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THE LIFE OF PRAYER.



THE LIFE OF PRAYER.

A Series of Lectures.

BY THE
REV. W. H. HUTCHINGS, M.A.,
SUB-WARDEN OF THE HOUSE OF MERCY, CLEWER.

“RECTE NOVIT VIVERE, QUI NOVIT ORARE.”

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TO THE
HONOURABLE MRS. MONSELL,
Superior of the Community of S. John Baptist, Ctter,
DURING THE FIRST TWENTY-THREE YEARS OF ITS EXISTENCE,
THIS VOLUME IS DEDICATED,
AS A SLIGHT EXPRESSION OF THE AUTHOR'S AFFECTION FOR
HERSELF ;
AND IN REVERENT ESTEEM FOR HER LONG AND DEVOTED
WORK,
TO WHICH HER BRIGHTNESS OF SPIRIT AND POWER OF SYMPATHY
IMPARTED NO ORDINARY INFLUENCE.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE thoughts which are contained in the following pages, formed the substance of a course of Lectures, which were delivered at All Saints' Church, Margaret Street, in the present year. The Lectures have been written for publication since their delivery, and have undergone expansion in the process ; some new matter also has been added, and a few more quotations. "The Life of Prayer," as the subject itself demanded, has been treated in a doctrinal and devotional manner, and, with the exception of the Third Lecture, has in it little allusion to controversy. It was felt, however, by the author, to be necessary, that one Lecture should be devoted to the consideration of the "objections to Prayer ;" as in the serial literature of the day as well as in the inner regions of the spiritual life, doubts concerning the doctrine of Prayer from time to time are presented to the minds of those, who have no love for, and feel no pride in them, and who will therefore welcome and value a thought which may help them in rejecting the temptation in them-

selves, or aid them in giving to others "a reason of the hope that is in" them.

In preparing these Lectures for the press, the author has been aided by some notes and outlines which were placed at his service by one who heard them, and who has, on a previous occasion, performed the same kind office, to whom again his thanks are due. These Lectures, though not written, were as carefully prepared as time would permit before their delivery, but their subsequent composition has been achieved amid much interruption; the author trusts, however, that though this may have affected the style, no inaccuracy will be discovered in the matter. He humbly and unreservedly submits the contents of this volume to the teaching of the Universal Church.

THE WARDEN'S LODGE, CLEWER,
Feast of S. John Baptist, 1877.

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THE LIFE OF PRAYER.

Lecture II.

THE NATURE OF PRAYER.

“ But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”—S. Matt. vi. 6.

IN the Sermon on the Mount, CHRIST assumes that the three practices, which had been prominent expressions of religious life amongst the Jews, would continue to hold their place in the Religion of which He was the Founder. In the transition from the Old Dispensation to the New, some customs must disappear, some fresh obligations be established, but those three—almsdeeds, prayer, and fasting, were recognised as possessing a lasting importance; they would enter into the life of the Christian as they had into the life of the Israelite. As S. Paul says of faith, hope, and charity, that they should ‘abide’ as constituent features of the inner life, when the extraordinary gifts and transient manifestations of the Spirit had ceased; so prayer, alms-

deeds and fasting, were to maintain their position, when all that was of temporary value in the former Covenant had come to an end.

For the reason of their permanency we have not far to look ; it is to be found in man's nature, condition, and moral obligations. Man's nature, according to S. Paul,¹ may be regarded as threefold, as consisting of body, soul, and spirit ; and fasting, almsdeeds and prayer, are exercises which appertain to those three elements of our being—fasting, to the body ; almsdeeds, to the soul, the centre of desire and attachment ; prayer, to the higher side of the incorporeal nature, the spirit. Again, S. John describes man as the subject of three great temptations ; he is liable to be carried away either by his love of pleasure, of wealth, or of honour, and the visible world presents material for the gratification of all the three. Thus the Apostle has left us the inspired warning—“ Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world . . . for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the FATHER, but of the world.”² Now fasting, almsdeeds and prayer, are correctives of these three vicious tendencies of corrupt nature : the first weakens “ the lust of the flesh ” by “ keeping under the body ; ” the second regulates the desires of the soul, “ the lust of the eyes ; ” and the third subdues “ the pride of life ” through that sense of dependency which prayer cherishes. More-

¹ 1 Thess. v. 23.

² 1 S. John ii. 15, 16.

over, man has moral obligations in three directions ; he has duties towards, and consequently can sin against, himself, his neighbour, and his GOD. Prayer, almsdeeds and fasting, are actions, which have a preservative or reparative effect, and enable, by GOD's grace, those who practise them to "live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world"¹ — "soberly," in regard to themselves ; "righteously," towards others ; "godly," towards GOD.

It is evident, then, that successive Dispensations would not interfere with religious practices, the roots of which lay so deep in man's nature, trials and necessities ; and from their permanency we may conclude their importance. When we find Patriarch, Jew and Christian, resorting to the same practice, we may not doubt but that we are confronting some primary and fundamental expression of religion.

But the religious exercises referred to, not only continued to exist in the Religion of CHRIST, but in it they attain a perfection which they had not before ; He purified the affection and motive with which they were done, and imparted to them a new dignity and power ; He turned away the eye of His disciple from the creature and directed it to the Face of the Creator, to "the FATHER which seeth in secret ;" in the language of the Prophet, He separated "the precious from the vile."² The power of the visible had made itself felt, where the Invisible should have been supreme ; these duties had been fulfilled to gain "glory of

¹ Titus ii. 12.

² Jer. xv. 19.

men ;”¹ a common disease had infected all of them, which CHRIST would heal and remove. He rebuked the desire for vain-glory, and enjoined withdrawal from the public gaze, so as to avoid the outward occasion of this evil—“But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy FATHER which is in secret ; and thy FATHER which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.” CHRIST not only removed the alloy from the metal, but enriched the ore with new veins of wealth—dignified these practices by His own Example, Who for our sakes became poor that we through His poverty might be rich, Who fasted for forty days and nights in the wilderness, and spent whole nights in prayer on the mountain-top. CHRIST bestowed a new efficacy upon all that would henceforth be undertaken in union with Himself, and added a new promise of recompense in each case—“thy FATHER, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.”²

What has been as yet said concerns equally the “three eminent duties,” it must not be on that account assumed that fasting, almsdeeds and prayer, are on a level in point of dignity and importance. As faith, hope, and charity, are all three virtues of the first rank, yet the last is “the greatest ;” so of these three religious practices, prayer stands pre-eminent in many respects. Fasting and almsdeeds are the preparation for and accompaniments of prayer ; they are of a negative, it is of a positive character, they remove

¹ S. Matt. vi. 2.

² Ibid. 4, 6, 18.

hindrances, it perfects the creature ; they have to do with material things, it with Divine ; they are concerned with the flesh and the outer world, it with the spirit and the Kingdom of Heaven ; they detach the soul from the creature, it unites the soul with the Creator. These three act, it is true, and re-act on one another, but they are not therefore equal ; for soul and body are not equal because of their mutual influence. There are conditions under which the latter exists without the former, and is acceptable to GOD, but never can the former rise to Him without the latter. We are conscious then, that we are entering upon a subject of supreme moment, when we choose for our consideration "the Life of Prayer." We shall need at every step the assistance of the HOLY SPIRIT. He who helpeth our infirmities when we pray, must also help us, if we are to speak aright and profitably on a theme so deep, so vast, so full of mystery, and so difficult of analysis as that of prayer. Our aim will be to treat the subject rather in a suggestive than in an exhaustive manner ; we will consider the Nature of Prayer ; its Necessity ; Objections to it ; the Conditions of Prayer ; and the different kinds of Prayer, mental and vocal. And first, we shall be occupied with the Nature of Prayer.

I. What is prayer? We shall perhaps be better able to answer this question, if we resolve an act of prayer into its constituent parts, and consider each separately. An act of prayer requires one who shall make it ; one to whom it

is directed ; and a communication between the two. These three parts are mystically represented in the dream of Jacob,¹—there was the patriarch beneath, the LORD GOD above, and the ladder of intercourse between the two. Thus for an act of prayer there must be two terms, and some contact between them. Let us begin from beneath, and consider the one who prays.

For a being to be capable of praying, he must possess two attributes ; he must be rational and dependent. “Of all beings here below, man alone prays.”² Religion more than reason distinguishes man from the brute which perisheth, in that of the latter in the brute there are glimpses, but not of the former ; there is nothing in animals which bears the same relation to Religion as instinct does to reason. Religion is a new commencement in man ; as consciousness is, in the animal kingdom. We are at once aware when we find in the Psalter such expressions as these—“the young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from GOD,”³ “He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry”⁴—that the inspired writer does not ascribe to the lower creatures the act of prayer ; but in a graphic manner he alludes to them as provided for by Divine Providence, when they go in quest of food, in accordance with the instincts of their nature. They are said to “seek their

¹ Gen. xxviii. 12.

² M. Guizot, *L'Eglise et la Société Chrétienne*, 1861, p. 22.

³ Ps. civ. 21.

⁴ Ps. cxlvii. 9.

meat from God," in the same sense as wind and storm are said to obey His word. To place the roar of an animal and the utterance of prayer on the same level, is either to credit the animal with intellect, or to degrade prayer to the irrational exclamations of an uncivilized state. Prayer is the voice of hope ; the cry of the animal, that not only of distress but of overthrow. Prayer is the utterance of an intelligence, the outpouring of a mind, with its numberless associations, its memories, its foresight, its inward, backward, forward, upward gaze : the cry of the animal bears witness to the momentary pang of its nature, is an utterance significant of pain or want, but has no further meaning or direction. Prayer necessitates the presence of reason in the being who employs it ; man and angel therefore are linked together in the exercise of this power. As with the body and its passions, man has affinity with the animal world ; so with the soul and its aspirations, he has some fellowship with beings who are above him in the scale of creation. Angels surpass us in their powers of supplication and worship ; as the being purely intellectual excels in mental constitution the being who is only rational. Therefore the Church endeavours to kindle into a fuller flame our feebler devotion by associating it with that of the choirs above, as at that solemn moment when she thus bids us join them—" therefore with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify Thy glorious Name ; evermore praising Thee, and saying, Holy,

holy, holy, LORD GOD of hosts." And in Holy Scripture, the masterful capacities for prayer and praise in the angels are often mentioned ; but the greatness of their powers does not divide them from us. As the beasts on the one side exceed us in animalism ; so the angels on the other surpass us in spirituality, their powers differ from ours in degree rather than in kind, and the consciousness of their keener aspirations has a sustaining and elevating influence on our own. Mind, then, is essential ; without it, a creature cannot pray.

