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Lectures on the Lord's
Prayer

LECTURES
ON
THE LORD'S PRAYER.



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LECTURES
ON
THE LORD'S PRAYER.

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THE LORD'S PRAYER.

I.

THE INTRODUCTION TO THE PRAYER.

When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven.

Luke xi. 2.

SAINT MATTHEW'S version of the Lord's Prayer has its value heightened by St. Luke's introduction. The disciples, waking more and more to spiritual things, feel increasingly the importance and the difficulty of prayer. Approaching God they feel they want some guide. They would not launch forth their bark on the ocean of Divine possibilities without some one to hold the helm and guide the ship. And so they ask, "*Teach us to pray.*" What is worth doing, is worth doing well. And

all who have ever got beyond formal utterances feel that prayer is hardest of all things to do well. They can come with the multitude before God, and perhaps adopt their general utterances ; but when they go alone to speak with God alone, in the stillness of the closet, how unsatisfactory are all their prayers ; how much adrift they feel ; what disproportion they are conscious of between the petitions for time and those for eternity—the prayers for the personal, and those for the common, good ! So all who pray turn to Jesus, the great Master of prayer, above whose head the heaven seemed always open, and address to Him the request, “ Teach us to pray.”

They could not have addressed to Him a request more grateful to Him, for one might almost say that Christ’s business, His constant occupation, is to be a *Teacher of prayer*. In all His providential dealings with us, He is chiefly busy teaching us to pray. Here a necessity ; there a mercy ; now a deep grief ; now a gracious rest is sent just to make us look up and pray. He came revealing the Father that He might charm us to go forth to Him. He died that the suppliant might have freer access to God and richer gifts. He is ever knocking at the lattice, and saying to the soul, “ Rise up, My love, My fair one, and come away.” And here He crowns

and helps all His providential teaching, and the charm of His personal graciousness, by giving us a great lesson in clear, simple language which, though marvellously brief, yet seems to answer every question that the devout soul will ever ask.

The opening words will now occupy us.

“*When ye pray.*” He assumes they will do so; and that all will do so. Whenever we “come to ourselves,” we invariably “arise, and go unto our Father.” Some pray from aspiration, some from necessity, some from guilty fear, some from soul-distress. Some pray poorly like the Pharisee, some grandly like the Publican,—but all pray.

Few eyes are so blind to the charms of the Divine as not some time or other to lift up their eyes to the hills from whence cometh their help. So Christ says not “if ye pray,” but “when ye pray,” assuming that we will all pray. And, by the form of the petition for bread, He indicates His expectation that prayer will be a daily habit of the soul. Although, however, at some time or other all do pray, and none are so flippant but that the mystery and necessity which invest us, provoke the aspiration or the cry, yet how few fulfil the expectation of the Saviour, and are daily suppliants! The daily form may be gone through, but how few sit down daily with their

God in heavenly places, and communicate their wants to Him !

It is well to mark, therefore, at the outset, the Saviour assumes that we will pray, and expects us to pray daily.

And thus assuming prayer, He sanctions it. If it were a fruitless thing, He would have told us. If there were no replies but the empty echoes of our voices, His piteous soul would have directed us to some other solace. But, ✓ knowing all things, He knows no hindrance to the answering of prayer—no obstacle in the laws of nature—no reluctance in the mind of God. HE PRAYED HIMSELF—found freshness for His worn Spirit in prayer; and, Himself enriched by communion with God, He commends the same great course to us. Give no heed to philosophy, falsely so called, when it forbids you to have hope in prayer, for the Saviour bids you pray. And, bidding us pray, He gives us a model prayer, the words of which we may use and expand ; the spirit of which we may catch, which covers all the range of God's mercies and of man's necessities. And with a strange and marvellous opening, He says, " When ye pray, say, *Our Father which art in heaven.*"

It seems strange that any one—just waking to the fact that there is a God above him—full of rawness, and weakness, and sin, should be

taught to approach the great God with such an address. May all men, without qualification, look up to God and call Him "Father?" Some say, No! and think they are doing God service by forbidding the use of this prayer to any but those that are consciously regenerate. And they bid a man first be sure that he is, in a special sense, a child of God, and then call God "Father." They improve on the Saviour's teaching, and substantially "add to the things that are written in the book" a qualification that takes away all the comfort of this word from those who most especially need it.

Spoken
to
disciple

It may help to counteract the mischief of those who would restrict the use of the prayer to the regenerate, to remember that there are others who, on somewhat similar grounds, would forbid its use to the regenerate. For some say, "Inasmuch as the regenerate are forgiven once for all, and do not need again to ask for pardon, a prayer which contains the petition, 'Forgive us our debts,' can only be meant for the unsaved." A variety of this opinion suggests that the prayer was not meant for Christian use at all, but only for the use of the disciples until the Kingdom of God was set up by the atonement of Christ and the pouring out of His Spirit at Pentecost. And the holders of this opinion urge as a proof of its correctness the omission of

Pray
argument

all apparent reference to the name and work of our Saviour.

We may, with advantage, leave the two objectors to settle their own controversy. If Christ had meant only a particular class to use this prayer, He would have said so. He is not so incompetent that He cannot give a prayer universally suitable. Christ spake not for an age, but for all time. What suits any man, Jew or Gentile, saint or sinner, must essentially suit all men. Instead of Christ being absent from the prayer, it is full of Him. He is the Father to whom we pray. It is His Kingdom for which we pray. He is Head over all things, and therefore the Giver of our daily bread. It is He who has "power on earth to forgive sins." He is the great Deliverer from temptation and evil. So that, as prayer belongs to all dispensations, this prayer suited the disciples then, and suits all of us to-day. And if those who deal in such objections were as thoughtful as they are critical, they would soon discover that this prayer is self-protective; that no one can abuse it; that whoever can utter it is free to use it; and that while it suits the earliest beginnings of devotion, it taxes the highest saintliness to use it in its fullest meaning.

Liberating ourselves, therefore, from the restraints which men would impose on us in the

matter of this prayer, let us take it that to all men the Saviour's precept is, "When ye pray, say, OUR FATHER." Oh, what a beginning! To look up to the Great God in heaven—eternal and omnipotent—and to call Him Father! Every colder name is forbidden. We must not come with the doubtful mood which can only adore at a dreadful distance; but boldly, close, confidently, like children climbing to a father's neck. If we begin coldly we shall continue coldly. It is with prayer as with other things, "Well begun is half done;" and if we begin with warm trust and confidence and hope, the whole tone of the prayer is helped. It is not easy to say all at once, "Our Father." The claim implied in such a title seems too bold, and the hope too large. It seems presumptuous so to address God. Yet we must linger over this name till we can adopt it. And looking up, beholding the face of Jesus, and remembering that "he that hath seen Him, hath seen the Father," gradually we gather the confidence and the joyous hope which this word was intended to impart. And, beginning with love and hope, the petitions that follow are higher in their spirit and grander in their scope than they could possibly have been with any other beginning to the prayer.

Perhaps it may be well to be more precise, and to put and answer the question, What feelings

exactly does the Saviour desire us to cherish when approaching God? What are the emotions which this opening word secures?

I. This Name of God requires us to COME BEFORE GOD WITH SACRED SELF-RESPECT.

It is penitence, not servility, that is the mark of saintliness; the cringing of a guilty shame is no opening for grace. It is not the true instinct of devotion to pile names of contumely upon ourselves; to "scrape ourselves with the potsherds" of self-reproach. True humility has its basis in self-respect, and finds in an exalted standard of what was possible the reason for deplored its many shortcomings. True saintliness always implies much of this. It cannot make excuses for its own weakness, or aim low; it aspires after the likeness of its God! And, accordingly, the Saviour requires us to come before God with the self-respect which remembers there is something Divine in all of us; that we were made in God's image; that if we have been prodigal children, we are still children. That, as deriving our spiritual nature from Him, we are immortal like Him, and capable of affections kindred to His own. We must not come with the low views of human nature which tolerate everything that is weak and degenerate, but with higher views that deplore everything

that mars our manhood. St. Paul protests against a "voluntary humility." Undue disparagement of self is apt to lead at once to a low standard and a feeble purpose. When you pray, pray as being God's child by nature; if not by a second birth.

2. This name requires us TO COME WITHOUT SELF COMPLACENCY. "Say, OUR Father." Take a high rank; but the common rank. Remember you are precious in God's sight for being a man—not for being different from your fellow-man. No one may say "My Father" in a sense which denies God's Fatherhood of other men.

By saying "Our," take the common level of mankind, assuming no superiority, and then look up and say, "Father." All consciousness of peculiar claim or relationship is disallowed. Like the woman with the issue, we must each come as one of the crowd, and as such expect acceptance and help. With self-respect, but without self-complacency, we must draw nigh to God.

3. This name teaches us TO COME TO GOD WITH FULL ASSURANCE OF HIS LOVE TO US. What pure and deep affection is suggested by the parental name—father—mother! What

intensity of interest! The father's "life is bound up in the lad's life!" There is no relationship that inevitably carries with it a stronger affection and a deeper interest than the parental. And this word of Jesus bids us to give God the sweetest and richest of all names to expect the utmost conceivable degree of love and interest: to come to Him as to One that does not merely care for humanity in the lump, but takes an individual interest in each one of us. God's family is no larger for Him than our families are for us; each son and daughter comes in for His tenderest love. We cannot expect too much from God when we commend our wants to Him, and link our lives to His grace and mercy. We may abuse His love, we may deprive ourselves of its blessed consolations, but we cannot destroy it. We may go to a far country—where His fatherhood will be unable to enrich us;—but even there the fatherly love yearns after us, and waits to welcome our return. We may indeed take such an attitude towards our God, and follow such a course that His fatherliness cannot operate toward us in any saving or soul-gladdening way. The omnipotence of Jesus was limited in its operation by whatever dulled the susceptibilities of men. "He could do no mighty work" in a certain city "because of their unbelief." And so

God's fatherhood cannot smile on the unfilial; nor can it enrich those who keep Him at a distance with its choicest good. To smile on impenitence would encourage it; to enrich with pardon the wayward would debase him into a more absolute indifference. God is often grieved with a terrible necessity: He desires to bless us, but the heart barred against Him cannot admit a blessing. And His fatherliness is constrained to veil its glory and to interrupt its benedictions. Nay, sometimes God's love finds itself in painful embarrassment, and has to say, O Ephraim, what shall I do with thee? Sometimes He can do nothing but punish us; can discover no other way of awaking us from our sins and recovering us from our follies. And then with the inexorableness of love He smites us for our sins, and bears Himself toward us as if He were our enemy. But judgment is His strange work. Even His discipline has mercy at its core. And whenever we return, the Fatherliness that never ceased to warm His heart begins to lighten His face, and to be felt in all the touches of His hand. We must not abuse God's Fatherhood, for it increases the guilt of our waywardness, and, tender as it is, it is not able to bless us if we remain unfilial. But we should not forget it, for He yearns to bless us, and, like Jesus over Jerusalem, He weeps "tears from the depths of a

Divine despair," when we know not the day of our visitation.

That God is indeed a Father to us was one of those things kept secret since the world begun until Jesus came, and, by the infinite love of His life, made the infinite love of God credible. Miss not the grandeur of this revelation. Come trusting—not afraid to ask. The children are not expected to lay up for their Great Father; but the Father lays up for the children. Whatever we have been, it is our duty to reckon on deepest interest and richest love filling God's heart towards us.

4. The name here given to God teaches us
TO COME WITH ASSURANCE OF HIS POWER
TO HELP.

Fathers on earth cannot always help us; they are on our level; themselves enfeebled and perplexed. But when Jesus says, "Say, Our Father which art IN HEAVEN," He raises our view to the greatness and the power of God. There, in heaven, He has leisure to help us. He has the infinite perfection that leaves Him free to bear the burden of others. He has the resources from which He can supply our need, and the place of vantage from which He can influence all that happens.

