

The relation of Christ, as the Son of God, to the human race as a whole, immediately opened up the possibility of a world-wide society in which all nations, all classes, all castes, all degrees, all individualities, should be not so much merged as distinctly articulated and recognized in a complete and complex whole. The kingdom of heaven, while borrowing its terminology from earthly kingdoms, was unlike any one of them because it was to include them all. Into that kingdom all the peoples, nations, and languages should pass.

The person of Christ is the link which binds all men together; the presence of Christ is the guarantee of the union; the work of Christ which consists of the removal of sin, is the main condition of a hearty-unity for all mankind. When ~~sinful~~ therefore you put your trust in Christ and your sinful nature is subdued, you are incorporated into a body of which He is the head, and you must pass out of the narrow self-life into the broad Christ-life; you can no longer live for yourself alone, because as the member of a body you exist only in relation to all the other members. "But," it is said, "am I not to seek my own salvation, and then to work it out with fear and trembling" ? am I not to withdraw from the world, and to labour hard to make my calling and election sure ? " In a certain sense, the answer to that question is, Yes. But then only in a certain sense; for you are really incorporated with Christ, and are a genuine member of the body of Christ. John's Gospel states, "We know that we are passed from death unto life because we love the brethren and "if we walk in the light we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." We work out our salvation therefore only by losing the self in

others; we withdraw from the world and make our calling sure, just as our thoughts become identified with God's thoughts, and as our lives are passed in cheerful and victorious services.

If, then, on the ground of our humanity we are cautioned against separating ourselves, because by so doing we set our teeth against all sound wisdom, on the ground of our Christianity we must be warned not to separate ourselves, because that means to harden our hearts against the faith itself. When we say to ourselves, " We will live our Christian life alone," We ~~will not live the~~ will not live the Christian life at all." We do not know what the life of in heaven may be, -- though from the casual glimpses we obtain of it, we should say that it is a great social gathering, at which we shall sit down with Abraham and all the saints of God, a kind of marriage festivity to celebrate the union of the Lord with His bride,-- but it is plain that the Christian life, as it is revealed to us here, must be the life of a community, for it is likened to a vine, from which all the dead branches are cut off, and plainly all cut-off branches are dead.

You know that the Son of Man would make men one; you know that Christ called-calls His disciples into a holy family of mutual love and service, so that men may know that they are His, and may recognise Him because they love one another. Are you venturing to disregard His commandment and to frustrate His will by separating yourself for your own desire? have you fallen out of all relations with his family, so that the sonship, the brotherhood, the friendship, the fatherhood, the citizenship, of the heavenly kingdom are as good as meaningless to you? Christ has so tied us together that being saved depends upon our ability to regard each other. We must be one - and love one another to be saved.