But, further, the being who prays must be dependent ; he must have a Superior, must acknowledge a Power above him, upon Whose Will his life hangs—"my soul hangeth upon Thee, Thy right hand hath upholden me." There can be no prayer without an acknowledgment of inferiority ; the being who prays must be one of limited power. Hence between the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity, who are Co-equal in Power, Wisdom, and Goodness, prayer cannot pass. When we speak of CHRIST as praying, we are able to do so because He is "inferior to the FATHER, as touching His Manhood ;" He prayed by means of that nature which He assumed. And, further, it seems to be contrary to the instinct of the Catholic Church to beseech our LORD to pray for us now. We use the term prayer of those supplications which He offered on earth, when His Humanity was not only inferior as a nature to the Divine Nature, but inferior also in point of mortality ; when in short CHRIST was a "wayfarer." But when we

describe CHRIST'S action in Heaven, we call it Intercession. "It must not be said, 'O CHRIST, pray for us,' but 'Hear us,' or 'Have mercy on us,' both to avoid the error of Arius and Nestorius, and because prayer is directed to the Person, which is Divine." Though we regard our LORD as presenting His Humanity, and Pleading the Merits of His Passion before the FATHER, we use a more exalted term than that of prayer, and approach Him on that side of His Being "by virtue of which He bestows rather than seeks." Again, when S. Paul asserts that the Blessed SPIRIT makes "intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered,"¹ he is not imputing to the Divine Spirit Himself a creature's act, but he is attributing to the Spirit those fervent aspirations and deep emotions which the Spirit excites in the souls of the faithful, and offers for them in some mysterious way in the Courts above. There can be no prayer, then, between Divine Persons; prayer is ever the cry of dependence and inferiority, and the act of prayer, as it is a witness to, so does it increase, the sense of dependence on a Higher Power. The being, then, who prays, must be both rational and dependent.

II. We have now to direct our thoughts to the other term of an act of prayer. To whom are we to pray? There is but One to Whom prayer can, as an act of Worship, be addressed—GOD. The Being who can hear and answer prayer must be credited with the attributes of Omniscience

¹ Rom. viii. 26.

and Omnipotence. Those who are in the habit of addressing creatures, of course admit that those creatures cannot by their own powers hear them, or if they heard them, answer their prayers ; they believe them to learn from GOD those petitions which are offered on earth, as angels have some way of discovering, and rejoicing on account of the penitence of some sinner. The pulse of joy which beats in the Divine Heart reaches, as an expanding circle, the blessed spirits in their various orders ; and in a similar manner it is conceived, that Saints gain possession from the Divine Mind of what passes on earth : the Divine Mind Alone knows *directly* our supplications. Again, those who invoke creatures, pray to them only to pray for them, not to grant their requests ; they regard them as intercessors with GOD—those who by office or personal holiness can add some force to their own petitions, and press them, so to speak, upon GOD. Thus the people besought the prophet to pray for them when terrified by a thunder-storm at the time of wheat-harvest—“the people said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the LORD thy GOD, that we die not.”¹ So the sorcerer asked the Apostle to pray for him, “Pray ye to the LORD for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.”² There is a conviction that nearness to GOD, whether on earth or in Heaven, strengthens the power of prayer ; but whatever view may be taken of calling in the aid of the Saints, all will be ready to acknow-

¹ 1 Sam. xii. 19.

² Acts viii. 24.

ledge that prayer, properly speaking, as an act of worship, can only be addressed to Almighty GOD, for He alone can hear, and He alone can answer; and that by whatever route according to devotional attractions prayers may travel upwards, they must not only, to be of any avail, finally reach the Eternal Throne, but the very knowledge of them in Heaven must emanate from Him Who is "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."¹ When, therefore, the disciples asked CHRIST to teach them to pray, He said, when ye pray say, "Our FATHER, which art in Heaven;"² He taught them, that is, that prayer should be directed to GOD, as the One who could hear and answer—"O Thou that hearest prayer, unto Thee shall all flesh come."³

That prayer must be addressed to the One Supreme Essence, the Life upon which all other lives depend, will be admitted by all who believe in a Personal GOD, and those who do not believe in a Personal GOD do not believe in a personal self, and so the two terms of prayer are destroyed at one blow, and therefore prayer itself becomes an impossibility; our own personality is bound up with the Personality of GOD, for we are made in His Image, though our personality must fall far short of His. But here the question arises, whether in the full light of the Gospel, in the knowledge which we possess of the Inner Life of GOD, our prayers as to the Object addressed may not have some advance upon the supplications of the Patriarch or devout

¹ Heb. iv. 12.

² S. Matt. vi. 9.

³ Ps. lxx. 2.

Jew. May we not pray to the different Persons of the Godhead, as well as to the Divine Unity. The Church certainly sanctions both ways of directing our prayers to GOD. We are not only taught to pray to GOD, as the Jew, whose revelation was summed up in the words, "the LORD" thy "GOD is one LORD;"¹ but as those who have been baptized into "the Name of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of the HOLY GHOST." The Litany, collects, and hymns, supply instances of addresses to distinct Persons of the Godhead, "O GOD, the FATHER, of Heaven," "O GOD, the SON, Redeemer of the world," "O GOD, the HOLY GHOST, proceeding from the FATHER and the SON," "Almighty FATHER, who hast given Thine only SON,"² "O LORD JESU CHRIST, who at Thy first coming didst send Thy messenger,"³ "Come, HOLY GHOST, our souls inspire," "Come, HOLY GHOST, Eternal GOD."⁴ So in Holy Scripture we find S. Stephen calling on JESUS in his dying hour. As we have revealed to us not only the Relations of Persons between Themselves in the Divine Life, but also the special work of Each in regard to us, we are drawn to turn especially to that Person to Whom is appropriated the particular Mystery on which we are dwelling, or the fruits of which we are seeking; for although all external works are

¹ Deut. vi. 4.

² Collect for First Sunday after Easter.

³ Collect for Third Sunday in Advent.

⁴ Hymns in Ordinal.

common to the Blessed Trinity as the Divine Nature Itself, yet they are wrought in a certain order in reference to Divine Persons—thus Creation is attributed to the FATHER, Redemption to the SON, and Sanctification to the HOLY GHOST.

But it must be borne in mind, that such prayers as are offered to distinct Persons of the Deity are not the exclusive worship of that Person, but addresses to the One GOD under that Eternal Distinction of His Being ; it would be a sin or grave error either to imagine that an act of devotion could be paid to a part of the Divine Life, or to attribute to One Person of the Godhead a greater Power, Wisdom, or Goodness than to Another, or to conceive a greater affection for or to bestow greater honour on One Person than Another. Nevertheless special devotions to Each Divine Person are not only legitimate, but to be encouraged, when it is clearly understood that prayer to One is prayer to All ; such devotions consisting in those thoughts, affections, and effects, which the knowledge of the Divine Person who is addressed excites within the soul—knowledge of His Origin in the Godhead and Work in the creature ; and these devotions have the subjective effect of impressing on the mind the Distinctions of the Life of the One GOD, and of exciting the affections.

However, after all, the soul in prayer turns rather to the Attributes than to the Relations of GOD, rather to the Character than to the Distinctions of the Divine Life ; it lays

hold of His Power, Wisdom, and Goodness, and moving amongst these, leans in turn then on one, then on another ; it trusts His Power, rests on His Wisdom, delights in His Goodness, passes from perfection to perfection, as the Foundations on which belief in prayer is based. GOD stands primarily to the creature as GOD, the Distinctions of the Divine Life are its Relations within Itself. When, then, CHRIST directed prayer to be addressed to the FATHER—“say, Our FATHER, which art in Heaven”—He was not, we may believe, bidding us to pray to the First Person of the Deity, unless the First Person stand for the Principle of the Whole Deity, for those whom He addressed had not yet grasped the Distinctions in the Godhead ; but He was revealing GOD as a FATHER, and showing how He was to be regarded in the Christian Covenant, and the spirit in which He was henceforth to be approached ; He was manifesting the New Testament aspect of GOD. Now we were to draw near to GOD as a child to a Parent with love and confidence, with joy and tenderness ; and not with the dread and uncertainty, and consciousness of distance from Him, which belonged to the spirit of the Old Dispensation. JESUS CHRIST says, “View GOD as your FATHER, as the One who loves you with that special kind of love of which you have had some experience in earthly relationship.” Whilst, then, in regard to the Object to Whom prayer is offered, our devotions may be in advance of the Jew ; we must keep alive as clear a consciousness of the Divine

Unity as he possessed ; and when directing our worship to One Divine Person, not imagine that the Other Two are excluded—not suppose, if it may be reverently said, that we are praying to a part of the Godhead—but that we are addressing the Divine Essence, the One GOD, under One of the Three Eternal Distinctions of His Life, which have been revealed to us in the Christian Dispensation.

III. Our attention has been fixed on the two terms of prayer, the being who prays, the Being who is prayed to, we have now to consider what passes from the one to the Other, the act of prayer. Beings may exist which possess the required attributes, the one of mind and dependency, the Other of Infinite Knowledge and Power ; but unless there is some inter-communication—if they stand entirely apart—prayer does not as yet exist. There must be some movement of the one to the other, some offering and acceptance, some ladder of intercourse. Prayer is the movement from beneath, mind rising up to Mind, febleness to Omnipotency !