Thus the opening word, rightly dwelt on,

kindles all higher feelings and hopes; and when we linger over the Great Name till we learn its meaning and believe its promises, we can then ask, without lightness and without despair, for all the great things God wants to give, and we need to get.

“When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, . . . say, OUR FATHER WHICH ART IN HEAVEN.”

II.

THE FIRST PETITION.

Our Father . . . Hallowed be Thy name.
Matthew vi. 9.

HE thoughts of Jesus are not our thoughts, nor His ways our ways. A petition that we should have been apt to have omitted entirely from our prayers, He puts first and foremost of all. It is that which was foremost in His lips and heart. In the crisis which preceded Calvary, we are permitted to overhear the workings of His heart. "Now is My soul troubled," He exclaims, "and what shall I say?—'Father, save me from this hour?'—'But for this cause came I to this hour: FATHER GLORIFY THY NAME,'"—in this word, putting aside all shrinkings of the flesh, He asks that by His action the glory of God might be advanced. He came to this world that the name of God might be declared and glorified.

This was one supreme purpose of His Incarnation; and on this part of His work depends, in His esteem, the great bliss of man.

And, accordingly, to this petition, which asks for the manifesting of the Divine glory, He gives priority over every other. To this petition, thus commended, more consideration should be given than usually falls to it.

Let us ask and endeavour to answer the question—

For what exactly do we pray in this petition?

If we can see exactly what is sought, we shall easily see why the Saviour makes us seek it first of all.

And, first of all, this petition evidently involves a request that—

THE GLORY OF GOD MAY BE REVEALED.

God's name cannot be hallowed until it is known, and it must be told us before it can be known.

Our want of reverence springs partly from our ignorance. To see God, at once leads to service and to love. The clouds and darkness which are about Him permit suspicious thoughts and darkling fears to take possession of our spirit. But, known, God would at once be trusted and revered. We need, therefore, to know before we can hallow God's name,

We do not know God's name. Bits of it we can make out. Something of His power we can read in Nature; something of His wisdom; something of His general kindness. And these we put in, rightly enough, as part of His great name. But the rest of His name is obscure.

Whether His interest in the race includes an interest in the individual; with what feelings He regards our sin, our penitence, our aspiration, and our needs—these things are “greatly dark.” And when a soul, stretching its wings of faith and hope, ventures to use the opening word of the prayer and say, “FATHER”—at once there rises a deep desire to know how far that name may be trusted, and whether all the comfort which that name suggests may safely be assumed. Accordingly, the deepest desire of awakened hearts is *to know God*.

“Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us,” said Philip. And in the same spirit, every one who has said “Our Father,” lingers on the sweetness of that word and prays—“Lord, teach me this Father name—all it means; help me to believe and revere it.” “Tell me, I pray Thee, Thy name!” cried wrestling Jacob, forgetting Esau and every earthly trouble in the desire to penetrate the mystery of God. “Show me now Thy way, that I may know Thee;” . . . “I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory!” was the cry of Moses

on the Mount. The Psalmist sought above all things, "the light of God's countenance," and deprecated above all things, "the hiding of His face." It was the ancient hope of immortality that men would "behold God's face in righteousness, and be satisfied by waking in His likeness." And so here the prayer rises, "Let Thy name beam forth on us in all its glory."

To know God is no light blessing: but is the great one which takes precedence of all others. So operative is the mere Knowledge of God in producing all grace and goodness, that the Saviour says—"To know Thee, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent, is Life Eternal."

To see God is a converting and quickening experience. "As we behold we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory." Seeing God in the face of Jesus, the sinful woman is melted into tenderness, and washes Christ's feet with tears. Seeing God in Christ, Peter could leave his nets, Thomas lose his unbelief, the dying thief be changed into a saint. The whole story of the conversion of the disciples, of their faithfulness, and of their fitness for heavenly glory, is told in the single word, "I have manifested Thy name unto them. . . . And they have received the words which I have given them." And as the knowledge of God is a converting, so is it a quickening thing. God's name is the

"pattern on the Mount," by which we mould our own life. When that name is clouded with doubt, we shrink from approaching, and decline to serve Him; but when it gleams forth, and "the beauty of God" is revealed to us, then we aspire after His fellowship; all powers are consecrate; we seek to copy what we lovingly adore. The great transformation of character and its perfecting above, come from seeing God—from knowing accurately His full name. "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

And as all sanctity depends on it, so all consolation flows from it. There is no tear which the vision of God will not wipe away. The sight of Him lifts the gloom from every valley of the shadow of death. When we are without God, we are without hope in the world; but to know Him is to know that "all things work together for good," that love rules everywhere, that no necessity is forgotten and no distress despised. The bliss of heaven is simply the knowledge of God; and the difference between earth and heaven is simply that there God's name is fully known, and perfectly hallowed; while here our knowledge and our reverence are alike imperfect.

Thus we do not ask a light thing; but the first and foremost of all blessings—that which quickens, that which comforts, that which

brings us near, and makes us like our pattern in the sky.

And asking for the greatest and most essential boon, we offer a prayer which is answered in many ways. It is a prayer for light and sight—that “the eyes of the heart may be opened, and the Spirit of revelation given.” It is a prayer for the regenerating influences of the Holy Ghost—for His revelation of the Saviour.

And God answers this prayer when “a glory gilds the sacred page,” when the words of Scripture are a second time inspired, so that they come to us with a warmth, a meaning, and a directness, as if that moment spoken to us by God Himself.

It is a prayer God answers, when on some mount of wistful contemplation God finds for us a cleft in the rock, and displays His form before us, and utters His great name in the words which end for ever the misgivings of the heart.

It is a prayer God answers when He manifests Himself by coming and dwelling in us.

It is a prayer that God answers when He enables us to read His nature as it is reflected in His works; to argue upwards from all that is beautiful and holy in man to the unsullied beauty of His own character.

It is a great prayer, that in our lives and the lives of others, God’s goodness may be reflected

as in a mirror; so that they who do not gaze upward may yet, from the human reflections of His glory, have some knowledge of their Redeeming God.

At the Creation, the first work of God was Light. And Light upon Himself is still the first work of the new creation, and the first want of man.

Therefore, in the foreground of all your petitions, put the prayer for God's revelation of Himself, and present and urge it, until in richest fulness the answer comes to your heart.

But there is a prayer here for more than the revelation of God's glory. That might come, and we might fail to use it. Accordingly the petition, while involving a prayer that God's name might be made known, asks besides, and chiefly, that when known, it may be hallowed. Thus, secondly, it prays for

A REVERENT USE OF ALL THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD THAT COMES TO US.

We can abuse all things, even the mercy and the truth of God. There is such a thing as "holding the truth in unrighteousness;" holding it irreverently, indolently, waywardly. And it is possible for the name of God to be imparted to us in some degree, and yet for us to lose all the service it was meant to render.

We have therefore to pray that the revelation of God may meet with reverence from us and others; that every result which God's disclosure of Himself ought to have on us may be realised; that there may be no flippancy in our mood when we gaze upon Him, but the veiled face of the cherubim, the unsandalled foot, the obedient will. We have to offer really the poet's prayer:

"Let knowledge grow from more to more,
But chiefly reverence in us dwell,
That mind and heart according well
May make one music."

We pray that, with the deference due from those made, enriched, ruled, and redeemed by God, we may bear ourselves devoutly towards Him.

If you analyse the general idea of hallowing God's self-revelation, you will find it to contain various qualities of gracious character.

i. The prayer for power to hallow God's name is a prayer for FAITH. I hallow God's name only when I *trust* the love and power which it reveals. To hear Divine whispers of His infinite mercy and not take refuge in it, is to dishonour the revelation of that mercy and treat it as untrue. All Divine attributes when revealed should be responded to in action. If God proclaims His name as "Merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth;" we hallow that name when with holy awe we adore

its infinite majesty, and trust the mercy it discloses. If we see God's name written in the life of Jesus, we hallow it only when we entrust ourselves to the Redeemer's love. It is thus a prayer for the faith that saves, for the trust which rejoices in God's care.

2. It is a prayer evidently for OBEDIENCE as well. I do not hallow God's name of majesty if, with empty recognition, I do Him merely formal reverence. His name of Lord is only hallowed by me when I serve Him ; His name of Judge, when I prepare for His great tribunal. Consecration is of the essence of true reverence. And the heart that hallows God's name admits and responds to all His claims. It is a prayer for the destruction of perversity, and for the grace of child-like obedience.

3. It is a prayer for ZEAL FOR GOD'S GLORY as well. It asks the humility which will rise superior to all petty ambitions, and desire God's honour only. It prays for the watchfulness that will guard against dishonouring Him ; for the purity which will give no occasion to the enemy to blaspheme ; for the courage that will "declare God's doings among the people ;" that will deem it an honour to intercept, and thus, perchance, convert the animosity that men cherish against their God.

4. And it asks for a worthy estimate of man,

If I hallow God's name, I hallow man's name as well, and look with enlightened eye on the Divine element which makes the family likeness of man. By reverence given Him I am saved from the folly of contempt of others, and from the sin of injustice to them. If I hallow God's name of "Father," I am bound to hallow my own name as child, and to rise to the self-respect of an immortal soul.

It is thus no formal petition and no mere doxology; no compliment merely, or word of homage. It is a great prayer—man's darkness begging light, and man's weakness begging strength.

Have we prayed it enough? Are we of "the generation of those that seek God's face?" Have we had our Peniel wrestlings, and have they issued in ability to say, as Jacob did, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved?" Have we seen God only in the dim glimmer of human statements, and of cold conclusions of human logic; or in "God's light have we seen light clearly?" We do wisely only when we seek to "see Him for ourselves," and learn the truth in the living face of God. Opening our eyes, therefore, to catch the saving light, let us come to Him breathing first the greatest of all petitions: "OUR FATHER—HALLOWED BE THY NAME."

III.

THE SECOND PETITION.

Our Father . . . Thy Kingdom come.

Matthew vi. 9, 10.

THERE is a mystic element about each one of these first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer. The hallowing of God's name, the coming of His Kingdom, the accomplishment of His will are the supreme necessities of our lives, but necessities which only the awakened and thoughtful nature understands. But every nature that is so awakened adopts most naturally each word of this great prayer, and, offering in succession each petition, rises on the

“Great altar-stairs,
That slope through darkness up to God.”

When we have said, “Our Father,” and offered the prayer for grace to reveal all the meaning of that name, and to help us to revere it, some

answer to our petition comes while we offer it. Discerning God's infinite fatherliness, we observe there is in Him a majesty of stately love hitherto imperfectly recognized; a royal aspect; the indications of the presence of all elements of lordship and all fitness to rule. We discern in Him the lordship of the Maker who created us, the Provider who sustains us, the Redeemer who saves us. We feel He has a lien on all our powers; that the sceptre well becomes His hand; that His love makes the yoke He lays upon us easy, and His knowledge of us makes the duty assigned us by Him wise. And, seeing this, we offer instinctively the second great petition of this prayer: "Let Thy Kingdom come;" let Thy sovereignty embrace, Thy lordship control us and all men.

Marking the instinctive rising of the prayer in every heart kindled with reverence for God, we are in a position to notice successively:

- I. THE FORCE OF THIS PETITION.
- II. THE DUTY OF OFFERING IT MORE EARNESTLY.

We begin with—

THE FORCE OF THIS PETITION.

