

**THE STILL HOUR; OR,
COMMUNION WITH
GOD. [BOSTON-1860]**

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The Still Hour; Or, Communion with God. [Boston-1860] by Austin Phelps

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AUSTIN PHELPS

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PREFATORY NOTE.

SOME subjects of religious meditation are always timely, and *standard* thoughts upon them the most timely. Such, it is hoped, will be found to be the character of the following pages.

A portion of them have been delivered as a sermon, in the Chapel of the Andover Theological Seminary, and several times elsewhere. Evidences of their usefulness in that form have been so obvious, that the author

is induced to comply with the repeated requests which have reached him, that they should be given to the press.

That they should be much enlarged in the course of revision for this purpose, is almost the necessary result of a review of a subject so prolific, and so vital to Christian hearts.

THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY,

ANDOVER, MASS., DEC. 1859.

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THE STILL HOUR.

I.

OH THAT I KNEW WHERE I MIGHT FIND HIM!

Job 23 : 2.

'IF God had not said, "Blessed are those that hunger," I know not what could keep weak Christians from sinking in despair. Many times, all I can do is to complain that I want Him, and wish to recover Him.'

Bishop Hall, in uttering this lament, two centuries and a half ago, only echoed the wail which had come down, through living hearts, from the patriarch, whose story is the oldest known literature in any language. A consciousness of the *absence*

of God is one of the standard incidents of religious life. Even when the forms of devotion are observed conscientiously, the sense of the presence of God, as an invisible Friend, whose society is a joy, is by no means unintermittent.

The truth of this will not be questioned by one who is familiar with those phases of religious experience which are so often the burden of Christian confession. In no single feature of 'inner life,' probably, is the experience of many minds less satisfactory to them than in this. They seem to themselves, in prayer, to have little, if any, effluent emotion. They can speak of little in their devotional life that seems to them *like* life; of little that appears like the communion of a living soul with a living God. Are there not many 'closet hours,' in which the chief feeling of the worshipper is an oppressed consciousness of the absence of reality from his own exercises? He has

no words which are, as George Herbert says, 'heart deep.' He not only experiences no ecstasy, but no joy, no peace, no repose. He has no sense of being at home with God. The stillness of the hour is the stillness of a dead calm at sea. The heart rocks monotonously on the surface of the great thoughts of God, of Christ, of Eternity, of Heaven —

'As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.'

Such experiences in prayer are often startling in the contrast with those of certain Christians, whose communion with God, as the hints of it are recorded in their biographies, seems to realize, in actual being, the scriptural conception of a life which is hid with Christ in God.

We read of Payson, that his mind, at times, almost lost its sense of the external world, in the ineffable thoughts of God's