Prayer is like sacrifice, a term of wide and varied signification ; it is capable of an extensive as well as intensive definition. Thus everything which is offered to GOD by the creature, and is acceptable to Him, has the nature of prayer ; every good action which is done with a pure intention—“Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before GOD,”¹—not only the prayers but the

¹ Acts x. 4.

alms also. The Son of Sirach shows how the different ends of sacrifice may be obtained by good actions—"He that keepeth the law bringeth offerings enough: he that taketh heed to the commandment offereth a peace offering. He that requiteth a good turn offereth fine flour; and he that giveth alms sacrificeth praise. To depart from wickedness is a thing pleasing to the LORD; and to forsake unrighteousness is a propitiation."¹ Prayer is every effort made for GOD. Besides the maxim "pray and labour," there is the one which identifies labour and prayer, "to labour is to pray." "By this," says one of old, "we bring it to pass that we pray without ceasing, when by our works we please GOD; the whole life of a righteous man is a prayer." S. Augustine speaks of the Psalm which is pleasing to GOD, not only when it is sung, but when it is expressed in deed—"GOD is not so much pleased by the word of the mouth, as He is by the thing and action." So again he explains mystically what is meant by singing to GOD on "an instrument of ten strings."² "He sings, who with a vivified spirit keeps the ten commandments, and does good with brightness. He who does good with sadness bears the psaltery, but cannot be said to 'sing' upon it." To act in view of pleasing GOD is to pray; in this way the Apostolic precept is fulfilled, "whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of GOD."³ Man possesses a triple utterance, "the word of the heart,

¹ Eccclus. xxxv. 1—3.² Ps. xcii. 3.³ 1 Cor. x. 31.

of the mouth, and of the deed ;” hence the wide extent of prayer, at one time it is the desire of the heart, at another the expression of the lips, at a third the performance of the action, which is acceptable to GOD. This power of turning into an oblation, and investing with the character of a supplication, every action of life, is a ground of comfort for those who have little leisure for exercises of devotion ; the prayer of good works is within the reach of all who cannot offer at any length the prayer of the lips, or withdraw their attention for any time from their outward occupation, and thus the most commonplace act may be raised to GOD through the leverage of a pure intention.

But not only, nor chiefly, actions which are outward, but those also which are inward and finished in the region of the soul, may become messages to GOD, and have a precatory value. Thus a temptation resisted for His sake takes wing and passes up as an utterance—“ We offer spiritual sacrifices, by means of a well-ordered life, and by resisting the least stain of the soul”—“ Then indeed we offer ourselves to GOD, when we die to sin.” The resistance is accompanied with moral cost, and therefore has a sacrificial character ; the cost is not only measured by the effort of the soul when in prayer power is converted into action, but by the effort which is put forth to overcome a special hindrance and a counter power. It is on this account obedience is better than sacrifice, when there must be a choice between the two.

In the same way sorrow and suffering, rightly borne, come within the range of this extended signification of prayer. The Psalmist reminds us that tears do not pass away without a record—"Thou tellest my wanderings, put Thou my tears into Thy bottle; are they not in Thy book?"¹ God of old heard the cry of Hagar's child, and sent His angel to deliver them. "Sorrow has for the LORD the value of a prayer." So suffering, accepted with resignation, and united with the Passion of CHRIST, ascends to GOD, when the mind, it may be, cannot frame sentences or the lips utter them. The bed of the dying is the Cross, upon which pain and sorrow are offered to and accepted by the FATHER; and conformity of mind and will to each succeeding pang, has before the Throne of Heaven the eloquence of an ardent supplication. The blood of sprinkling which speaketh better things than that of Abel, gives to suffering a voice, an echo of Calvary, which reaches the Heart of GOD.

We have seen the comprehensive range of prayer, as it embraces every action done, and every struggle and suffering endured for the sake of GOD. We must now gather in our thoughts from its wide and general import, to its specific character, from its extensive to its intensive nature.

There are numerous definitions of the act of prayer, for the communications between one person and another are as manifold, as the affections with, or purposes for which they are made; they are "as numerous as the

¹ Ps. lvi. 8.

manifestations of love in the heart of the saints." S. Augustine describes prayer as "the ascent of the soul from earthly to heavenly things, the seeking of that which is above, the desire of the Invisible." Or again, prayer "is the turning of the mind toward GOD through a pious and humble affection." The following form which the definition has ultimately assumed may be traced to John of Damascus, "*Prayer is the ascent of the mind to God, or the asking from God for becoming things.*" The first part of the definition contains its generic character; the last part, one of its species, and its most common signification. Prayer, of whatever kind, is "the ascent of the mind to GOD." The HOLY SPIRIT is the original source of this definition, thus in the Psalms we find elevation of soul to be of the essence of an act of prayer, "Unto Thee, O LORD, do I *lift up* my soul."¹ "Rejoice the soul of Thy servant; for unto Thee, O LORD, do I *lift up* my soul."² Again, "Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk: for I *lift up* my soul unto Thee."³

But what is the meaning of this expression, this ascent or lifting up of the soul to GOD? How can we lift up our soul to Him in whom "we live and move and have our being?" How to Him who is everywhere? One of the natural conditions of the Divine Life is Omnipresence—"If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there, if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there."⁴ How then is a

¹ Ps. xxv. 1.

³ Ps. cxliii. 8.

² Ps. lxxxvi. 3.

⁴ Ps. cxxxix. 8.

spiritual essence to be lifted up to the Omnipresent God, spirit to Spirit? By rising above the captivity of the flesh with its passions, of the senses, and of the external world. The material metaphor is the clothing of a thought which is a reality to our consciousness. We know the opposite movement, "the corruptible body presseth down the soul, and the earthly tabernacle weigheth down the mind,"¹ and in the act of prayer the soul makes its effort to counteract and overcome this depressing tendency, and to renew its upward flight; it strives to put forth its native energy so as to rise above phenomena and reach the Reality, to pass beyond the scenery of the journey of life and ascend to its Home, to the "FATHER which is in Heaven!" Thus praying on the mountain-top, and the lifting up of the hands in prayer, were outward representations and helps toward this inward elevation.

Every ascent of the mind to God, however, is not necessarily prayer. There is the lifting up of pride as well as of devotion, "His soul which is lifted up is not upright in him;"² or again, there is the speculative approach to God of the philosopher or theologian, unaccompanied with right, or accompanied with wrong dispositions. Hence prayer has sometimes been more fully described as "the lifting up of the mind *and heart* to God"—"We approach God," says one, "not by a corporeal but by a cordial ascent." The elevation must be one of love; the upward

¹ Wisd. ix. 15.

² Habak. ii. 4.

flight must be with "the wings of a dove," if we would flee away and be at rest, it must be not only a mental turning to GOD, but also a turning to Him "with a pious and humble affection."

The elevation attained will not be the same in all who pray; nor, whatever it is, will it be sustained alike by all. The ascent of the soul is like the upward flight of birds, which is dependent on their strength and the right use of their wings. The ascent in prayer will accord with the attainment in the spiritual life in each case. Though there may be times of unwonted power and facility of rising into GOD, yet as a rule, the height of the ascent will be in proportion to the degree of grace in the soul, and will increase with the increase of spiritual life. The two will keep pace together, "Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee, in whose heart are Thy ways," or as it is in another version, "Thine ascensions;"¹ "the greater the love, the greater the ascent." Thus the elevation of the soul in prayer, the "strength" of its ascent will be a measure of the soul's life and a test of it.

The latter part of the definition of prayer "or the asking from GOD of becoming things," leads us to remark that the soul ascends to GOD in prayer with some special purpose in view, which itself enters into the nature of prayer. We may represent to ourselves the soul in the immediate Presence of GOD, having made its ascent, the

¹ Ps. lxxxiv. 6.

world left behind, itself reaching forth into the Eternal, gazing on the Fountain of Life, before the Throne of GOD at the very Seat of Love and Power! With what design has it come before Him? The purposes for which GOD may be approached are revealed in the sacrificial system of the Jews; their sacrifices were offered with four distinct objects, viz., Praise, Thanksgiving, Propitiation, and Petition. The outward offering was an image of the inward; and the soul may have passed into the Presence of GOD, intending to make its spiritual offering for any one of these four purposes. The object may be the Praise of GOD, adoration of His Majesty, the contemplation of and delight in His Perfection—"Praise the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His Holy Name;" or again, the purpose of the prayer may be thanksgiving, the acknowledgment of some benefit which has touched the heart of the recipient with the thought of the Love of the Giver, and brought him back to give glory to GOD as he realises the freedom of the Giver in bestowing the blessing, and his own unworthiness to receive it, and again the words of the Psalmist may be employed—"Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits;"¹ or the soul may draw near (but not so near now) after a fall, to appeal to Divine Mercy and avert Divine Wrath, and may enter into that Presence only to utter the cry of the Publican, "GOD be merciful to me a sinner;"² or again, the ascent to GOD may

¹ Ps. ciii. 1, 2.

² S. Luke xviii. 13.

be for the favourite purpose of gaining from Him some spiritual or temporal blessing, as when the blind man made his earnest supplication in reply to the question of CHRIST, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? "LORD, that I may receive my sight;"¹ or, when the Apostles said, "LORD, increase our faith."²

The soul may be "lifted up" to GOD for any one of these ends, and not only for the sake of gaining some benefit from Him. To imagine that prayer and petition are co-extensive, is to confound a generic term with one of its species, and to invest prayer with a selfish and subjective character by depriving it of its noblest and most generous features. If we look into the pages of Holy Scripture, we see how large a part of inspired devotions is given to the offering of glory and honour; and from this, we may learn to be on our guard against allowing prayers for pardon and for benefits together to set aside those important duties of praise and thanksgiving, by means of which the knowledge and love of GOD are increased in the soul and the spirit of self-forgetfulness is fostered.

We have thus endeavoured to enter into the Nature of Prayer, and to gain a more tangible idea of it by analysing it in action; seeing it not as a power or capacity, but, as it were, in its living exercise. On the one side is the rational and dependent creature; on the other, the Omniscient and Almighty Creator, the One GOD in Three Persons: the act

¹ S. Luke xvi 41, 42.

² S. Luke xvii. 5.

in its wide and figurative sense, is all that is done, or endured for GOD ; in its proper and restricted definition, the ascent of the soul to GOD—an ascent which is in proportion to the spiritual state of the one who prays, an ascent of love as well as thought, an ascent capable of being made with a fourfold purpose, either for praise or thanksgiving, to avert evil or to entreat for good. Such is prayer.