Simultaneously with our discernment of the Redeemer's right to rule us, there is the regretful

discovery made that we have withheld our hearts, and our fellow-men have withheld their hearts, from this gracious sovereignty. "Our wills are ours to make them His :" but we do not always do so. That freedom of choice which was given us that our goodness might be better, sometimes makes our evil easier. We keep out the Saviour, break His bands asunder, and cut away His cords from us ; so that, instead of our yielding the command of the spirit to Him, we are outside His empire altogether—not yielding allegiance not admitting duty. And even when we have surrendered to our Saviour, there is still great room for this prayer; for, to maintain that surrender, it needs to be daily renewed, but rarely is so. What we laid on the altar keeps slipping off. We are perpetually tempted to take back part of the price. Evil slowly dies ; it keeps reviving and re-asserting itself. So that, although we may have lifted the gates to let the King of Glory in, yet there is always some part of us outside His empire. "The Amorite is still in the land," and we have still to supplicate that His Kingdom should come to the unhallowed part of us.

Recognizing thus successively—that our God ought to be our King, and yet that our whole nature has not been absorbed in His empire—we long that He would establish and extend His

Kingdom in our heart. For, on our knees, we feel that our supremest need is a Master; that it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps; that our nature cannot unfold to its grander proportions until we are led by the Saviour in the soul-enlarging paths of duty. Every part of our being is an aching void when Christ is not in it. Imagination, without Him, is a chamber of dread and darkness. Reason, without Him, lacks light and intuition. The heart, without Him, lacks vital warmth, the joys of the heavenly love and the sufficient consolation. But that void of our being which generates most disquiet is the throne built within us for God; when it is empty, none else can fill it but God. And the evils of anarchy and darkness—want of consecutive progress, of clear purpose, and calm rest—the waste of power and opportunity are all realised when God is not there. Man is like some great organ, from which one ignorant of music will only extract hideous noises; but the master, who knows its secrets and its powers, will so touch it that he will melt men into tenderest mood or move them to lofty emotions. And even so God knows us—our lowest note or topmost compass—and when He plays upon us, then the grand harmonies of life are all elicited.

The stoutest ship will sink in a very moderate storm unless there is some one at the wheel

to keep her "head to wind," facing and taking in the front the waves that strike her. And man is a ship that goes down unless God steer him.

Without God for Master, the direction varies in which we move; we have to retrace our steps; no worthy cause evokes our energies; we make the awful mistakes that make our subsequent life a wreck, or a penance, or a despair. With grandest power of service we cannot find the way of doing good.

Accordingly the poet declares that to be "lord of oneself is heritage of woe." *We want a master.* And when the Saviour has all tenderness, wisdom, interest in us; when He gives "each man his work," suiting always the task according to "the several ability;" when He is not exacting, only wants the obedience which would bless us in rendering more than Him in receiving it; when His love deserves and sweetens every service; when that part of our being which is withheld from Him is a part where all the thorns and briars, the care and fears and weaknesses of our life grow—the enlightened heart needs only the suggestion of the prayer, and at once, in the sense of supplicating for the establishment and extension of Christ's Kingdom within us, it says, "THY KINGDOM COME."

And this petition having this force in its

relation to ourselves, we offer it further on behalf of others. And in it,

We pray also for the establishment and extension of Christ's Kingdom amongst men.

His Kingdom is not a secret sovereignty over individual hearts alone, but an empire over the united commonwealth of the Christian Church. A common allegiance to the Redeemer has created the great brotherhood of the Church of Christ. And that Church, united in faith, love, hope, duty, is the Saviour's Kingdom. Standing amidst the ruins of empires, Daniel had foreseen a time when "The Kingdom and dominion and the greatness under the whole heaven would be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him." And inspired by His words, the Jewish people had for centuries been looking, not backward in despair, as the heathen did, but forward in hope for the advent of the golden age in which this Kingdom of God would be set up. The cry of the Baptist, which makes such an upheaval in the general mind, is simply the message that the expected Kingdom is at hand.

And the hope of John the Baptist was fulfilled, for the Church of Jesus is hardly ever named by the Saviour except under the grand title, "The Kingdom of Heaven," or "The Kingdom of

God." As if in the estimation of the Saviour a bit of heaven had become an inhabitant of earth in her ; as if she was the Ideal Community, in whose fellowship men reached their highest growth, and by whose service men became enriched with God's choicest blessings.

And as the devout heart feels that for itself the establishment and extension of the Saviour's secret kingdom within is the thing supremely to be desired, so it feels that for the world the establishment and extension of the Saviour's kingdom in it, is the thing most earnestly to be sought. When we hallow God's name we see that the extension of His sovereignty, through the extension of His Church, is the supreme need of mankind ; that His quickening power is perpetually incarnated in her ; that her voice is that through which He most clearly speaks to men, and her hand that which He employs to bless men.

We see that the Church shares the anointing of the Saviour, and, like Him, has power to "heal the broken-hearted, and give sight to the blind, and liberty to the bruised, and to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." We see that she is a "quiet resting-place and a peaceable habitation" for hearts that are worn and weary ; that she is the best guide of youth, the sanctifier of manhood, the sacred home of age ; that

philanthropy of every kind has its home in her ; that she ennobles the individual life, and purifies the social condition of men ; that she makes laws just, and nations prosperous with peace. We see that she is the worthy Bride of the Redeemer ; that they twain "walk the world, yoked in all exercise of noble end." That she is indeed, even now, a "New Jerusalem descended out of heaven, having the glory of God, a river of life in her midst, and abounding in trees of life, because in her is the throne of the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb."

Those who do not pray see not the glory of the Church, nor the essential service she has rendered, and can render, to mankind. But when we pray we are wise enough to see many things which in our less devout moods we overlook, and soon begin to feel that the world's welfare is bound up in the Church's welfare. When she thrives every essential interest of man is furthered. When she languishes every essential interest of man is injured.

So the devout ever pray for their dearest friends, their neighbours, their country, the dark places of the earth, "Let Thy Kingdom come to them."

Such being the force of the petition—its earnest longing for the establishment and extension of the Saviour's empire in our own

hearts and in the world at large—consider, secondly—

THE DUTY OF OFFERING THIS PETITION MORE EARNESTLY.

We do not offer it as we ought. Indeed, there is no more striking indication of the feebleness of true religion amongst us than the habitual neglect of this petition. Instead of being the second great cry of our heart, taking precedence of all our more pressing needs, is it not the case that we hardly offer it at all?

Who is there that offers it daily, as he is in the habit of asking daily bread? Whose heart lifts up its gates daily, that the King of Glory may come in? How rarely do we lift up the brow to be sealed afresh, and, as a daily habit, lay every faculty upon God's altar to be accepted and used by Him? Is it not rather the case that even the devoutest desire almost everything else about Jesus Christ more than His sovereignty? We want His comfort, we want His teaching, we want His promises, we want His light, we want His protection, we want His support. But His rule, His command, how many of us are there that put that first and foremost before daily bread? or rather, may I not ask, How few there are that do not omit it altogether from our prayers? We ought to be

on our guard against our religion becoming a selfish thing. Religion, when it is real, is denial of self, destruction of self; and in the degree in which self enters into it, it ceases to be religion. If our piety becomes a selfish thing, and our religion becomes a mere life insurance—a precautionary thing to save ourselves merely, and nothing more—the light that is in us is darkness, and how great is that darkness!

If you look at the petitions which are found in this Lord's Prayer, you will see that there is one quality that belongs to every one of them. Every one of them is an altar, and you cannot offer one of them without offering a sacrifice. "Thy name be hallowed :" in this prayer, seeking God's glory, we sacrifice our own. "Thy kingdom come :" here we give up self-will to God's control. "Thy will be done :" in this we abandon our own more selfish plans and desires of life. In asking only for "Daily bread," we give up the lust of wealth and luxury. In "Forgive as we forgive," we sacrifice our resentment and our revenge. In "Deliver us from evil," we ask for the refiner's fire. Every petition is an altar ; and whenever we offer any petition that is not an altar, we waste our breath. If any petition does not carry the surrender of the heart with it, we are like a man who asks a gift without holding out his hand to get it, requesting

mercy, and locking the door against it. It is vain for us to ask for mercy and joy and assurance and rapture and heaven, and not give ourselves up to be moulded, inspired, enlarged, guided by God. And, therefore, this petition of surrender is the salt of the whole, that which makes all the others answerable. Yet all neglect this petition—at least, I think we do. Am I right? And if I am right in assuming that we omit it in the first half of its meaning—the personal part—do we offer it with any greater degree of earnestness in the second half of its meaning, in which we ask for the extension of the Church of the Redeemer? I know on Sunday we say “Amen” to pulpit prayers for the Church of Christ, and in the week-day prayer-meeting we will offer prayer for its enlargement; but where is the solicitude and yearning of heart with which we should offer this prayer? Where is that emotion which made the Psalmist say, “Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I prefer not Jerusalem to my chiefest joy”? Where is that patriotism that makes us feel for the mother country of the saints of God? How few of us recognise what we owe to the Church of Christ, to the lives she has cherished, to the Gospel she has preached to us, to the fellowship she has given us, to her hymns of praise, to the inspiration of her noble

examples, to the restraint of her solemn testimonies ; and, in gratitude for the blessings received from her, pray for her prosperity and growth. Who is there that can say, as David did, and as the Saviour did, "The zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up"? Instead of that we are all apt to criticise the Church's failings. The ministers blame the people, and the people blame the ministers, and all blame one another. Oh, it is easy to blame! The pattern has heavenly perfection in it, the copy is full of earthly imperfection, and no great insight is required to see the discrepancy between the two. The faults of the Church are vastly greater than any think. Still, she seemed to her Saviour worth dying for. She has charms in His eye; is the bride of His election ; He deems Himself —may I say it?—equally yoked in sweet and everlasting espousals with her ; He takes her as His own ; and, if we rightly knew our part, we would pray for her prosperity, day and night, with the utmost fervour. Therefore, in both its parts we cannot afford to neglect this prayer. In its personal bearing it names the only security which is perfect for a human soul. We are not safe until the Saviour has command of us ; and just in the degree in which we withdraw anything from His control we give the enemy a leverage over us. Blessed are they that see their

way in the light of His countenance, that are guided by His eye. They have no regrets ; they "go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God." Thus our safety needs it, and is achieved by it. And our joy requires it as well. If I am half Christ's and half my own, I drop between two stools, and have neither the joys that He would give nor the set of perishing delights which, away from Him, I might enjoy. But ask Him to fill the throne of your being, and to dominate you with all His power, and then uncertainty is gone, and self-reproach is gone, and the angels that serve Him day and night are your companions that sing in your ear, and heaven lifts itself before your eye in all its beauty, waiting to reward the holy service which you render. Peace and joy that no one can take away come to the heart where Jesus reigns. There is no peace until He comes. For we cannot get Christ into our heart unless He is in the throne of it. He is either outside or He is in the throne of it ; and when Christ is outside the heart, like the disciples when Christ had not come to them, we are in the storm and in the dark. But let Him come in, and His presence makes heaven.

"Christ in the heart—Christ in heaven,
Heaven is in the heart, and the heart in heaven."

We wish to be useful, and feel that the only value in life is usefulness. We shall be useful only in the degree in which our obedience to the Saviour is a living and continuous thing. Follow the heavenly vision and men will follow you, and you will be a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night to those who do not see and follow the Divine leading for themselves. You will charm others to Christ. You will have omnipotence in your hand, grace will be poured into your lips, you will have usefulness of every kind just in the degree in which you welcome Him to the sovereignty of your heart.

And we need, and the world needs, that Zion shall prosper and extend. What an influence for good operates on all of us when the Church is worthy of her name, "The Kingdom of God," when she is aglow with His presence, and bright with the zeal of consecrated love!

