

ON THE ENTRANCE INTO SPIRITUAL LIFE.

"Wherewith shall come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God?" How shall I, a sinner, approach the eyes of that Majesty, which cannot look upon sin without abhorrence? My iniquities are more in number than the hairs of my head; and my heart sinks within me on their remembrance. My affections are naturally all inclined to the world, and worldly things. My judgment is depraved; my will is perverse; my understanding is darkened; my knowledge vain; and I see nothing within me, or about me, but what by guilt is already defiled. I have sore proof of that scripture, "that every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart is only evil continually" and that "from the sole of the foot, even to the head, there is no soundness" in my nature; but only "the wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores" of sin.

How then can I please God? How shall such a worm, such a lump of perverse ungodliness, obtain His favour? Shall I seek to deserve it by my own good thoughts? Alas! I am not sufficient of myself to think even one. Shall I by excellency of words approach my offended Maker? He regards not words, but the spirit and the heart; and my spirit and heart are wholly defiled. Shall I then by good works attempt to render Him propitious? O my God, where shall I find them? How can I begin to act, before I have begun to think, what is right? How can the exercises of the body be pure and free, when the soul is unholy, and enslaved by sin? And if, from this day, I could cease from evil, and do perfectly what is just and right, which the experience of all men tells me is impossible; yet what will become of the long black catalogue of iniquities, both in heart and life, which are already written against me? How shall I wipe off the sins of my nature and my life, respecting the times that are past?

O Lord, Thou hast revealed Thyself, as a Holy God, and a Just. Thou hast declared, that Thou wilt not spare the guilty. And I have offended Thy righteous law in every hour and action of my life. How then can I be saved? How is it possible for me to escape the wrath to come? My anxieties, like my sins, might justly overwhelm me; and I ought to tremble at the righteous judgment, which I know I deserve. There are but a few days, at the most, for me to live upon earth; and I am not sure of one. O, how shall I flee from the wrath to come? how shall I avoid eternal burnings, in which no man can dwell but with misery, and which no man can think strictly without horror? Lord, can such a sinner as I escape? Canst Thou have mercy upon me?

Such are the breathings of the heart when it first begins to awake, and live, and feel that there is an evil and a curse in sin, and that sin, with all its evil, lieth at the door.

By Ambrose Serle