It is evident then, if the practice of prayer is to be cultivated, the creature must cherish the sense of dependency, which lies at the base of all approach to GOD, the consciousness that “in Him we live and move and have our being ;” and prayer in turn will increase this feeling and enable the soul more intensely to realise its personal relation to GOD. This sense of dependence may be for awhile set aside, and an opposite spirit of self-sufficiency may be instilled into the mind by a false philosophy backed by physical strength and worldly prosperity, but sooner or later the original and creaturely feeling will re-assert itself ; and thus times of sickness, weakness, and trial, when self-reliance breaks down, are ever the times when the spirit of prayer is more easily caught and devoutly cherished.

It must, however, be remembered that if growth in the power of prayer there must be spiritual progress—the overthrow of faults, the increase in virtues, the rooting of the besetting sin, the formation of habits of faithfulness to grace generally ; these are the sources by which the soul’s upward flight is quickened and sustained, and the higher the ascent,

as in mountain-climbing, the wider will be the range of view, the greater the illumination. Yet this ascent does not only depend on the state of grace which has been already reached, but also on the assistance of actual grace at the time of praying; and therefore Divine succour in the act itself must be sought and co-operated with—"Draw me, we will run after Thee."¹

Finally, let the unselfish devotions of praise and adoration maintain their rightful place; and in all prayer, even of petition, let the desire, apart from the gain, be to please GOD by the act itself, remembering that prayer is an action which is acceptable in His sight, and an offering which He loves to receive from His creatures. Prayer on this account is compared to incense in Holy Scripture—"let my prayer be set forth in Thy sight as the incense;"² and for the same purpose, to describe the acceptability of sacrifices as images of the Central Sacrifice, both they and It are named sacrifices "of a sweet savour."³ Prayer for many reasons may be likened unto incense, but the comparison viewed on the side of GOD portrays prayer as rising up to Him as a grateful odour; His delight in receiving prayer is set forth under the image of the enjoyment which man derives from inhaling some fragrant perfume. In the Tabernacle and Temple of old, in the language of the Psalter, in the description of the worship of the Church on earth, in the

¹ Solomon's Song, i. 4.

² Ps. cxli. 2.

³ Lev. i. 9; Eph. v. 2.

description of the worship of Heaven, incense accompanies or is the symbol of acts of devotion, proclaiming the acceptableness of prayer before GOD. And it is an inspiring thought, that each one who prays on earth may now have a share in the glorious worship of the Courts above, may place something in those "vials full of odours,"¹ which are accepted in union with the ceaseless offering from "the golden censer" in which is "much incense,"²—even the infinite merits of the Sacred Humanity—which the Angel of the Covenant, the Mediator Himself, presents before the FATHER'S Throne.

¹ Rev. v. 8.

² Rev. viii. 3.

Lecture XX.

THE NECESSITY OF PRAYER.

“And He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.”—S. Luke xviii. 1.

IN the last Lecture we considered the Nature of Prayer.

We saw that an act of prayer, when resolved into its parts, consists of a person who prays, of a person who is addressed, and of some communication between the two. Certain attributes were required in the creature, in order that he might be capable of this noble action ; certain Perfections in the One who was addressed, that the prayer might be heard and answered ; and the prayer itself, must be an ascent not only of the mind but of the heart to God, regulated by the soul’s attainment in holiness, and taking its specific character from the purpose for which it was offered.

We now proceed to examine the grounds upon which the necessity for such an act as this is based. We postulate the existence of personal creatures and a Personal Creator, and then—with both in view, we look first at the one, and then at the Other, to see whether there is any deeply-

written trace in the nature of the one, or clear intimation on the part of the Other, of the necessity of Prayer ; setting aside any argument that may be derived from the previous likelihood, that there would be some communication of this kind between the Maker and those whom He had made.

CHRIST proclaims the necessity of prayer, “Men *ought* always to pray and not to faint.” He had been speaking, if S. Luke’s order is followed, of the trials which would fall on His disciples in the last days, how they must “suffer many things, and be rejected,” and then He at once referred to prayer as a source of strength, as a means of warding off discouragement, for “if thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.”¹ Likewise S. Paul, when he had described the different pieces of armour which the Christian soldier must wear and carry, presently adds—“praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit ;”² prayer was needed, according to the Apostle, to supply the strength and courage requisite for using successfully the weapons which he had enumerated, against those spiritual enemies with whom the battle is fought.

We will view, then, the necessity of Prayer, first as discovered to us by nature ; secondly, as a revealed means of grace ; thirdly, as an act of obedience to a Divine precept ; and lastly, as a transforming influence.

I. It may seem, at first sight, unnecessary to search into the depths of human nature for the glimpses of any truth

¹ Prov. xxiv. 10.

² Eph. vi. 18.

which has been most clearly revealed ; unless, indeed, we have in view those who deny or doubt the authority of the Scriptures. But there are two reasons for appealing to nature in the first instance : one, the fact that this ground of the necessity of praying has been denied, and prayer asserted to be “an element foreign to our original mental and moral constitution,” something imported into our nature by the skill of theologians, who either directly inoculate the youthful mind with the fallacy that GOD hears and answers prayer, or who by means of maternal tenderness and anxiety introduce into the nursery an error, at a time when impressions are easily made, which are afterwards with difficulty (if ever) effaced ; the other, that at a time when many seem eager to trace out and make the most of the apparent divergences in the manifold works of GOD—to seize on, in the different spheres of nature and grace, of science and revelation, the points of seeming contrast, and to lose sight of the deep under-lying unities ;—it may be helpful to observe the correspondence between the cravings of nature and the lights of inspiration, between the cry of the human heart and the authority with which that cry is invested by the declarations of the written Word.

With regard to the necessity of prayer, the germ of this as of other revealed doctrines, is to be found in our nature, and affords one illustration of the truth of that profound exclamation, “O soul, thou art by nature Christian !” Of moral truth there is an inward engraving, a light, which lighteth

every man that cometh into the world ;¹ “the virtues,” says a modern writer, “were like plants half-developed in some gloomy shade, till CHRIST poured His sunshine upon them, and made them flourish with luxuriance.”² It is important, then, to ground the necessity of prayer on the dictates of nature as well as on the teaching of Revelation, thereby resting it on a double authority each of which lends support to the other. Let us see, then, whether there is not an instinct in our nature which bids us pray, and whether that instinct is feeble or imperious in the way it asserts itself.

For any thing to be original in our nature, it must possess certain properties ; in looking back to the beginning of our race it will present itself without any external origin, and it will continue to exist under conditions most diverse and at all times. With regard to the first property it will be observed that an instinct differs from a capacity in nature, in that the latter may remain dormant for any length of time, until it is called into exercise by a set of circumstances, without which its very presence would possibly not be detected. Thus races and individuals have had latent powers, which were brought to light by outward crises, but for which they may have never displayed them. But an instinct is a movement from within, independent of conditions ; not a solitary expression of unsuspected power, the result of the situation, but the original and constant action of a creature according to the law of its being. As to the

¹ S. John i. 9.

² Rev. H. Wace, “Christianity and Morality.”

universality of an instinct, the second property which we have assigned to it, the term of course must be taken in a rough and general sense. Exceptions to the presence of an instinct may be found, but they are too few to have weight, and are not national but individual. The fact that there are idiots, in no wise invalidates the truth that man is invested "with sanctity of reason ;" and in the same manner the fact that there may be found persons whom an instinct seems to have overleapt, is no argument against its universality when viewed in reference to humanity as a whole.

We examine, then, the history of the past, we take up the book which contains the first records of our race in order to discover whether this communing with GOD existed from the first—to see what the first human souls did. It is evident that in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve held converse with GOD ; their life had a relation of dependency upon Him, they heard His voice, spoke to Him. By the statement that they hid themselves behind the trees of the garden, it is clearly intended that we should understand that they were taking an unusual course ; that now instead of meeting GOD Face to face, they had interposed a hindrance, and stood behind the screen of nature, doing what fallen man has done since—making that hide Him which He had made to reveal Him. There are all the elements of prayer in Adam's intercourse with his Maker : man, rational and dependent ; GOD, Almighty and Omniscient ; and, communications between the two. The Poet re-

presents our first parents as absorbed in the offering of praise and thanksgiving¹ in their unfallen condition, when propitiation and necessity had not yet become reasons for praying to GOD; but as soon as man had fallen, we find "the ascent" of fear and of need, of deprecation and excuse, on record in the book of Genesis. We trace the instinct of prayer continuing in fallen man, else it might have been supposed that it was a part of his supernatural equipment, and had no foundation in his natural life. In Adam's sons this instinct survived; Cain and Abel offered sacrifices, and sacrifices are the outward expression of prayer; there was an ascent of the mind to GOD, a real ascent at least in one case, for "by faith Abel offered unto GOD a more excellent sacrifice than Cain."² In the next generation, after the birth of Enos, this instinct seems to have attained some new form of expression, for "then" we are told "began men to call upon the name of the LORD."³ At first sight, it might appear that in these words we have a record of the commencement of the practice of prayer, and that therefore the attempt to ground the necessity of prayer on an instinct of our nature must be abandoned, in that the first property of an instinct—the absence of any ascertained origin of a practice—is wanting; but the previous examples of prayer and worship, at once forbid the verse to be so interpreted. Various explanations have been

¹ Paradise Lost, Book iv. 720.

² Heb. xi. 4.

³ Gen. iv. 26.

given to these words : they have been thought to refer to public worship—that then some formulated method of approaching GOD was adopted, some “assembling of” themselves “together;” others have seen in them an intimation that in the family of Seth was instituted some higher kind of life of special devotion to GOD—a germ in fact of the Religious Life with its special vocation and service ; whilst some from the words, “the Name of the LORD,” that is, “JEHOVAH,” have supposed that a clearer idea of GOD, not only as the Creator but as the Ever-living and Sustaining Source of life, had come to man, and increased the warmth and frequency of his worship ; or again, an interpretation has been based on the expression “call upon” the Name of the LORD, as implying not only faith but trust and dependence ; and this explanation is supposed to receive countenance from the fact that “Enos” means “weakness,” and is thought to be descriptive of the condition of man, as the effects of the Fall began to be more felt by him, and his lingering strength showed signs of abatement, and consequently the sense of dependency was increased, and thus men the more earnestly “began to call upon the Name of the LORD.”