To-day the Church is weak because worldly. Men do not say to her, "We will go with you," for they cannot add, "for God is with you." But if, in answer to our prayers, she were to arise and shake herself from the dust of indolence, and loose herself from the bands of her weakness, and put on the beautiful garments of compassion, and tenderness, and zeal; if her feet were shod with "the alacrity of the gospel of Christ;" if she pleaded with the hardened,

and sought the wandering, and healed those that are broken-hearted ; if, in answer to our prayers, she went forth to win souls ; if at home and abroad, endued with power from on high, she went forth "conquering and to conquer"—the wilderness of earth's misery would soon begin to blossom as the rose ; men would be blessed in Christ, and all nations would call Him blessed ; and in the beauty of regenerated lives, the harmony of exalted affections, the quickening hope of immortal good, we should see how wisely we pleaded for ourselves and others when we prayed, "OUR FATHER—THY KINGDOM COME."

IV.

THE THIRD PETITION.

Our Father . . . Thy will be done in earth, as it
is in Heaven.

Matthew vi. 9, 10.

N these words we have one of the most blessed, but one of the least understood of all the petitions of this prayer. It springs, however, naturally out of those preceding it. And if we but approach it by the gradations suggested by the prayer itself, as the angel who, wrestling like an enemy, left the blessing of a Divine friend, so this petition will lose all that is hard and painful in its aspect, and become a fount of strength and consolation.

It is easy to see how it gets its place in this prayer. Calling God "Father," we at once felt our need of fuller light upon the meaning of that great name. Getting that light, we used it in the second petition, and in it yielded the control of our will and our heart to Him whose worthiness to rule us had been thus revealed to us. When the heart has thus been yielded to His command,

there rises within us the feeling that something else besides the control of our action might with advantage be yielded to Him; that nowhere would our interests be so safe as in His hand; that to none could we commit so wisely the entire choice of all our circumstances. And so instinctively, we extend the scope of the previous petition, and say, "Not only rule us, but all pertaining to us; in all our experience, in all our circumstances, in our every path, for time, for eternity, Thy will be done with us." We cannot offer this petition until we have seen and known the Fatherliness of God; but when we feel that He is truly "our Father" we cannot help presenting it, and we at once begin to marvel that any mournful meaning should ever have become associated with this petition.

It is far from being a prayer of mere resignation, as a favourite, but enervating hymn might suggest. It is not the natural cry of the grieved heart alone, when it seeks by submission to gain peace. It is no stoic utterance accepting the inevitable. It is not the mournful wail of those who, in it, surrender bright hopes and favourite plans. It is something altogether different. It is a joyous prayer of a trusting child. The desire of one who knows his Father will choose a better lot and bestow a richer experience than he can ever hope in his own strength to find.

There is no thought in it of discipline to be accepted, or penalty to be endured. The thought of the petition is of heaven, where God's will is absolutely done; of a place which differs from earth essentially in the one point;—that here poorly, there perfectly, God's plans are realized. There is the perception that all the rich, varied, endless bliss of heaven springs simply from God's will being there always realized. And that just in the degree in which God's will is done on earth, will sorrow be ended, and joy enlarged, and the well-being of all increased. And so, as a prayer not of sorrow but of faith, a prayer for fulness of joy, the soul that hallows God's name, and has tasted the bliss of subjection to His control, sends heavenward this cry, "Father, Thy will be done."

In considering this petition there are three directions in which our thoughts may move.

- I. THE EXACT MEANING OF THE PETITION.
- II. THE CONSOLATION SUGGESTED BY IT.
- III. THE WISDOM OF ADOPTING IT.

All these matters claim our earnest contemplation, and will repay it.

We begin, therefore, with—

THE EXACT MEANING OF OUR PETITION.

Its general force has been already indicated, but something must be added to confirm and

further elucidate what has been advanced. For, should the sense indicated be attached to the words, there is a difficulty at once produced in many minds. "Is the will of God not always done?" Can we—especially on our knees—assume that God's will fails sometimes of accomplishment? Who can thwart His power, or prevent the accomplishment of His plans? "Who hath resisted His will?"

These questions rise naturally, and tend to drive us back to the idea that all this prayer can be is an utterance of submission to those purposes of God which, with or without our prayer, will certainly find their accomplishment.

It is to be regretted that a desire to simplify the complexities of life, and to arrange all things after a logical and easily conceivable system, has led the Church of Christ sometimes to acquiesce in a doctrine of God's plans and purposes which has more in common with the Positive philosophy than with Evangelical religion, and which represents all human history as unfolding in a rigid chain of sequences, such as would give no scope for human freedom or for answer to prayer—a chain so rigid that everything is predestinated and fixed. It is easy to perceive the strong reasons which exist for cherishing some such thought; repugnance to the idea of Chance especially, and the difficulty of conceiving how

God's great plans could find their realisation, and yet permit any play of human freedom or any variation in its own subordinate designs.

But we may venture reverently to ask—Is it the doctrine of Scripture that all God's desires and purposes invariably obtain fulfilment? I think not. On the contrary. It would probably be easy to quote a text contradicting this doctrine for every text that seems to confirm it.

The truth seems to be that *some* plan of God's is always and invariably realised; but that He has many alternative plans, less, more, and most good; that the best of these is “THE WILL” of God here treated of; and that whether THE WILL of God—*i.e.*, the very best—be done, or *a will* of God—the best possible in unyielding circumstances—depends on us.

Resist Him as we will, we and all our actions will yet be included in the sweep of some Divine plan, and everything we do, even our evil, be made contributive to some gracious results.

But if instead of resisting Him we fall in with His desires—become workers together with Him—then THE FATHERLY PLAN, fullest of mercy and of love, is realised. If we be plastic to His touch, He moulds us into vessels of honour; if crude and unyielding, it is still He that is the potter, and we are still moulded on His wheel, but He can only fashion us into some vessel of less

honourable use. If we will make "a wall," He will build over us a palace of silver; if we will only make a door, He will "enclose us in boards of cedar." Always a plan of God will be realised, but not always the plan His love desires to realise.

Accordingly we find Him often lamenting the failure of His gracious purposes. "Oh that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea." In these words it is suggested that some other action on Israel's part would have permitted the realisation of a more gracious plan on His.

"Oh that My people had hearkened unto Me, and Israel had walked in My ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned My hand against their adversaries." Here also a will of God was evidently done—and one as full of mercy as the circumstances would allow, but not THE WILL of God, with its choicest benediction.

It was the will of Christ to have gathered the children of Jerusalem, as a hen doth gather her chickens under her wings, but that gracious will was not done. Nor is that will of God, which is that all men should come to the knowledge of the truth, always realised. The will of God is our sanctification, but that will is not always

fully realised. With the greatest oath which before Calvary it was possible for Him to use, He swears, "As I live I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that he turn from his wickedness and live." Yet while *the will* of God seeks to save men from death, *a will* of God inflicts the very death from which His higher plan endeavoured to secure them. And it is important that we should recognise this distinction. It is recognised through all Scripture as the most solemn fact of human condition that the gracious will of God depends for its accomplishment on our concurrence and co-operation. With this, a purpose infinitely tender in its fatherliness will be realised: without this, some lesser will of God, the best possible in the circumstance, but only the second or third best, will be accomplished. Do not let us, because a truth mars the exactitude of our philosophy, neglect it. The Church has suffered much by forgetting that we must become not schoolmen, but "little children," if we would enter into the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Let us then have courage to take Christ's words in their simple meaning, especially, I may add, when we know by experience that God's will is not always done. For who is there who has not had it borne in on his soul again and again that God desired him to take such and

such steps, and attain such and such joys ; and yet this, that we know to be the will of God, has failed in its accomplishment ?

Such, then, being the case, in this prayer we recognise that fatherly will which consults for our perfect well-being, which would make the most of all our powers, which foresees all dangers, and would prevent their working mischief, which would make our joy perfect and our usefulness complete. We recognise further, that that "will" may, through our dulness or waywardness, fail of its accomplishment, and so, for ourselves, our friends, and for mankind at large, we pray, " Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

If such is the force of this petition, let us consider, secondly—

THE CONSOLATION SUGGESTED BY IT.

Even before we offer it, and before our lives are enriched by the answers that come to it, this word brings soothing and quickening to our hearts. For, perplexed with the entanglements and burdened with the responsibilities of life, this word comes to us with the sustaining thought that, while we are unable to plan it aright, God has planned it for us ; that in the Divine mind there is an ideal plan which embraces every object at which we should aim, the perfecting of our being, our daily protection, the averting of

all injury to our essential being, our present and our eternal joy. Did we even know what to prepare for, we could not make the suitable arrangement, and would be perhaps more embarrassed by such knowledge than we now are by our ignorance. In these circumstances what a solace it is to think that God has a plan for each of our lives infinitely tender and fatherly, taking into account every peculiarity of our nature or our circumstances ; that He will supply all the guidance and all the help needed for its accomplishment, and that all we need to do to secure its accomplishment is to fall in with God's way and co-operate with Him !

If we are about to travel in some country hitherto unknown to us, we feel it a great relief if some friend who knows it and us will plan our journey for us. If, knowing exactly our physical powers, our mental tastes, our inclinations and necessities on the one hand, and the distances, scenery, resting-places, facilities of travel of the intended land of our sojourn on the other, such an one will plan our route and fix our resting-places, and indicate what we have to do, what a relief lies in his assistance ! How eagerly we should avail ourselves of his guidance and help, and how much rest of mind would his plan permit us to enjoy ! And, if so, there is a consolation, surely, of the very grandest sort to be found

in the fact that God has made a plan for each of our lives, and that He not merely exacts service, but renders it ; that He charges Himself with planning out the line of our greatest security, progress, usefulness, and joy, especially as the making such a plan for life suggests the purpose to supply all the help of Providence and grace which may be needed to carry it out, and the readiness to impart all the guidance requisite for its fulfilment. Such a fact is sufficient to abate materially one, at least, of the greatest burdens of life—the perplexity of choosing our path. When we can get a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night to guide us ; when One who knows us better than we know ourselves is willing to guide us, and to make of our life one consecutive success and joy, it becomes possible for us to rest and to breathe freely, even while we recognize most fully the responsibilities of existence and the gravity of a mistake.

Be of good cheer ! we are of such importance to God that He has a gracious plan of our life, and of each day of that life, and will reveal it to us and enable us to embody it, so that no mistake need be made, nor failure risked, nor regret awakened in all our life. To the thoughtless this consolation may seem slight, but to the thoughtful it will appear supreme.

Consider, then, thirdly—

THE WISDOM OF ADOPTING THIS PETITION
AS OUR OWN.

This must be obvious to all our hearts. One of the earliest of our discoveries is that "it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps," and once made, the discovery is being perpetually made afresh. So that all who can realise that God will take the trouble to plan our life for us, will at once admit that the wisest course we can adopt is to pray and labour that His plan may be carried out. And the more we think of it the more we see the wisdom of praying it may be so. For, first, we have not in ourselves either the knowledge or experience which would permit us even to plan with wisdom our outward and earthly lot. We never know what would be best for us, even in the commonest matters of daily experience. We are constantly desiring what, attained, would do us harm, and dreading what, when it has come and gone, we admit to have been our choicest mercy. Joseph cried with anguish of soul over being sold into captivity, though it proved the path to a throne, and to influence so great that it permitted him to secure protection to his family and his people for generations. Rachel asks for a child, and dies in bearing it. The plains of Sodom, which Lot seemed to choose with such shrewdness, involved him in the loss of wife, and fortune, and friends,

and of something more precious still. The mission to Egypt, from which Moses shrunk so persistently, was that which gave him immortal fame, and permitted him to render a service to his people and mankind which is not exhausted yet.

