

Fire

Some cold, dull day in late autumn, when darkness is coming on, and the wide plain below as far as eye can reach is empty of life, and the mountain-path chill underfoot, and we are feeling very much alone, a strong natural desire comes over us for human contact. Then, suddenly, at a turn of the road, a light beams out. It comes like the answer to a summons, like a thing expectation called for, like a missing link in a series suddenly supplied.

Or, you are sitting at dusk in a dreary room between blank walls among uncongenial furniture. A familiar step approaches, a practiced hand sets the hearth to rights, the kindling crackles, a flame shoots up and the room glows with comfortable warmth. The change is as pleasant as when a cold inexpressive face suddenly lights up with friendliness.

Fire is closely allied to life. It is the aptest symbol we have for the soul within that makes us live. Like fire, life is warm and radiant, never still, eager for what is out of reach. When we watch the leaping tongues of flame, as they follow every current of the draught, soaring up not to be diverted, radiating waves of light and heat, we feel how exact the parallel is, how deep the kinship. This fire that forces its way through the intractable material that impedes it and reaches out to touch with light the things around and make for them a center of illumination,--what an image it is of that mysterious flame in us that has been set alight to penetrate the whole of nature and provide it with a hearth!

And if this aspiring, irresistible, life of ours were allowed to express itself outwardly, if it were given the least outlet, it also would break through and burst into flame.

And with what strength it should burn before the altar where at all times it rightfully belongs! We should stand there close to the Sacramental Presence where God addresses himself to us and we address ourselves to God, concentrating our force and our intelligence in prayer and attention. We recognize in the lamp before the altar the image and representation of what our life should be. Its flame is never allowed to go out.

As material light it has of course nothing to say to God. It is for you to make it an expression of your soul, like it burning out the force of your life in flame and light close to the Holy Presence.

We cannot learn this all at once. It must be striven for. But each moment of quiet illumination will bring you nearer to God, and will carry you back among men at peace. You leave the sanctuary lamp before the tabernacle in your stead, saying to God, "Lord, it stands for my soul, which is at all times in thy presence."