Whatever be the meaning which the history is intended to convey, it cannot be that the practice of prayer commenced in the third generation, when we have already an account of the approaches to GOD in the first and second. But whichever interpretation we take, the words have an

important bearing on the first property of the instinct of prayer, for they show that it was not only when man was fresh from the Hand of his Maker and by the very gates of Paradise, that prayer was offered—for if so it might have arisen from a fading remembrance of a state which had been forfeited—but that prayer as an original instinct held its place, and developed as that nature developed from which it sprang. In an unfallen state, the instinct of the soul was to turn to the Author of its happiness through joyousness; in a fallen state, the instinct of the soul is to turn to Him through its sense of weakness and depression; but in both states there is the instinct to turn to Him, though the prominent cause for doing so may be different. Looking back, then, into the past by the light of the only record which can safely guide us, we find the practice of prayer from the first without any external command or origin, and therefore it preserves one mark of an instinct of nature.

But an instinct to be acknowledged must not only be able to claim antiquity on its side but also universality. That which is a genuine part of human nature will *always* be a part of human nature. If that which marked human life in its earlier stages, disappears in times of advanced civilization and culture, it may be doubted whether it was a pure instinct of our nature, and be attributed either on the one side to an original revelation or on the other to a defective or barbarous condition. It must, however, be admitted that in matters of Religion, the mark of antiquity

in an instinct has a special value ; we can see in it "natural Religion" before it has been tampered with. If we want to learn the habits of an animal, we must see it in its native freedom, and not only after it has been trained and domesticated. The kind of civilization to which human nature has been subjected, might consist of the development of one or more instincts or faculties to the prejudice of the rest ; nay, it might tend directly to the obliteration of some instinct ; and thus, we turn with greater confidence to nature in its unsophisticated state for the discovery of its intuitions and tendencies.

The instinct of prayer, however, does not lack the second property, universality ; we find it both in the highest and lowest states of civilization, in places and races widely sundered both in position and circumstance. "Prayer is not less general in mankind at large than is faith in Providence. It has ever been in use, both as a personal and as a social practice. . . . If, in order to determine what the Religion of Nature is, we may justly have recourse to the spontaneous acts and proceedings of our race, as viewed on a large field, we may safely say that prayer . . . is a constituent of man's religion."¹ It matters not for our present purpose, that this instinct has been oftentimes directed to false gods, and has found expression in ways various and grotesque ; the very variety of its exhibition, according to a modern writer on the Atonement, strengthens our con-

¹ Dr. Newman, "Grammar of Assent," p. 398.

viction that it is an instinct—these are his words, “The variety and great divergence in practice favours the idea that it was not from any primæval tradition, but from instinct, (sacrifices of atonement were offered.”) If we examine the practices of barbarous nations ; if we turn to the ancient religions of the East ; if we look at Greece and Rome in the plenitude of their intellectual power, we find that in some form or shape the necessity of prayer and homage to a superior Power is admitted, and in no nation is the instinct entirely obliterated. In the root of human nature there is a sense of dependency, and a sense of guilt ; natural Religion is based on these two, the correlatives of which are prayer and atonement—the actions respectively proper to the creature, and to the sinner. It is useless to speak of the instinct of prayer as of something imported into our nature ; that which is simply imported does not make its home so fixed and sure, that no lapse of time or change of circumstances has the power to dislodge it. That which we find in the actions of the first members of our race, that which is witnessed to by every shrine and Rite, by every sacred Temple or ruin, that which the barbarian practises before his idol, and which the philosopher tells us the educated Greek resorted to “in commencing every work, great or small,”¹ bears the genuine mark of something original in our nature, of a pure instinct implanted by GOD.

¹ Conf. Plato. Timæus, iii. 27.

I have dwelt at some length on the instinctive character of prayer, because on it I first ground its obligation; we ought to pray out of deference to an instinct with which God has endowed us, for by our intuitions and instincts He expresses His Will to us, and to neglect to act in accordance with them, is to disobey His voice within us. "The general and perpetual voice of men is as the sentence of God Himself. For that which all men have at all times learned, Nature herself must needs have taught; and God being the Author of Nature, her voice is but His instrument. By her from Him we receive whatsoever in such sort we learn."¹

Moreover, this instinct of prayer is an imperious one; it is one which will assert itself, even when it has been set aside, and its presence denied. There are moments in life when men are superior to their own principles, and human systems fail to silence the deep cry of the heart; when men pray who have denied the power of prayer. There are moments when the artificial gives way before the real, and the acquired before the original, when instinctive yearnings have a directive force which scatters to the winds the vain objections of the intellect, and sorrow with its rude hand breaks up the hardened soil of pride and self-sufficiency, when the words of the poet are more than verified—

“ ‘There is no GOD,’ the foolish saith,
But none, ‘there is no sorrow,’

¹ Hooker, Eccl. P., B. I., ch. viii. 3.

And nature oft the cry of faith
In bitter need will borrow.

“Eyes which the preacher could not school
By way-side graves are raised,
And lips say, ‘GOD be pitiful,’
Which ne’er said, ‘GOD be praised !’”¹

Thus S. Augustine speaking on the parable of “the friend at midnight,”² by which CHRIST taught His disciples to continue instant in prayer, explains “midnight” as “the midst of a time of sorrow and darkness,” and points out how tribulation has the effect of stimulating us to pray. In times of great danger, at the approach of death, at momentous points in human life, those who have neglected prayer often turn to it naturally and manifest an earnestness of supplication which is a witness not to a “borrowed” power but to an intuitive force, which at last, however it may have been stifled, finds a vent, and will assert itself. “That men *ought* always to pray,” then, is the teaching of nature, and prayer as a matter of natural religion is an express duty.

II. We pass now from the sphere of the natural to the super-natural, from nature to grace, to find another basis for the necessity of prayer. Prayer meets us with a twofold claim in the domain of revealed Religion: it is necessary as a means of grace, it is necessary also as a fulfilment of an express command of GOD; these

¹ Lines quoted by Dr. Hessey in his “Boyle Lectures.”

² S. Luke xi. 5.

are two sides, the one objective, the other subjective, of the same truth. Actions which are a necessity for spiritual life, are encircled with a Divine command to reveal their importance and to ensure their accomplishment; as actions which are wrong in themselves and injurious in their consequences, are forbidden, in order to proclaim their badness, and to add another and a strong motive for avoiding them. But although the two reasons from which the necessity of prayer arises in the supernatural life, are thus connected together in their source, they are separate in their relation to us; the one appealing to our sense of duty, the other to our interest. As another instance of this twofold necessity for performing a religious action, I may refer to the obligation of receiving the Holy Eucharist; the action is necessary because there is a distinct command, "This do in remembrance of Me,"¹ which enjoins its performance, the action is necessary also as a means of grace, for "except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you."² When a religious action is revealed to us with this twofold claim on our attention, we may at once conclude that it is momentous. There are actions commanded, which are tests of obedience, the necessity for the accomplishment of which does not lie in the nature and effects of the thing itself; so also, there are actions which may be means of grace, but which become so indirectly and are of no universal obligation, and are accord-

¹ S. Luke xxii. 19.

² S. John vi. 53.

ingly invested with no Divine command; but when the action is urged upon us both on the score of obedience and also as a means of spiritual life and power, then it has a special sacredness and importance, its omission involves us in a sin as well as in a loss, and its fulfilment, on the other hand, brings with it a double blessing.

We shall gain a clearer view of the revealed necessity of prayer, if we take separately the two grounds on which its obligation in the spiritual life rests; we will accordingly first consider it as a means of getting grace.

It will be observed, that the necessity of prayer viewed in this connection, is derived from the prior necessity of grace. "Every man is held to pray in order to obtain spiritual goods, which are not given, except from heaven; wherefore they are not able to be procured in any other way but by being thus sought for." In the New Testament, that *grace* is a necessity for the supernatural life, is an elemental truth. Grace is to that life, what the water is to the life of the fish, or the air, to our natural life—something absolutely indispensable. The difference between the advancing dispensations of GOD in their effects upon man, lies in the different measures of grace which are placed within his reach. To the potency, richness, diffusiveness, variety, and proximity of this spiritual force, is to be traced all those exuberant formations of spiritual life in the New Dispensation, which the earlier Covenant did not produce. What-

ever may be the efforts of the will to put to account the gifts of GOD, grace is requisite both to set in motion, to sustain, and to ripen the life within us. This truth is clearly revealed in Holy Scripture, "Of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace."¹ "No man can come to Me, except the FATHER which hath sent Me draw him."² "Without Me ye can do nothing."³ "Being justified freely by His grace."⁴ "By grace ye are saved."⁵ "By the grace of GOD I am what I am ; and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain."⁶ "Grow in grace."⁷ "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it."⁸ In following the operations of grace from the commencement of the spiritual life to its end, five effects have been enumerated ;⁹ it heals the soul, it produces a good will, it enables the good which was willed to be brought about in action, it makes perseverance in good possible, it leads to glory. Thus grace is, from first to last, the invisible nourishment of the soul's life, and prayer is the means in man's own power of gaining grace ; it is through prayer, that the different effects of grace are wrought in us. We ask GOD for spiritual healing—"Heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee." "O cleanse Thou me from my secret faults." We need Divine Help for resisting temptations—"When CHRIST was

¹ S. John i. 16.

³ S. John xv. 5.

⁵ Eph. ii. 5.

⁷ 2 S. Pet. iii. 18.

⁹ S. Thom. Sum. 12. q. cxi. 3.

² S. John vi. 44.

⁴ Rom. iii. 24.

⁶ 1 Cor. xv. 10.