And we are not wiser than our fathers. We still judge of experiences as of men—by “the outward appearances,” instead of looking into the heart of things.

Would any of us think our neighbour wise, if, reversing the Saviour’s prayer, he said, “Not Thy will but mine be done”? And should we be wise in doing the same?

Oh, what a calamity it would be for us if our plan of our life were to be fulfilled! That plan which combines the maximum of outward comforts with the minimum of difficulty, trial, or service. The rich man, with his full barns, had probably had his plan of life realised; and, for his epitaph, God said, “Thou fool,” as in a moment all his fortune fell from him, and he stood beggared and naked in the other world.

Our will done, there would be none of the difficulties that develop strength, none of the trials that refine the heart, none of the demands on our sympathy or service that enlarge the heart.

If there were even no other world, but this

were alone the object of our solicitude, every wise man would go to God and say, "Father, Thy will be done." But the wisdom of offering this prayer becomes more obvious when we remember that, little as we can guess what would be best for us here, still less can we guess what course and what experiences of life would most secure our well-being in the life to come. That life is the life, all we call life here being but the apprenticeship for the life to come; and our experience is good or evil only as it tends to fit or to disable us for its engagements. Now "our will" generally overlooks that world, some little thing at hand hiding the vast beyond; and in shaping our desires we give but little place to the question how far their fulfilment would increase our capacity for the bliss, or our fitness for the duties of the other world. For a mess of pottage we are apt to sell the distant birth-right. But God sees the issues of all things—of the prosperity we desire and of the trials which we dread; of the high calling, which by its difficulties develops immortal faculties; of the "ease in Zion," which by stagnation enfeebles all our powers. When that other world has such nearness, importance, permanence; when character is the only capital with which we can enter on the life there, is it wise to follow any plan in which its interests are subordinate or

perhaps imperilled altogether? When we wake to the sense of our immortality, and are moved by the gracious solicitude which it awakens, the first and last action of instinctive wisdom is to commit the whole ordering of our life to God, and to say, "Thy will be done." And if to secure our best advantage here and hereafter we shall pray this prayer, there is another great reason still why we should adopt it. Offering it we find a peace that passes understanding, while neglecting it there is to the soul nothing but solicitude and unrest.

I have shown that there is consolation in the very fact that God is interested in us sufficiently to plan our life. That consolation grows into perfect peace when we submit to His plan and ask that it be realised.

When we go over to God's side, we shall find God is on ours. And when we enthrone our God, and give up to Him the disposal of all pertaining to us, then restlessness leaves the spirit, faith brings the gleam of peace over a future which was dark with stern solicitude. When God is left free to effect His gracious plan, He comes near with His blessed presence. When we are willing to walk in the paths which God chooses for us, He comes nigh, and is Himself our living guide. In weariness there is the shadow of His wings, in grief the solace of His

sympathy. Working on our own lines, a sense of the Divine disapproval makes us afraid ; working on God's, we walk in the light, as He is in the light. His hand upholds and His voice continually cheers us. And life is like the shining light—shining more and more unto the perfect day.

If these things are so, we have reason to repent of our neglect of this petition, and to repair that neglect. And some confession is due from us of our fault in offering it sometimes in such a tone and with such a meaning as accused the kindness of God.

Let us say, Our Father ; let us gaze on the heaven whose bliss is but the fulfilment of His will, and then, with the faith in which lowly submission and joyous trust blend perfectly, let us offer for ourselves, our dear ones, and for mankind at large, the wisest of all petitions—“ THY WILL BE DONE IN EARTH, AS IT IS IN HEAVEN.”

V.

THE FOURTH PETITION.

Our Father . . . Give us this day our daily bread.

Matthew vi. 9—11.

HE first three petitions are prayers that rise from the greatness of human nature. The second three are the petitions of its littleness, its weakness, and its need. On this latter half, which embraces these, we now enter.

The opening petition of this second half of the prayer is strangely situated. Faith has no higher cry than “Thy will be done;” Penitence no deeper groan than “Forgive us our debts.” And yet between these two petitions, that of the heights and that of the depths, comes this petition of the shop, of the cupboard; a prayer for business and for bread. Jesus knows our

frame, and remembers we are dust. He does not care to

“Wind our souls too high
For mortal men beneath the sky.”

But requiring us to utter the best part of ourselves first, when we come into His presence, He permits us to bring the feebler and poorer part as well. Nay, He constrains us to do so. He knows that a prayer solely occupied with spiritual things would soon become formal or affected. On the other hand, He knows that a prayer solely occupied with worldly benefits would become very speedily as unreal as it was selfish. Therefore, having united soul and body together in Life, He links matters of the body and matters of the soul together in Devotion. The petition for bread keeps the whole prayer *real* and honest. The prayer for God’s Light and God’s Kingdom keeps the whole prayer trustful and devout.

And this petition in the very heart of the prayer makes us come with the simplicity of little children to our heavenly Father. In studying this, consider:

- I. THE FORCE OF THIS PETITION; and
- II. THE WISDOM OF OFFERING IT.

We begin with,

THE FORCE OF THIS PETITION.

Happily it is the simplest of all petitions. "Bread" standing naturally for all the necessities of life, this petition brings all our earthly necessities to God, and charges Him with their supply. It does this, however, in a most singular way, making of what might seem a sordid prayer one of the most beautiful and spiritual of all requests.

He that has experience in offering this prayer gradually discovers that it reacts upon his spirit ; and that in its few simple words it contains a striking set of correctives on the one hand, and inspirations on the other.

Looking at the chief of these. He finds this prayer requires him

- (1) To forego all bread but what God gives ;
- (2) To put away greed, ambition, and anxiety ;
- (3) To remember in prayer and action the needs of others besides his own.
- (4) While coming thus to recognise God as a rich Giver of all we need.

Look at these.

1. *The prayer constrains us to forego all bread save that which God gives.*

Our Pagan forefathers had a livelier sense of congruity in the matter of prayer than we sometimes have. Their more honourable prayers were addressed to some honourable deity.

Sometimes, however, they wanted dishonourable gain—success in theft, or overreaching ; the bread, not of toil, but of deception. They prayed for that ; but they offered their prayer to Mercury, who amidst other distinctions had this—that he was the god of thieves.

Like them, we can get bread from one or other of two deities : the god of this world will give it us ; or our Father in heaven. The great God will give it us only on stringent conditions ; that we work for it, and in some measure merit it. The god of this world will give it, or at least promise to give it, on what seem easier terms ; a little fraud, a little keenness, a little dishonour.

When we say, “Our Father in heaven, give us daily bread,” we turn our back on the other giver of bread, on all evil ways of making a living or augmenting our fortune, and ask only such comforts of God’s providence as can come to us in an honourable way ; thus deprecating all sinful gains or dishonourable wealth.

2. *This petition requires us, next, to put away all greed, ambition, and anxiety.*

For it asks only “bread”—nay, only “to-day’s bread.” Enough to sustain—not enough to pamper us. Enough for comfort—not enough for display. Enough to free us from needless care—not enough to free us from wholesome dependence upon God.

It would be a mistake, of course, to take the word "bread" in its barest meaning. "God giveth to all men liberally." And we are to interpret the prayer by the abundant breadth of God's provision. And the word undoubtedly was meant to cover all necessities of life. These vary : that being the luxury of the strong man which is the necessary of the weak ; civilisation and an artificial mode of life having necessities that a simple life of bodily toil in the open air never feels. So that the one word "bread" carries a variety of meaning in the mouths of worshippers, and in the ear of God ; meaning more or less according to the circumstances of each.

But the word bread never covers any excess ; and, if we adopt it, we carry to the throne of grace only our necessities. Greed has no voice supplied it in this prayer. The desire to be rich finds no sanction here. We cannot, keeping to the spirit of the prayer, ask for wealth, distinction, the means of indulgence or display. It limits our expression to our modest and essential wants, and it limits us to current wants.

It is possible, perhaps, to press this too far. Some laying up for the morrow is a course we feel God would smile upon. We must lay up enough in the six working days of each week to support us on the seventh. And it is only an

extension of the same principle to lay up, in the six working decades of life, enough to support us in the seventh. It is Bible doctrine that the fathers should lay up for the children ; and it is the instinct of the Divine law of love, written on the heart, to make provision for the independence and comfort of those dear to us.

Still, there is such an awful tendency for the lean kine of to-morrow's possibilities to eat up the fat kine of to-day's peace that the Saviour limits our prayer to this day's bread. If we save, it must not be out of what we should give away, but out of what we feel at liberty to spend. And there must be no excessive provision. We do not ask enough to hoard largely, and so be independent of God. Merely enough, and enough for each want as it rises, is what we in prayer and labour alike have to aim at.

Thus, neither greed for more than enough, nor ambition that seeks wealth as an instrument of power, nor unbelieving anxiety about the future, find any expression in this prayer. We have to bring our wants to God, but only those real and present wants that would press on a contented mind.

How much of mercy and of consolation lies in the very limitation of this prayer !

And asking only for the supply of real and present wants, the petition further requires us to

3. Remember in our prayers, and in our actions, the needs of others besides ourselves.

The words "our" in "our bread" and "us" in "give us" are not meaningless. We are prone to think too exclusively of ourselves—to pray in the singular, "Give me my bread;" and when we pray in the singular number we are apt to act in a selfish mood. For if on our knees we forget others, we are not likely on our feet to remember them. In all this prayer the plural number is prescribed. We have to come always thinking of others, and naming their wants with our own. Jesus "would that we should remember the poor," and all those less happily circumstanced than ourselves, and present their claims level with our own.

Nothing so much purifies devotion as love. Nothing lifts the desire up to the throne of God with such acceptance as this loving interest in others. "He that prays for another is heard for himself," says the Jewish proverb. The Saviour, to secure this unselfishness, makes us pray for others' necessities as well as for our own. But while honour, and contentment, and kindness are secured, the petition lastly requires us to

4. Recognise that God is a great Giver of all good.

The great Father "lays up for the children;"

He opens His hands, and all things are full of good. Just below the surface and behind the appearance of things, God is at work ; and all good that comes to us comes from Him.

Here we recognise that strength to win our daily bread comes from God ; that guidance in worldly matters is given by Him ; that trade is ordered by His providence ; that at numberless points He touches our experience, and in numberless ways moulds it according to His will.

And thus able to give us all we need, the prayer recognises that He is willing to give as well. He is not Father only in name ; He gives to all things the desire of their hearts. There is no indifference with Him, no neglect, no slowness to put all His powers at our disposal.

And so when the petition limits our prayer in some directions it inspires it in others, leading us to come to God freely, as a little child to a parent, feeling that all our troubles—the less as well as the larger—command His interest, and that He is able and willing to give us all we need.

Oh, what comfort is there in such a petition ! If the limits it imposes in some degree fret our more selfish mood, they make us more able to come with faith. The desire that is made by them more pure is made by them more hopeful as well.

Our unselfish wish rises and finds the heart of God, and we know it is according to His will, and we rest in His love, and rise from prayer knowing that "our bread will be given us, and our water will be sure."

This petition is too rarely offered in its simple fulness of meaning. We make haste to be rich, and in doing so fall into many snares. We aim at too much, and lose the power to enjoy the enough we have. We think only of ourselves, and lose the quickening consolation of believing God cares for us and for all. Man's brotherhood denied, God's fatherhood is obscured. Nothing would tend more powerfully to hallow, to enrich, to secure our lives, than simply the habitual use of this prayer. "Give us this day our daily bread." Let me, accordingly, in the second place, urge

SOME REASONS FOR OFFERING THIS PETITION.

