

# **DIVINE DISCONTENT**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649324439

Divine Discontent by James Guthrie

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Cover @ 2017

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**JAMES GUTHRIE**

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DISCONTENT**



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*Edited by Mary Stratton*

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DISCONTENT

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DIVINE  
DISCONTENT  
*By James Guthrie*



*E. P. Dutton & Company, New York.*

*There is a kinship between the first  
innocence and the last mastery*

### I. OF CONTENT

OUR praise of content is too idle. Among arduous days we set up this ideal of rest, our own desires far too tempestuous to let us be at such a haven, and circumstances too busy with our lives. So it is no foolish notion that contentment sets a limit upon meaner ambitions and gives room in the world for nobler. The man who beholds little of life believes there is no more. A child, still radiant with the trail of glory, adventures only upon the path of innocence, snug and content with food and warmth and sleep, securely shut from the hurt (which is knowledge) within his mother's arms. Maybe I take it on trust from the robin that

sings by my window on the bough of an apple-tree; but, for all his pertness, he is an innocent too and finds contentment without much to-do. His business does not mock at good daylight, he does not go far from home. And unlike that ragged beggar of the streets whose misery makes him sing, the robin sings for gladness, or there is no reason for him to sing at all. Since the Fall we have to regard man's life of experience as a more complicated matter. The time comes when the cloud loses a little its early saturation of glory and takes a greyer light, when the child's heart begins to beat with human passions. Are they right or wrong who hazard that the tragedy of Adam took from mankind a more wondrous life of innocence? Is the divine law so withdrawn from operation within and around us that we must mourn amid experience the loss of the "contrary state" of innocence? The danger would be in judging our case from an academic or ecclesiastical proposition, or from words whose significance is hidden until life



itself has ripened in us the wisdom we may read them by. Inspiration, the work of the divine, lies embedded within experience; it comes unbidden in unlikely places to unlikely persons. It may forsake the monk early upon his knees before the high altar, and uplift the soul of the humble woman who coaxes the kitchen fire to light. It may be radiant in a railway carriage, or fill a wakeful night with vision. We have no guarantee that we shall hold or behold it, if by an intellectual shift we seek to enclose it within the boundary of our wit. By no sort of arithmetic may it be added or divided. Thus, content, the true virtue which fine souls exhale all about them, is a flashing inward light, a genial warmth, a sign of wholeness and fitness; but we must be particular as to its quality, and not be led astray by that mere dumbness and numbness of faculty, that animal sleep from which the vision is shut. You cannot make content from the absence of cause for discontent. Eat and drink as you may, you are still hungry, still

thirsty. Strange lands and strange faces and many pleasures will still leave you the burden of yourself; and the task upon your table is not added to, for all your fury of steam and electricity. The strangest of all strange things is yourself to the end. Those are unworthy of our regard who seek contentment by the avoidance of daily vicissitude, holding the law of self-preservation to be the one law which makes for right living. "Children are noisy creatures and spoil the house," say some; "let us have none of them: for us an orderly place with quiet days and unbroken nights of sleep." These good folk are clean, industrious, virtuous, a pattern to casual passers-by. But their methods are high-handed. They hate a dog, but love a doormat; they love chairs and curtains better than children; for their virtue is not discerned through temptation or proved by adversity. They have virtue as though life were emptied of humour and affection to make room for it. Poised amid the chances

of existence, they yet take none, and feel no lack, spending their days dusting and scrubbing, in an eternal preparation for the life which they have no time to live. Others make for themselves a Spartan law against giving and lending, or perhaps they rule hospitality so rigidly for themselves and against their friends that visiting at their house partakes of a fearful discipline, not often to be undertaken. It is all to no purpose: these have not the root of the matter in them: their aim is bad, and their arrows wide of the mark. Where then is true contentment to be found? There is a pretty parable in one of the school books of a certain king who went among his people, after the old fashion of kings, seeking wisdom. Among princes and nobles he could find no man who was contented; so, disguised under a cloak of red and gold, with a long blue feather in his cap, he set forth to discover, if he could, a man who was truly contented. After trying a merchant and a farmer, who proved both to