⁸ Phil. i. 6.

baptized and prayed, the heavens were opened, for after Baptism prayer is necessary to man in two ways, to overcome the inward proneness to evil, and the outward enticements of the world and the devil." Temptations to be resisted with sanctifying effect must be resisted in the power of prayer; slight temptations may perhaps be vanquished by natural effort, or overthrown by an opposite vice, but such victories are not registered in Heaven. As CHRIST said of Himself, "no man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven,"¹ so no work or effort ascends to GOD, unless it is wrought in the power of the grace which first descended from Him. If external temptations assail us, we must cry with the Apostle when the angry waves threatened to engulf him, "LORD, save me!"² or if inward temptation arises, we must resort to prayer, as another Apostle did, when the thorn in the flesh tormented him; he tells us, how he besought the LORD thrice, that it might depart, and received from Him the assuring reply, "My grace is sufficient for thee."³

So again, to advance in the spiritual life, in the development of virtues, prayer is a necessity—The Apostles prayed, "LORD, increase our faith." The increase of the interior life simply consists in the growth of different virtues and graces, and these virtues are formed by the combined action of grace and free-will; these are the two

¹ S. John iii. 13.

² S. Matt. xiv. 30.

³ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

factors, the raw material so to speak, from which the fabric is manufactured. A continual supply of grace is needed for the increase of each virtue, and therefore prayer is needed, not only in general, but also with definite reference to the support of the virtue which we have to exercise, or in which we are most conscious of defect. The Apostles' petition for the increase of faith is a case in point ; they felt their need of, and the poverty of their attainment in respect of that virtue. Prayer, therefore, after their example, should be offered for growth in definite virtues. Again, with regard to the gift of final perseverance, prayer is essential. That special gift of GOD which preserves the soul through the perils of dying, cannot be merited. "It is," says S. Augustine, "His hand, not ours, which holds us firm to Him." "It is not of him that willeth nor of him that runneth, but of GOD that showeth mercy."¹ But "those things which we merit not, we may obtain by prayer." And not only grace for the present, and perseverance to the end, but the glory of another world into which grace finally ripens, may be the subject of prayer. "FATHER, glorify Thou Me . . . with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was,"² is a prayer reaching into the depths of eternity, which in a lower sense may become the supplication of each one of us ; we may pray that that idea of the Divine mind which existed from eternity concerning each one of us, that special form of glory for which

¹ Rom. ix. 16.

² S. John xvii. 5.

we were created, may be attained hereafter in all its fulness.

It may seem in what has been said concerning the necessity of prayer and the necessity of grace, that the two things have not been kept distinct, and that at the time when we were supposed to be treating of the need of prayer, we were suddenly found to be speaking of the need of grace. This intersection of the lines of thought arises from their close proximity. A sentence of S. Jerome's, when he was arguing with those who denied the necessity of grace, will at once explain how premises and conclusions may slide about and be inverted with regard to the necessity of prayer and grace—He says "prayer and grace are of the *same* necessity ; grace is necessary for salvation, hence it ought to follow that prayer also is necessary ; but why should prayer be ordained in relation to eternity, unless it be for the sake of obtaining grace?"

There are, however, two limits to the power of prayer which we must not forget in its relation to grace. Prayer is itself dependent on grace in the spiritual life, and an act of prayer for grace is a correspondence with a grace which has been already given. "The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities : for we know not what we should pray for as we ought."¹ "Grace," says S. Chrysostom, "precedes our prayers always." The good thought or desire is a touch from another world ; the angels of God descended as well

¹ Rom. viii. 26.

as ascended on "Bethel's Stair." We are not "sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of GOD."¹ So again, S. Augustine says, "Some things are granted without prayer to GOD, such as the beginning of faith." The beginnings of life, whether natural or supernatural, are from GOD; the continuation and increase of life depend also on human co-operation. The act of prayer stands as it were between the early and the latter rain, of prevenient and subsequent grace, the result of one, the cause of the other.

Again, prayer as a means of grace must not take the place of Sacraments. The Revelation which proclaims the necessity of the one, also asserts the obligation of the other. There are sacramental graces, the effects proper to the Sacrament, special helps, indelible character, which are not ordinarily within the reach of prayer. By prayer the soul ascends to GOD: by Sacraments GOD descends to the soul; they are points of contact with Him, external means of receiving grace, channels of the Incarnate Life. Prayer is the respiration of the soul; Sacraments, its medicine and food; both alike necessary, though the one constant, the other occasional.

These limits to the power of prayer are of practical consequence; by the first, we are reminded that whatever our attainments in devotion may be, they cannot be the ground of self-complacency, in that, they result in every

¹ 2 Cor. iii. 8.

stage, from the preventing grace of GOD; by the second, we are warned against a species of pietism and subjectivity, which, whilst it exalts prayer, affects to disregard or disparages the virtue of those ordinances which CHRIST has ordained and pronounced of vital importance.

We have then considered the necessity of prayer as a means of gaining grace; and CHRIST Himself by His precepts and example, has taught us how to use this means. CHRIST teaches us by His words—"Pray to thy FATHER Which is in secret;"¹ "men ought always to pray;"² "watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation;"³ "ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you;"⁴—your heavenly FATHER shall give "the HOLY SPIRIT to them that ask Him."⁵ Again, CHRIST teaches us by His actions—although the Spirit was given without measure to Him, He upheld His Human Soul by constant communion with His FATHER. He spent whole nights in prayer to GOD. His praying was not merely an *exemplary* action, which He performed for the sake of others, but a *real* work; He prayed not only in the presence of others, but went away into retired spots where He might hold uninterrupted communion with the FATHER. The length, and the solitude of those supplications on the mountain-

¹ S. Matt. vi. 6.

³ S. Matt. xxvi. 41.

⁵ S. Luke xi. 13.

² S. Luke xviii. 1.

⁴ S. Luke xi. 9.

top forbid us to regard them as actions of no consequence to Himself. "In all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren;"¹ and hence—though He was the Fountain of all grace to others, He willed to sustain His soul by the exercise of prayer. That prayer was a real support to His soul is manifest also from its effects; thus CHRIST seems to rise from His knees with a new consciousness of power, refreshed and invigorated, after He had beneath the olives of Gethsemane, struggled and wrestled, like Jacob of old; at one time He was sorrowful and very heavy, and then presently in fortitude and majesty He confronts His enemies who recoil from the very dignity of His Presence. Grace did not vary as a possession of the Sacred Humanity, but it varied in its conscious presence, and thus CHRIST willed to taste, as far as possible, the vicissitudes of the spiritual life. He sustained His created nature, by the grace which He as GOD communicated to it; but His Human Soul, if it may be reverently said, made that grace its own by means of prayer, so that He might be *really* our Example and not only in appearance. That CHRIST then should pray, proclaims the necessity of prayer, imparts to its exercise a special merit and efficacy, and teaches the right manner of its fulfilment.

III. The obligation to pray is not, however, to be viewed simply in reference to our own benefit. Prayer is also an act of Religion, an act of obedience to a Divine Precept

¹ Heb. ii. 17.

which we are bound to perform, even if no grace came to us from its performance. This objective view of the necessity of prayer is one less familiar, but hardly less important. Prayer is not only necessary as a means of grace, but also as a primary religious duty, for prayer is distinctly *commanded* by CHRIST and His Apostles. Thus in the text, CHRIST says, "men *ought* always to pray."¹ He bids His disciples "watch and pray;"² "pray always."³ S. Paul says, "pray without ceasing."⁴ S. Peter, "watch unto prayer."⁵ S. James, "pray one for another."⁶ Prayer is an act of Religion, an act whereby we render worship to the Almighty; it is a recognition of His Being and of His Providence. "How shall they call," says S. Paul, "on Him in whom they have not believed?"⁷ Prayer is an exercise of faith, hope, and love in the Divine Power, Wisdom and Goodness, and in itself as an act of homage is the duty of the creature. The creature who performs this action, makes a protestation of his dependency on GOD, and of GOD's absolute Sovereignty and Dominion over him; he acknowledges the rights of GOD; he may even desire, like the Psalmist, to call in the aid of the inanimate creation to join him in his worship, when his soul is full of the praise of GOD. Prayer is then an act of obedience to the precepts of the Gospel.

¹ S. Luke xviii. 1.² S. Mark xiii. 33.³ S. Luke xxi. 36.⁴ 1 Thess. v. 17.⁵ 1 S. Pet. iv. 7.⁶ S. James v. 16.⁷ Rom. x. 14.

Now from this doctrine flow two results. The omission and neglect of prayer involve not only a loss of grace, but constitute a distinct sin ; it is a sin against religion, and against charity. Religion is a moral virtue, whose province it is to show due honour and reverence to Almighty GOD ; to cease to pray therefore, is to fail to exercise a moral virtue, and that the highest. What justice is to the creature, religion is towards GOD—that by which we seek to give Him His due. To neglect prayer, is also to sin against charity. Charity presents three objects—GOD, ourselves, others—all of whom are to be loved : but when prayer is omitted we fail in the love of GOD, for we desire to hold converse with those whom we love ; the love of our neighbour we fail in also, for he needs our prayers ; and the love of our soul we fail in, by the neglect of a duty upon which our spiritual life depends. How the neglect of prayer is itself a sin, may be thus illustrated—‘ If a soul is in the presence of a temptation, and is aware of it and conscious of its power, and resists it, it may be, for a while but in its own strength, and then falls into the sin, it incurs a twofold guilt ; there is the guilt of the sin committed, and the guilt of the sin of omission, in that in the time of temptation, it did not resort to prayer for strength, and so neglected to fulfil a command of the Gospel.’ This is one result of the precept of prayer ; that neglect of its fulfilment, is in itself a sin.