1. *The adoption of this prayer will give us peace.*

Not, indeed, all peace; but peace from all worldly anxiety and from innumerable disturbances of the heart.

Unless this prayer is offered there is solicitude of many kinds—how to get, how to keep, how to enjoy the good things of earth. And the man who takes on his own shoulders the entire burden

of these things will find that in the care they involve he has to pay a high price for any satisfaction the comforts bring him. There is a dream of a sort of peace being reached by gaining enough at once to give us bread for all our life, and thus being independent altogether of God.

But care dwells with the rich just as regularly as with the poor. But offer this prayer, and you are at peace. For it casts all the things that mar our peace on our heavenly Father's care.

It is not narrowness of means that troubles men, so much as largeness of ideas. And this prayer helps peace by reducing the desires within moderate compass. Care for to-day kills only its units, care for to-morrow kills its thousands. And when anxiety, instead of being left to roam at large in all the possible necessities of the future, is restricted to the necessities of the day, it never becomes undue solicitude.

It is a subtle cure for care, to add the care of others to our own, but it is the Divine cure. Let love think of others, and our care becomes at once genial instead of fretful, hopeful instead of anxious.

You cannot while thinking only of yourself feel any assurance of God's love and care. The selfish eye is blind and cannot see the unselfish-

ness of God. But when you gather others' cares with your own, and come to Him, He smiles on your kindly, humble desires, and in His smile you have peace.

This peace is not a light thing, but something richer than any fortune; a sufficiency where wealth is absent, and where wealth is present an influence which permits it to be at once grandly used and richly enjoyed.

It would be a Balm of Gilead to many a careworn soul simply to adopt this blessed prayer in its lowly faith and loving contentment.

2. The adoption of this petition would hallow all our life.

In the words, "He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much," the context shows it was of Religion in the employment of our money that the Saviour was speaking; and it is not too much to say that he who is religious in the matter of daily bread is religious in everything.

For the largest part of the work of all men is directed to the getting of the means of living; and if in the pursuit of our trade this gracious prayer moderates all selfishness, destroys all greed, and brightens with the smile of God all our activities, it would be found that the whole of life was somehow affected graciously by the one petition.

There is no mistake more serious than that of divorcing business from religion. Under the notion that their rules and objects are altogether separate, many professedly religious persons keep their religion entirely out of their trade. Perhaps allowing that morality has something to do with business, they yet deliberately keep it from being touched, refined, and ennobled by the higher regard for the will of God.

Such action tends invariably to destroy religious life altogether. For Spirituality only permitted to breathe on Sundays, and limited to a narrow range of private activities, decays and dies.

But if no shilling comes into our hands but what has been purely asked from God, and is gratefully accepted as from His hands ; if in pursuing our calling we are aiming only at daily bread, and are not grasping for any more ; if having prayed for others, the force of the sincere prayer constrains us to share with others whatever is beyond our needs ; then Religion has room to breathe—a field for her finest activity—a constant service and a perpetual means of growth. Then every transaction is a link to God, deepening truth, honour, and love, and quickening faith in God in matters of eternal interest. Then the workshop or the counting-house becomes a temple, often filled with a

cloud of glory, and the entire life becomes imbued with the Spirit of God.

If thou wouldst be perfect, pray daily, "Our Father in heaven, give Thou us our daily bread." It is only an extension of this line of remark to add—

3. *The use of this prayer will vastly enlarge our knowledge of God.*

There are grave errors into which the Church never would have fallen if she had given this petition the prominence it deserves.

For instance, it is hardly conceivable that the worship of saints could ever arise where men regularly and thoughtfully used this petition. If God be a being whose greatness alienates Him from us, and who cannot be expected to take any interest in our common life, we are driven in the exigency of care to seek some lesser being, whose littleness will permit the feelings of sympathy and pity to operate. But if we felt that God is thoughtful of all our common wants, and takes care of our basket and our store—is a real Father, who thinks of His children's food, we need no other friend; we carry all our cares to Him.

There would, again, be very little Ritualism if this prayer were regularly used. That error also springs from the thought that God is only a King, keeping a regal distance, whose priests

are masters of ceremony that know the precise etiquette of approach. As soon as men learn the homeliness of God, and the meekness and lowliness of the Lord God Almighty, and talk to Him of the difficulties of making ends meet, of the children's clothes and schooling, the heart loses all that bad soil of superstitious fear in which Ritualism takes such easy root.

And so I might go over many doctrines which defraud God of glory and man of comfort, and in every case it would be found that this petition would lead to such light on the engaging qualities of God that the simple offering of it would enable the spirit to grow out of all its delusions.

Am I right in these views? If I am, let us give to this petition a holier and more thoughtful usage than has been our wont. Let us not rudely overlook its delicate restraints and suggestions, but, graciously accepting its genial inspiration of contentment and brotherliness and faith, let us like little children go to God and say—"OUR FATHER, GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD."

VI.

THE FIFTH PETITION.

Our Father . . . Forgive us our debts, as we
forgive our debtors.

Matthew vi. 9, 12.

IVE us bread, and forgive us our debts : so Christ links together the great need of the body and the great need of the soul. What Christ has joined together none should put asunder ; we should neither in greed ask only bread, nor in remorse and despair ask only pardon. But we should ask both together, and gather from the union of the petitions the lesson that forgiveness is a prime necessity of life—essential to the soul as bread is to the body. Fools mock at sin, deeming it trivial in its nature and its consequences. Our Saviour treats it as the great calamity of life, and bids us seek to get rid of it by pardon. His view of things was free of all distortion. In the light in which He beheld all things, nothing was

exaggerated and nothing obscured. Their real magnitude, their exact form, revealed themselves to His eye ; and it is wise of us to use His vision to correct our own, to accept His estimates, and then to follow His guidance in our prayer.

In this petition there are two things specially brought before us :

I. THE REQUEST ; and II. THE CLAUSE WHICH IS ADDED TO THE REQUEST.

We begin with,

THE REQUEST. “OUR FATHER, FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS.”

How solemn ! How consoling is this word !

Nothing is more awful than its assumption that we are in debt to the Lord God Almighty. Nothing is more sweet than its suggestion that God is in the habit of pardoning men, and that we have only to ask in order to obtain His forgiveness. Thus, before the petition has wrought anything directly for us, it acts as a two-edged sword, destroying at once our delusions and our despair. Look at each side of its teaching, as bringing before us the great reasons why we should offer its request.

i. Observe, *We are in debt to God.*

We have only to listen to the voice of conscience to admit this at once. For, amongst the deepest of all our instincts, is the sense of

responsibility—a feeling that some things are due from us. We are no sooner conscious of freedom to choose our acts, than we become sensible of certain claims constraining our choice, and the whole realm of duty rises on the soul. Before we discover a personal God, and any specific relationship to Him, every form of goodness which seems possible to us appears binding on us as well.

Somehow, all the good of which we are capable puts in a claim on us, requiring to be wrought. With every need of our fellow-men which we might meet; with every example of goodness which we might with advantage copy; with every precept of goodness there arises a sense that the course which these suggest is duty, and that we are responsible for doing it. And when we have seen God, and have felt our relationship to Him, then all this sense of duty grows in force and delicacy.

Our creation, and our preservation by Christ, augment our self-respect, and with it our sense of duty to Him. The example of all His virtues, of His thought for others, His purity, His service of constant love, give a sanction to all the similar virtues of which we are capable.

When we perceive ourselves to be the objects of infinite care, and of redeeming activities, the reception of God's mercies deepens within us a

sense of the duty of rendering a similar service to others in the degree in which it is possible. The fairness of the life of Jesus, His continual service, His character unsullied with a stain of self-seeking, complete our sense of what is grandly possible to us.

And thus, gradually there rises before us a "Pattern on the Mount," according to which we feel our life must be fashioned. And duty comes to us as the Pillar of cloud and fire to guide us on our way, in the path by which greatness and peace alike are reached. We may turn our back on this ideal of life, but it is there. We may damage the senses by which it is perceived, and the powers by which it is obeyed, but it is there, —a law traced for us by the finger of God. However we becloud, we cannot utterly destroy our sense of responsibility. And we destroy our own dignity as men in the same degree in which we succeed in obscuring it. Bliss, growth, purity, flow from the hearty and obedient recognition of it; all forms of evil spring from its denial.

We owe our God all the good of which we are capable.

And, owing Him this, we fail to meet our responsibilities to Him. We leave undone the things we ought to do, and do those things we ought not to do. When we begin to reckon up our shortcomings, they are more than can be

numbered. Our own hearts, corrupted and partial as they are, condemn us ; and we feel that He who knows all things must see much ground of blame that we have altogether overlooked. The more we awake and see things in a Divine light, the more faults, gross and inexcusable, lie obvious in our life. Only the ignorant feel innocent. The holier we are, the deeper is the sense of the wickedness of the current selfishness of our lives. The chief of saints felt himself to be the chief of sinners. And whenever the eye is exercised to see the beauty of the Saviour's character, its perception produces simultaneously self-respect and deep repentance.

And when we add to the actual wrongs we have done the great neglects of which we have been guilty, our sense of sinfulness increases ; for while sins of commission slay their thousands, sins of omission slay their tens of thousands. The sin of the priest and Levite in the parable was only neglect. "Inasmuch as ye did it not," is the opening phrase of the verdict, "Depart from Me, ye cursed."

Only not to trust the Saviour, only not to love Him and our brethren of mankind—what a perdition is implied in these negations ! And our life is full of these deplorable neglects, which combine the maximum of harm with the minimum of consciousness of wrong. When we begin

to add up these wrongs and these neglects calmly and fairly, and admit into our reckoning all aggravations accruing from the possession of light and the enjoyment of mercy, we cannot fail to understand, in some degree at least, how contrition has been the “seal” upon the brow of all God’s saints in every age, and how Christ should speak of “our debts” to God.

If there are such debts to our God, obligations thus unmet, and faults contracted, let us see that we make not light of such a state of matters. Sin is the great evil, in comparison with which all other evils are insignificant. We should beware of throwing dust in our own eyes, and healing slightly the hurt of our own hearts. We have debts, with nothing to pay; and, bankrupt before God, our wisdom is to take our debts to our Father in heaven, saying, “Father, forgive them.”

For the Saviour’s word, assuming the guilt of sin, proclaims at the same time the possibility of its pardon.

How sweet is the suggestion of this word—that forgiveness is granted to those who seek it!

For forgiveness is a great word. It means forth-giving—that is, the absolute dismissal and sending away of that which we acknowledge. And, carrying this large significance, it reproduces

exactly the force of the term which the Saviour uses.

There is no philosophy of atonement embodied in the prayer. The Saviour knew, but does not state it, in what way God would achieve His purpose of at once enhancing the obligation of duty while pardoning the breaches of it. How much the forgiveness freely bestowed on us would cost our Saviour, He does not here announce, but simply presents the result of His atoning work before us, and bids us ask and expect the free, absolute, complete forgiveness of our sins. Oh! what a gospel is there in this word! There is, perhaps, a gleam of hope derivable from philosophy on such matters. The way in which Nature makes the best of all things—gathering up fragments, that nothing may be lost, and turning all corruption into a source of life—suggests a glimmer of hope that perchance our failings may be wrought into some plan for the development of our better natures. But it is only a glimmer. And when our memory declines to forget our faults, when painful experiences keep up the recollection of them, when the law—"What a man soweth, that shall he also reap"—proclaims itself to our souls, then these debts "cleave to us," "take hold upon us," so that we cannot lift our head; and everywhere

something of the tone of the *Dies Irae* marks the utterance of the awakened heart.