The other result is, that the act of prayer is in itself a good work. Where a command is given, obedience to it

procures a reward. This truth may be viewed either as to the past, or in reference to the future. With regard to the past it invests prayer, when performed for the purpose, with a reparative value. Thus prayer is associated with fasting and almsdeeds as penitential works. If we have failed in some action in the past, we strive afterwards to perform the same action with greater earnestness and regularity, to show our sorrow for the failure ; in making compensation, we try to give back that which we have wrongly taken. Penances have relation to sins : thus, the sins of the flesh are revenged by fasting ; covetousness, by almsdeeds ; and neglect of the worship of GOD, by prayer. A devotional penance may be slight ; it may be so purposely to bring out more clearly the greatness of the Love which forgives, yet its fulfilment is no slight thing, for it is a recognition of past failure, and an act of reparation which is to be a reminder of the neglect in the past. There are three kinds of goods which we possess and can offer to GOD, or defraud Him of by not offering them—goods external, goods of the body, goods of the soul ; and of whichever of these three in the past we have defrauded Him, we can now by His grace in loving reparation offer to Him of the same kind more generously. If by neglect of prayer and worship, we have sinned by keeping back from Him the affections and desires of the soul ; we may now increase in the length and fervency of prayer, with a view of redeeming the past. In reference to the future, the fact that prayer is an act of

obedience to a Divine Precept gives to prayer a meritorious character, when it is offered in union with CHRIST, and in the power of the HOLY GHOST. Thus in the Sermon on the Mount, when CHRIST adds a promise to the prayer which is offered to the FATHER in secret, He does not say "He will grant it," but asserts that the prayer will hereafter be rewarded—"He who seeth in secret will *reward* thee openly."¹ Prayer has not only a relation to the past by filling up deficiencies, to the present by supplying grace, but also to the eternal future, by "laying up in store . . . a good foundation against the time to come."² Every act of worship, every devotion or office, every meditation or even ejaculation rightly offered, will through the Goodness of GOD contribute something to the radiance of the crown of glory in the Day when the faithful fulfilment of every duty shall have its reward, and every secret service shall be revealed and acknowledged before the Throne of GOD.

It remains for us to notice *when* this precept of prayer is binding, so that the omission of it becomes a sin. When CHRIST says, "men ought *always* to pray," it is evident that He does not mean that no other duty should be fulfilled; but that at all times, whatever we are doing, the spirit of prayer should be preserved. But the practice of continual recollection, the habitual sense of the Presence of GOD, the "always" beholding "the Face of the FATHER," is rather

¹ S. Matt. vi. 6.

² 1 Tim. vi. 19.

a matter of perfection than of precept. A precept is that which regulates the general tenor of Christian life, and applies to all persons. The precept of prayer must be obligatory at certain times and on certain occasions, when it becomes the positive duty of the soul to turn to GOD, and when the neglect to do so is a sin. The fact that the precept obliges us to pray is generally admitted, but the special times when the obligation touches our life are not so clearly revealed. The following are the occasions on which spiritual writers usually consider prayer to be a matter of express obligation :—in the beginning of our moral life, that is, when we first come to the use of reason, for if some time is allowed to elapse before the being with its new consciousness of a personal existence turns to recognise the Author of its life, it is a grave sin of omission ;¹ in the end of life, the soul, should it possess its powers, ought to pray for perseverance and victory over the temptations of the last hour ; often in life, prayer is a duty at certain intervals, thus the Psalmist prayed, “ Let my prayer be set forth in Thy sight as the incense,” which was offered morning and evening in the Tabernacle ; when some Sacrament is to be received, prayer is necessary as a means to fit the soul and give it right dispositions for its reception ; in time of Divine Worship and the Eucharistic Oblation, respect for the Presence of GOD teaches its necessity ; when any grave temptation arises, or bodily danger impends, to seek the

¹ S. Thomas, Sum. 12, q. lxxxix. a. 6.

help of Divine grace is a distinct duty. In the fulfilment of the precept of prayer at such times, we see, it is true, the lowest requirements of the Divine Command, but by faithfulness in that which is least, the foundations of the life of prayer are laid, and an extended sense of the obligation of the precept of prayer will be sure to follow upon obedience to it in its rudimentary form.

IV. We have now to view the necessity of prayer as a transforming influence. Those who do not admit that prayer has power with GOD, yet acknowledge that it has power with us, and allow that it possesses a reflex influence on those who use it. Whether it is necessary in order to produce this effect that the worshipper should believe in prayer, is a point upon which they do not seem to agree.¹ That prayer has a subjective effect is vividly portrayed by the outward changes which it produced. Bodily transfigurations are images of and witnesses to the inward

¹ Thus the Rev. Stopford Brooke says of prayer, "use it, pour out your wild petition at your FATHER'S feet, even though you know it is useless, and the expression gives relief," &c. On the other hand Mr. Lecky says, "the man who offers up his petitions with passionate earnestness, with unfaltering faith, and with a vivid realisation of the presence of an Unseen Being, has risen to a condition of mind which is itself eminently favourable both to his own happiness and to the expansion of his moral qualities. But he who expects nothing more will never attain this. To him who neither believes nor hopes that his petitions will receive a response such a mental state is impossible. . . . If prayers were offered up solely with a view to this benefit, they would be absolutely sterile."—Brooke's "CHRIST and Modern Life," p. 143. Lecky's *Europ. Morals*, p. 37.

results of communing with GOD. Thus we are told that when Moses came down from the Mount “the skin of his face shone”¹ so brilliantly, that he was obliged to cover himself with a vail whilst he spake to the people. So again, it is said S. Stephen’s upturned face, gazing into Heaven, caught something of an unearthly radiance, for they “saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.”² But we have a grander instance—in that it was no borrowed brightness, but the outshining of Him in whom “dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily”—of the transforming power of prayer on Mount Tabor. CHRIST, S. Luke tells us, “went up into a mountain to pray. And as He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment was white and glistening.”³ These effects of prayer on the lineaments of the face are not only prophecies of the glorified body; but they are also descriptive of the present power of prayer on the inner life, of a spiritual change which S. Paul refers to, when he speaks of being “transformed by the renewing of” our “mind,”⁴ and of being inwardly “changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the LORD.”⁵

But whilst the fact, that prayer has an “influence of a very beneficial character upon the minds of the worshippers” is thus generally accepted, it is accounted for in very dif-

¹ Exod. xxxiv. 30.

³ S. Luke ix. 29.

⁵ 2 Cor. iii. 18.

² Acts vi. 15.

⁴ Rom. xii. 2.

ferent ways by those who believe and those who do not believe in its supernatural character. The one attributes this subjective influence to a law of our nature, apart from all supernatural "intervention;" the other, to the contact of the soul with GOD in prayer. If prayer be, what we have seen it to be in the first Lecture, "the ascent of the soul to GOD," we at least are not at a loss to account for the effects which it produces. S. Augustine has long ago said, and experience confirms the saying, that "the soul becomes what it turns to." If the soul turns to earth, it becomes earth; if it turns to GOD, it becomes GOD-like. To let the thoughts and affections rest on the earth and on the flesh, is (as far as can be) to materialise and carnalise the soul, whilst to raise mind and heart to GOD is to divinise it. If the degradation of the soul follows upon a course of worldliness and sensuality, much more will its elevation be the result of communing with GOD; for spirit is kindred with Spirit, and the soul, made for converse with GOD, in turning to Him, is taking its native and legitimate direction. The soul by communing with GOD becomes like GOD, receives from His Perfections supplies of light, of power, and love according to its needs. The subjective effects of prayer are as manifold as the Divine Perfections. Thus when in darkness, doubt, or error, we turn to Him, Who is the Fountain of Light and Truth, we receive illumination, "they looked to Him and were enlightened;"¹ when in weakness, in a

¹ Ps. xxxiv. 5.

struggle with evil, we turn to Him Who is the Almighty One, we gain new power—when CHRIST came down from the Mount of Prayer, He overcame the complex evil in the lunatic child, which the Apostles at its foot had failed to do ; when we are in sorrow or desolation, we turn to Him in Whose Presence is fulness of joy, and catch something of His Blessedness—joy is a revealed effect of prayer, “ I will make them joyful in My house of prayer,”¹ “ Is any among you afflicted, let him pray,”² “ Comfort the soul of Thy servant, for unto Thee do I lift up my soul,”³ when we are perplexed and disturbed, we turn to “ the GOD of peace,”⁴ and are calmed and tranquillized ; when lonely and forsaken, we turn to the GOD of our life, and are comforted, as CHRIST Himself declares when He says to the disciples, “ Ye shall leave Me alone, yet I am not alone, because the FATHER is with Me.”⁵ In all the varied states of the soul, contact with GOD brings the light, the strength, the comfort, or the peace which is needed ; its faculties are quickened by the Pure Energy of His Life ; its memory, will, and understanding are strengthened and purified by habitual devotion. And the effect cannot be confined to the inner life where the transforming influence is received, but will find an outlet in look and manner, words and actions ; it will manifest itself in sincerity, in absence of

¹ Isa. lvi. 7.

³ Ps. lxxxvi. 4.

⁵ S. John xvi. 32.

² S. James v. 13.

⁴ Rom. xv. 33.

human respect, in decisiveness, in courage, in lowly dignity, in calmness and evenness of spirit. As with the Apostles, men took knowledge of them that they had been with JESUS, so those who "walk with" GOD, will be discerned by their recollectedness and consistency.

It is said that constant intercourse between creatures causes them to resemble one another, not only in disposition and habits, but even in features; after the same manner, that closest of all fellowship which constitutes the life of Prayer, gives to the mind and character something heavenly and divine—"He that is joined unto the LORD is one spirit."¹ Words fail, when we attempt to describe the effects of prayer; I have therefore ascribed to it a transforming *influence*, because by the term "influence" is represented something subtle, fine, all-pervading, penetrating, ethereal—something of which we may be fully conscious, yet are unable to analyse or define, which is nevertheless as manifest to us, as the rays from a light, or the perfume from a flower; and from this transforming power of prayer its necessity is again evident, for no active discharge of duties, or exercise of social virtues can produce that change which is only brought about by the habit of going up into the Mount, and holding converse with the Unseen.

We have traced the necessity of prayer to an instinct of our nature, to the voice of GOD within us; we have seen how the voice of GOD by an external Revelation corres-

¹ 1 Cor. vi. 17.

ponds with, directs, and confirms this instinct of the soul, teaching prayer to be necessary as a means of grace to the supernatural life, and as an act of obedience to a Divine precept ; we have found also a necessity for prayer in that transforming influence which it exerts on the natural life. This fourfold ground for its necessity will show how great is the culpability, and how grievous the loss, which those incur who neglect the practice of prayer, or regard it only in the light of a formal acknowledgment of the Deity, and not as an act upon which the sustaining of their spiritual, and the reforming and transfiguring of their natural life depend.