“What shall I, frail man, be pleading?
Who for me be interceding,
When the just are mercy needing?”

are the questions, insoluble and desponding, which rise to the lips of all but the frivolous and worldly. But the Saviour meets all this despair by this simple word—when ye pray, say, “Father, forgive us our debts.” For this precept assumes the cross which is to follow, on which, owning the sin of men, sharing its curse and praying for its pardon, He makes propitiation for the sins of the world. It teaches us that “without money and without price,” this most-needed and richest of all gifts is to be obtained. That God “abundantly pardons,” “delighteth to forgive;” that “far as the east is from the west, so far He removes our transgressions from us;” that He “blots them out as a cloud,” that He “buries them in the depth of the sea,” that “our sins and iniquities He remembers no more for ever.”

So that the burden may be lifted from our hearts! And the cup of woe, which we have filled, need not be drunk. A Divine pardon may intervene between the fault and the penalty of it. While we cannot forget our fault, we may have, what is far better than forgetfulness, God’s

forgiveness—so rich that we feel at liberty to forgive ourselves.

“I believe in the forgiveness of sins,” is one of the most marvellous and characteristic of all the articles of the Christian Creed. When Luther realised the force of this word, it changed for him “the shadow of death into morning,” and led him to that peace and hope which he proclaimed with such power as to produce the Reformation. And when, adoring our Saviour who died for us, and sheltering ourselves beneath His cross, we offer in faith this prayer to Him, we are saved by the Forgiveness of God coming to us, and its peace, that passeth all understanding, filling the soul. Reconciliation with God makes the great calm, permits all the noblest blessings of God to descend upon our spirits. And memory is free to linger over its innumerable experiences of mercy, and anticipation to exult in the vastness and tenderness of God’s gracious promises.

Neither coarsen nor endanger your heart by carrying needlessly the burden of unrepented and unforgiven sin, but pray for and get the forgiveness which your Father in the skies longs to impart to you.

If the consideration of the petition thus solemnises and comforts us, and guides us to the great necessity of life, consider secondly—

THE CLAUSE WHICH IS ADDED TO THE PETITION.

For we act wisely only when we offer the petition in its completeness. And when we do so we find that the clause which was perhaps at first a terror to the heart soon sweetens into a thing of gracious meaning.

Look at this word : FORGIVE US . . . AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS.

The Saviour does not take away with one hand what He gives with the other, and the addition of this clause does not proceed from any desire to limit the outflow of pardoning grace. He wants, on the contrary, to get the hearts of all who offer this petition into the mood which shall be most receptive of God's infinite gift.

A little consideration will make this clear.

For observe :

i. *A certain fitness to use and profit by God's blessings is uniformly a condition of their bestowment.* Common mercies may be bestowed irrespective of spiritual character. But for His higher gifts some congruity between the character and the gift is requisite. He does not lift the light of His countenance on those that are going astray. To do so would be to encourage them in their evil. He does not impart the secrets of His love to those consumed by greed and absorbed by the poorest form of selfishness.

They would abuse such assurances, and become harder still in their worldliness.

He does not give rapturous hope to the worldly, nor guidance to those who would only resent His gracious leading. But all His higher gifts are bestowed where they are welcomed, enjoyed, improved, where they will be productive of some Divine result.

“The dew that never wets the cold, flinty mountain
Falls in the valley free.”

And mercies come, into earthen vessels indeed, but only into vessels hallowed for their reception.

Observe, 2, *Penitence is the condition of heart to which alone God can impart forgiveness.* However He might wish to do so, God cannot pardon the impenitent. For His pardon would not be a blessing to them ; it would only fearfully injure them. We have just to endeavour to conceive the awful calamity of receiving forgiveness without repentance, to feel at once how impossible it would be for a God of love to grant it. Pardon thus given would corrupt the soul in every part. It would enfeeble conscience, destroying its constraint and sovereignty. It would develope an ignoble and base contentment with our faulty and sinful character that would degrade us in the scale of being. It would at

once abate all aspiration after improvement. It would make us despise our very God Himself. If the unforgiving could by any laxity of God's rules receive forgiveness, how revenge would be cherished and gratified! What a "cage of every unclean and hurtful bird" the heart would become! What a prolific source of mutual hatred, injury, and woe would be found simply in the permission of revenge involved in the non-requirement of repentance! God does not lend Himself to such mistakes. His work is perfect. When He pardons He does it in such a way as to make it, not a curse, but one of the highest of all blessings, purifying the heart, and invigorating the conscience, and deepening every finer affection. And the state of soul which is competent to gather all this good from His gift is simply Contrition.

The broken and the contrite heart loves much when forgiven much; labours to avoid grieving afresh the gracious Saviour; finds in the removal of its burden of guilt, power of purity to aim higher, and power to pursue the higher aim. Penitence thus turns all it touches into gold, and thrives on the pardoning mercy of its God.

Accordingly, not from any arbitrary reason, or because He grudges His gifts, but because God is Love, He only forgives where there is the penitence that would make forgiveness a blessing.

It is an awful thought, but a true one, that, while we are impenitent, punishment is *the only mercy of relationship* God can give us. He accompanies it with the beseechments of His Spirit, and gracious warnings, in the hope that as a hedge of thorns they may turn us back into the right way. But while He delights to pardon, He cannot forgive us until we have at least begun to repent.

Lastly observe, *That wherever there is repentance, it is easy to forgive our debtors.*

Pride cannot forgive ; it is too ignorant of its faults, has too exaggerated a sense of its own claims, it is too little and poor to have the generous wealth of feeling which can forgive an injury. Selfishness cannot forgive ; it is greedy of its uttermost farthing, and has eyes so full of beams as groundlessly to assume the existence of many motes which are absent, and to magnify every little fault that happens to exist.

And considering how much there is of pride and selfishness in all our hearts, it is not surprising that even when amiability is present in its finest equity, and generosity in its richest energy, there should yet be a difficulty in forgiving those who have injured us.

But when the Spirit of all grace has touched us, and revealed all the glory and all the mercy of the Lord—when our soul has become tenderly

sensitive to the greatness of its Saviour, regardful of the claims of man, and obedient to the promptings of its own higher life—*then* humility beholds no fault equal to its own ; and the heart, purged of its selfishness by its contrition, pities those who have injured it ; and the sense of boundless wealth enriching it makes it wishful to enrich others ; and so penitence easily pardons every fault by which it has been injured.

The contrite spirit dreads the thought of revenge, and in its sense of unprofitableness longs, by pardoning its enemies, to do something to soften the sternnesses and enlarge the bliss of life.

Now, combine these considerations, and it will at once appear how merciful the Saviour was in making this addition to the prayer. God requires a mood congruous with the mercy He imparts ; penitence alone can profit by forgiveness ; it can always easily forgive. Is it not well that, embodied in the petition, there should be a word which informs us at once whether the petition can be answered, and develops receptivity within us ? This word comes between no one and pardon. For if he is in a pardonable state of mind, he can say, “As we forgive,” without one quiver of dismay. While if he is not, this word whispers that he is himself more faulty than he thought, that his sorrow for his own sin is inadequate ; it sets him to measure his own faults

instead of brooding on the faults of others. And, somehow, when he is looking in a Father's face, and thinking of forgiveness, it is easier to be brotherly and to forgive. The insertion of this clause may make it that it takes a long time to offer this petition—perhaps an hour—perhaps a week—perhaps still longer. But when at length, in hope and in humility, he can say, "Father, forgive us, as we forgive," then pardon has her perfect work, and the soul, relieved of its despair and purged of its unbrotherliness, walks in "the glorious liberty of the children of God."

How many delusions would have been prevented, had this petition in its gracious gravity been thoughtfully used! How many hypocrisies unmasked to the hearts that cherished them! How much of unbrotherliness, with its backsliding, its ever-widening gulf of separation from God, its darkness and despair, would have been destroyed!

Let us endeavour to offer it; let us seek repenting grace until it reaches us in sufficient force to let us calmly, simply use it; and then God's face will beam on us "a morning without clouds," and, at peace with God and man, the beginnings of the eternal joy will hallow and fill and overflow our contrite and thankful hearts.

VII.

THE SIXTH PETITION.

—•••—
Our Father . . . Lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.

Luke xi. 2, 4.

—•••—

E now reach the last petition of this great prayer; and, as the version in St. Luke gives it, not the last petition only, but the last words of the prayer. The fine doxology, "For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory," omitted by Luke, does not occur in any of the most ancient manuscripts of Matthew's Gospel; and where it does so appear, appears in so many different forms as to indicate the absence of any original authority. It has the authority belonging to a very beautiful and ancient liturgical response, with which the congregations closed and crowned the prayer when used in public worship. But, unquestionably, the Saviour did not teach us to close the prayer with any phrase of this kind.

He left the form of prayer with an open end

—with a space vacant for God to say Amen. Knowing we are too apt to finish off our prayers formally, and think them done when they are only uttered, He, by a sacred unfinishedness in the prayer, seeks to keep us, like the men of Galilee, looking up after our ascended cries. He perpetuates the praying mood: makes us watch till God accepts the petitions we send Him, and prepares their answer.

The last word is the greatest petition of all; the hardest in the uttering, the grandest in the answering. It springs naturally out of what has gone before. Receiving the pardon of sins, a hypocrite might be satisfied, and finish his petition with a cry which wins it. But the penitent looks before as well as behind him. Sorrow for the past becomes solicitude about the future. He is more solicitous about cleansing from the power of sin than in his deepest alarm he was anxious about deliverance from his guilt. He has a keen sense of the likelihood of his falling into sin; dreads it as the evil of existence, and, moved by many deep desires—love of Christ, love of man, self-respect, regard for his immortal well-being—he cries to God to save him from everything that might lead to his falling into sin. Every petition, as we have seen, involves surrender and sacrifice—in none is the prayer for the “baptism with the Holy Ghost and with Fire” more prominent.

The position which the prayer thus occupies will enable us to appreciate at once—

I. ITS FORCE; and II. THE REASONS FOR OUR OFFERING IT.

On these two points let us fix our attention. We begin with,

THE FORCE OF THIS PETITION.

Lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. In some such form the enlightened spirit ever frames its prayer for sanctity. Two sets of things hurt and impede our better life. Things without, that operate adversely to our continuance in well-doing. Things within, which answer too readily to every external obstacle and seduction thus assailing us. Accordingly, we are always driven to some such double cry as this in our longings after purity—from everything without us which might lead to sin; from everything within us which prompts to sin; O God, deliver us!

The Scriptural use of the word “temptation” makes it the exact and comprehensive word for all outward occasions of sin. For, while including the seduction of the devil, the word is continually applied to all circumstances that put a strain on goodness, to everything that “tries” us in any way. It includes all afflictions, all over-plenty or over-want, all circumstances

prejudicial to the soul's prosperity, all valleys of the shadow of death, all stretches of "enchanted ground." Whatever proves a "trial" to the heart is included in this word.

And, accordingly, when we say, "Lead us not into temptation," we deprecate, without periphrase or attached condition, everything whose natural tendency is to infeeble the good within us, however much our flesh and blood might desire it.

The word is directed to God. For of all circumstances He is the disposer; and over all seductions of the enemy He exerts supreme control. It is our great consolation that He leads us, and that only when He permits are we led into temptation. Sometimes, to punish presumption, He leads into temptation. Sometimes, to teach us our own weakness and to produce watchfulness of spirit, He permits fierce temptations to play upon the spirit. Sometimes, to make us keep close to Himself, He permits the "roaring lion" to come out against us.

Temptation has, indeed, a great part to play in the development of character. We rise above evil only by resisting it. It is the conflict with temptation in all its forms of active seduction, or the influence of circumstances, which develops an energetic preference for good and the vigour to pursue and to achieve it.

So that temptation is really, as it were, the string of the kite—something operating as a downward force, but something without which the kite could not rise. Accordingly, Christ and all His followers are led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

And no temptation ever assails us save that which God allows. But, recognising the fact that, for His own Divine ends, God leads us into temptation, and that without it no strong spiritual manhood could be reached, none the less should we fear it and pray against it. "It must needs be" that temptations come; but we do not pray as philosophers, but as penitents, feeling weakness, dreading falling. We do not tie God's hands by offering this prayer, for we have said, "Thy will be done," and that larger petition governs this lesser one, and supplies its necessary limitations. While in that petition we accept, if need be, the warfare with "principalities and powers in heavenly places," in this we, like children, deprecate every strain upon our too weak goodness. That is the prayer of courage and confidence; this, of humility and self-diffidence. We prefer to be exposed to no peril, and so offer this petition; but if God sees best, we accept all peril, saying only, "Thy will be done." And we expect that, in the event of the letter of this petition being denied, the spirit of it will still be

granted ; that we shall be supported and delivered when tempted, and come out of it strengthened, should God see fit to lead us into it.

In this way the first half of the petition takes its simple form. The Lord reigneth. Our circumstances are His ordering ; nothing assails us without His control. We recognise the possible good of temptation, and so say, "Thy will be done." We recognise the probable evil, and so say, "Lead us not into temptation,"—leaving to God to embody in His answer the reconciliation of our perhaps divergent prayers. And as the prayer thus rises from the sense of weakness, and the desire to avoid further falling into sin, it is a very comprehensive petition. It asks exemption from trials, whose tendency would be to beget weakness or despair. It prays to be denied wealth, if riches would prove slippery places to the soul. It asks to be kept from companionship that would lead astray ; from every position in which the spirit would be prone to gather worldliness. It prays to be spared those assaults of the enemy which always pain even if they do not prevail ; from all darkness that would obscure faith ; from all allurements that would enkindle passion ; from all seduction that would turn the soul aside from the right path, or make it settle down in indolent content-

ment with its poor and meagre goodness. If we have prayed heartily the previous petitions, we shall not fail to offer this as well.

And, asking to be kept from temptation, we complete the prayer for sanctity by adding, "and deliver us from evil."

The temptation outside of us would be powerless without the evil within us; and what we want is the destruction of the latter still more than relief from the former. The Saviour did not contemplate His disciples ever finding their hearts void of evil. He expected them to feel its presence and its pressure more and more, according as their holiness increased. Not the earliest petition, but the latest of the prayer—last to be reached and hardest to be offered—is this cry for deliverance from evil. They who do their utmost to cast out evil from their spirits are those that feel the help of God must be imparted to make that effort of theirs succeed. They recognise, as those who strive not cannot, the dead weight of earthiness within them—the force of tendencies to go astray—the awful mass and sovereignty of selfishness within them. And so, remembering that we are not creatures of circumstances, that over and above every outward seduction there is the inward bias to what is wrong, they cry, "Deliver us from evil."

What a sublime petition! Offering the right

hand to be cut off, the right eye to be plucked out! A prayer that cannot be answered without some agony! A prayer that elects "the refiner's fire," that yearns for purity, at whatever cost it must be reached!

It is a prayer for a more tender conscience, which will restrain our "pleasant vices," for the destruction of self-will, for the lifting of our hearts to higher objects and pursuits, for the entire occupation of our hearts with those higher purposes in the pursuit of which alone they are ennobled.

And so tremblingly we offer it—like the prophet who prayed, "Correct me, but with judgment; not in Thy wrath, lest Thou bring me to naught." If God were not our Father, who would venture to offer such a prayer? But when there is in Him infinite mercy, and the graciousness which answers all such prayers with infinite tenderness, we venture to raise our thoughts even as high as this, and surrendering the heart to the altar fire, say, "Lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil."

Rarely do we offer this prayer; too constantly we shrink from it. Let us consider accordingly,

THE REASONS FOR OUR OFFERING IT.

These are not always recognised, or the prayer would not be so lightly used or utterly neglected

as it is. Slow as true growth must be, the devotion of Christian men would not show such a pervading mediocrity, such poverty of sentiment, such absence of enthusiasm, such meagreness of spiritual and kindly purpose as it does, if this prayer purged our lips like a coal from off God's altar. We do not use it except in the most matter-of-course way. How few are they who wrestle with God for deliverance from evil!

If we do not offer this prayer, it is, of course, because we fail to see sufficient reasons for adopting it. It is not, therefore, unimportant, but supremely necessary, that we should mark the cogent arguments which commend this prayer to our use.

Let me name some of them.

i. *The dangers arising from temptation without and evil within us are greater than any of us deem them.*

We are arrogant in our conceit of strength, and never know how slender is our power, how great the power of our adversary. In our folly we overlook the new forms which temptation may assume; the subtle likeness to duty which it may present; the force of its surprises; the chance of a concurrence of influences besetting us with a vehemence which would leave us powerless.

We perpetually underrate both our good and evil, but especially our evil. All of us have something of Laodicean conceit within us. And even those not quite blind enough to deem themselves perfect are apt to underrate the force of selfishness in its various forms in the heart. It is well that we should observe that the holiest have feared temptation most, and have most painfully recognised the greatness of the struggle with evil. Paul felt he wrestled not with flesh and blood, but with enemies whose conquest called for "the whole armour of God." He groaned beneath his evil—"who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Men have generally fallen in the matter on which they felt strongest. Abraham—the faithful—lied through unbelief. Moses—the man of meekness—through anger; David—most spiritual of the Church's psalmists—through carnality; Peter—bravest of the disciples, and clearest in vision—through mental confusion and fear.

You stand? take heed lest you fall. Principle is still limp with the strongest. One hour of indifference, or of despondency, might let you fall before a temptation that would darken all your life. That which we have already attained, inadequate and unworthy as it is, is something which it would be terrible to lose.

What horror of thick darkness comes with backsliding ! What bitterness of spirit ! What despair ! How hard to regain what through unwatchfulness we lose ! If wise, we should prefer any loss to that of character. "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation," for the peril is greater than any deem it ; and the loss involved in falling is vaster than any can calculate.

Cry, "deliver us from evil :" for the moment deliverance begins to halt declension begins to set in. Growing in grace is the only way of preventing that decline which, like a "consumption," so often enfeebles, even to the verge of extinction, all spiritual vitality.

Had some prayed this prayer, they would not have been "scattered in a cloudy and dark day." What years of melancholy barrenness and joyless, purposeless existence the adoption of this prayer would have saved them !

Offer this prayer because the danger arising from temptation without and evil within is vastly greater than you think.

2. *The bliss brought by the answer to this prayer is far beyond our thoughts.*

Our true bliss is being, not having. What we are is everything ; what we have, comparatively unimportant. To be victors over temptation, and purged from evil, is the supremest well-being.

Moral strength is the highest kind of health ; and inward purity the richest fountain of peace and joy. Regrets, fears, discontent, shame, remorse, weakness, solicitude about the future—you can name no troubles which compare with these. But in the degree in which the heart has been delivered from its evil, every thought is restful, every feeling genial ; God is seen in the graciousness of His providence, in the tenderness of His redemption ; duty brightens as the heaven-lit way that leads to God ; memory grows sweet with the consciousness of God's favour and forgiveness ; hope strong and elate with the expectation of the skies. Above all, love reigns, its every prompting and movement freighted with a bliss like that of God's.

Deliverance from evil is exactly and merely heaven. Its purity of heart sees God—yea, holds Him as its guest, and enjoys with Him intimate communion. Without holiness, men are blind and cannot see God ; with it, life is an Apocalypse—heaven is open, and we see angels ascending and descending on the Son of man.

The bliss of being is perfected in the degree this prayer is answered.

How important should this seem in view of our immortality ! What we have we leave ; but what we are we carry with us. We do not know the condition of that other life—how it

moves or by what processes life is perfected. But surely it were better to enter on its career of duties somewhat fit for them, with souls full of life, ready for the engagements and delights of heaven, than to land on the other side poor meagre ghosts, with feeble potency, shrivelled, fearful and incompetent.

Character is an eternal thing. We breed within it the worms that die not, or grow within it the Tree of Life of which we shall for ever eat. Is it not wise to seek its perfecting and strength ? especially as all usefulness comes with the victory over temptation and the deliverance from evil. It is not fussy work so much as stately goodness that blesses our fellow-men ; the tongue of the learned which speaks a word in season to the weary, the skill to wipe away the tear, the unction that knoweth all things ; the anointing to heal the broken-hearted, come through our deliverance from evil, and exist in exact and constant ratio to it.

Do we aspire to be useful ?—wish to leave the world better ? Pray, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,” and usefulness will “spring up, we know not how.”

And lastly I would urge :

Pray this, for the prayer will be answered.

There is no hard wayside soil, no rocky ground, no thorny ground in the heart of God. When

we sow it with seeds of prayer they take root and bear fruit in a degree but faintly represented by the hundred-fold which the good soil of human hearts may yield.

God will answer this prayer when we offer it. Perhaps not always in the way we expect.

Sometimes

“ He makes us feel
The hidden evils of our heart ;
And bids the angry powers of hell
Assault our soul in every part.”

Sometimes, dreaming only of a Baptism of the Holy Ghost, we get in answer to this prayer a Baptism of Fire.

But when honestly prayed it is always answered.

Very marvellous is the degree in which some lives reach deliverance from evil; so beautiful are they in self-forgetfulness, so strong in the passion of mercy and philanthropy. But even when the answer comes less obviously, it does come. The Eternal God takes His time, and does well whatever He deems worth doing. *He grows His saints where impatient man wants Him to manufacture them.* First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear—such is God's way, seeming slow, proving omnipotent.

Whatever power temptation seems to possess, whatever strength and headway evil seems to

have, let us pray this prayer, and gradually nature will become grace, and grace nature ; we shall loose ourselves from the bands of our neck, and shake ourselves from the dust, and put on our beautiful garments ; the Image of God in all its beauty will re-appear in our lives, until at last the complete answer of our deepest yearning will be given, and “WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM, BECAUSE WE SHALL SEE HIM AS HE IS.”

Note on the Sixth Petition.

The Revised New Testament renders this petition :

“And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.”

The Author was familiar with the reasons usually urged for adopting this rendering, but deemed, and still deems, them utterly insufficient. He thinks the old rendering approved by a minority of the Revisers, and therefore inserted in the margin, ought to be retained on these grounds :

1. That the Greek word *πονηροῦ* (evil)—having the same form in the masculine and neuter—might be translated either way.
2. That to rest a translation, which jars with the whole spirit of the Prayer and of the Gospel, on the fine shade of distinction in classical usage between the prepositions *ἀπὸ* (from) and *ἐκ* (out of) is a mistake ; the New Testament writers speaking and writing Greek as a foreign language, and displaying everywhere a natural indifference to the *minutiae* of classical propriety.

3. That such a rendering makes the second clause of the petition quite superfluous. "The Evil One" has no power over us, excepting through temptation. We are delivered from him, when we are guarded from his temptation. And that rendering is not likely to be the correct one which makes any part of the Saviour's words a mere repetition of what had already been sufficiently said.

4. And lastly, the Bible throughout, by its whole spirit, is at variance with the spirit of a rendering which attributes such a ghastly sovereignty to the Evil One. The Manichæans taught men to believe in two gods, the Good One and the Evil One ; and they could offer the prayer, "Deliver us from the Evil One." The Gospel, on the other hand, while indicating his power and influence, forbids any recognition of his sovereignty ; and the prayer, "Deliver us from the Evil One," could never rise instinctively in any Christian heart. When on our knees before our God, we see no second throne and no divided sovereignty.

On all these grounds, the Author holds that the Old Version is indubitably to be preferred.

THE END.

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