The first basis of its obligation will remind us that we must not regard our nature as entirely corrupt, and its voice as always misleading, but that in it, fallen as it is, there are vestiges of its original greatness, and intuitions and instincts which are to us an inward revelation of the Mind and Will of GOD. The second reason for the necessity of prayer, will explain perhaps the cause of our weakness in the hour of temptation—our lack of grace. Our inability in the time of trial to meet the enemy, arises from the neglect of seeking that supernatural force without which we cannot but fail. It is not in the strength of our own will only—“not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit”¹—that we can hope to conquer. Weakness in the strife arises from attempting to meet the supernatural, in the strength only of

¹ Zech. iv. 6.

the natural. If the weapons of our warfare are not only natural but spiritual, then they will be mighty to the pulling down of strongholds.

Further, we must be careful to regard prayer not only as a means of grace but as a duty, and thus fulfil it without reference to our own delight or profit in the act. To neglect to pray at certain times is itself a sin; to pray, is an act of grace and of virtue. If, again, we complain of our earthliness and worldliness, and the difficulty which we have in fetching our motives of action from a higher sphere, may it not be that we have failed to realise the importance of prayer in its subjective effect upon character, and have thought to gain a ray of heavenly brightness without the habitual communing with GOD upon the Mount?

The four reasons for praying may appeal to us with unequal force, or with a varying power at different times and according to different moods of the soul, but together they make up a cumulative argument for its necessity, which, unless we silence the imperious instinct of our better nature, deny the claims of Divine Revelation, and disregard the highest interests of our souls, we must not only admit, but bring to bear in practical effect upon our daily life. Upon faithfulness in the discharge of this duty, spiritual progress depends, CHRIST pointed to prayer as a source of strength and endurance, "men ought always to pray, and not *faint*;" and the prophet had expressed the same truth

before more amply, when he described the perpetual renewal which was the result of "waiting upon" GOD. "He giveth power to the faint and to them that have no might He increaseth strength. Even the youths shall be faint and be weary . . . but they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint."¹

¹ Isa. xl. 29—31.

Lecture III.

OBJECTIONS TO PRAYER.

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.”—S. James i. 5—7.

WE attempted in the last Lecture to answer the question, “Is prayer necessary?” We grounded its obligation first on the teaching of nature, on an instinct original and universal—that “general and perpetual voice of man” which is “as the sentence of GOD Himself.” In turning from the inward to the outward Revelation of GOD we discovered that prayer in two ways was declared to be necessary, first as a means of grace, and secondly as an act of obedience to a Divine precept. Lastly, we saw its necessity from the subjective effects which it produced in those who were in the habit of holding close communion with GOD. Much of what has been said both on the Nature and on the Necessity of Prayer applies to the whole intercourse of the soul with GOD; but in this and the following

Lecture, we shall use the term "prayer" in its narrowest and also commonest sense—that of *petition*.

We shut out from our view for the present any other ascent of the soul to GOD, than that which is prompted by the desire to gain something from Him, some spiritual or temporal gift. We draw near to Him no longer in order that we may praise Him, worship Him, and give Him thanks, but for the sake of what we hope to receive from His hands. We have already seen that this is one of the four purposes for which the soul may approach GOD, and though only one, when the term "prayer" is used without description, it is usually understood to mean "petition."

S. James lays down two principles as to this prayer of petition; he ascribes to it efficacy, he makes its efficacy conditional—"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of GOD that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." By "wisdom" the Apostle evidently intends a spiritual and not merely an intellectual endowment, for he is addressing himself to those who found it difficult to realise that crosses were blessings, and had consequently chafed at them; after exhorting them to be patient, he proceeds to teach them how they are to gain a right view of the usefulness of tribulation and of its bearing on the ultimate end of life—"if any of you lack *wisdom*, let him ask of GOD." He further encourages those whom he addresses to seek this spiritual gift, by pointing to the Divine Beneficence—"let him ask of GOD that giveth to

all men liberally and upbraideth not ;” after a few verses he recurs again to the thought of the Divine Liberality, “every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.”¹ GOD giveth, and giveth to all, and giveth liberally, ‘and upbraideth not ;’ in other words—His blessings are freely bestowed, not purchased ; granted to all, not only to favourites ; given without stint, simply ; and vouchsafed without recrimination as to past misuse of His gifts, or as to present unworthiness to receive them. The Apostle follows up this description of the Divine Character with an assertion of the potency of prayer —“and it shall be given him.” Then, descending from the contemplation of the one term of the act of prayer, he comes to the other, and adds the warning, that prayer if it is to gain the desired result, must be offered “in faith,” “but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the LORD.” S. James therefore first affirms the efficacy of prayer ; secondly, he makes that efficacy conditional. The conditions under which prayer is productive of results will occupy our attention hereafter, we shall now, after reviewing briefly the grounds on which prayer for spiritual or temporal blessings is justified, consider the objections which at different times have been raised against this doctrine. First, let us see what authority we possess for re-

¹ S. James i. 17.

garding prayer as an exercise which not only produces subjective effects, by acting upon those who employ it; but also objective results, by acting, so to speak, upon GOD.

I. We will select instances from the Divine Revelations, which will show that a belief in the power of prayer as a means of bringing about the objects which were sought, was at all times entertained. We begin with the Patriarchal period—Abraham's servant when he went to Mesopotamia for the purpose of finding a wife for Isaac, as he stands at the well's mouth at eventide when the women came to draw water, utters this remarkable prayer, "O LORD GOD of my master Abraham, I pray Thee send me good speed to-day, and show kindness to my master Abraham. Behold I stand here by the well of water, and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water: and let it come to pass that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink, . . . let the same be she that Thou hast appointed for Thy servant Isaac. . . . And it came to pass before he had done speaking, that, behold, Rebekah came."¹ That one of Abraham's servants should thus resort to prayer in the fulfilment of the task solemnly assigned him by his master, is an evidence that a belief in the power of prayer was not confined to the Patriarchs themselves, to the Saints of GOD, or the higher spirits of the age, but was

¹ Gen. xxiv. 12—15.

shared by the people ; and that prayer was an instrument which they trusted in, and turned to in their difficulties.

Again, "Isaac," we are told, "entreated the LORD for his wife, because she was barren ; and the LORD was entreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived."¹ This brief record sums up in a few words the earnest entreaties of, perhaps, twenty years, and the physical result upon which depended the fulfilment of the Promises. "GOD had appointed, that from Rebekah, Jacob and CHRIST should be born, but not without those mediating second causes, the prayers of Isaac." Whether we regard the fervour of the prayer, depicted in the word "entreated," or its duration, or its result, it is a wonderful instance of the power of petition. Then, Jacob witnesses to his belief in the power of prayer, when he is terrified by the approach of Esau, he thus beseeches GOD to defend him from his brother's wrath, "O GOD of my father Abraham, and GOD of my father Isaac, deliver me, I pray Thee, from the hand of Esau."²

Again, the potency of prayer to produce or to remove physical evils was marvellously manifested by Moses, when he brought the children of Israel out of Egypt. Plague after plague came in rapid succession, when he uplifted his rod ; plague after plague departed, when "Moses cried unto the LORD ;"³ "and the LORD did according to the word of Moses." When Amalek fought against Israel, it was upon the intercession of Moses on the top of the hill that

¹ Gen. xxv. 21.

² Gen. xxxii. 9, 11.

³ Exod. viii. 12.

success depended—"it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed;"¹ the fluctuations in the conflict revealed the source from which Israel's strength was derived. At Taberah, where "the people complained, it displeased the LORD, and the LORD heard it, and His anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them. . . . Moses prayed unto the LORD," and "the fire was quenched."² Thus, in the Levitical as well as the Patriarchal Revelation, there is a continuous witness to the use of petition.

The prophets resort to the same agent for working miracles. When the Philistines attacked Israel, the children of Israel said to Samuel, "Cease not to cry unto the LORD our GOD for us, that He will save us out of the hand of the Philistines And Samuel cried unto the LORD for Israel and the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines and discomfited them."³ Again, Elijah "prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain."⁴ Elijah and Elisha raised the dead through the power of prayer—"O LORD my GOD, I pray Thee, let this child's soul come into him again."⁵—"And when Elisha

¹ Exod. xvii. 11. ² Num. xi. 1, 2. ³ 1 Sam. viii. 8—10.

⁴ S. James v. 17, 18; 1 Kings xvii. 1; xviii. 1, 42, 45.

⁵ 1 Kings xvii. 21.

was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed. He went in therefore and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the LORD."¹ Thus, life was brought back to the widow's son, and to the child of the woman of Shunem. Daniel prayed for the city of Jerusalem, and an angel presently was despatched to answer his supplication—"whilst I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel touched me."² "Jonah prayed unto the LORD his GOD out of the fish's belly,"³ and was delivered.

If from the Old Testament we turn to the New, in the latter, as we should expect, is more fully revealed the power of prayer; CHRIST by His example and teaching bore witness to it. CHRIST prayed for S. Peter, that his faith might not fail in the awful fall which awaited him. CHRIST revealed at the grave of Lazarus, that He constantly employed prayer in doing His mighty works—"And JESUS lifted up His eyes and said, FATHER, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me, and I knew that Thou hearest Me *always*."⁴ CHRIST, as with omniscient gaze He looked into the future, and beheld as a widening circle, the expansion of His Kingdom, prayed first for Himself, then for His disciples, thirdly, for all those "which shall believe on" Him "through their word."⁵ His teaching also is explicit on this point; prayer with Him is not represented as merely a healthy

¹ 2 Kings iv. 32, 33.

² Daniel ix. 21.

³ Jonah ii. 1.

⁴ S. John xi. 41, 42.

⁵ S. John xvii. 1, 9, 20.

occupation of our faculties, profitable simply because of its reflex action on the soul, but as a means of gaining what we need from GOD. Thus in the Sermon on the Mount—to which we especially refer for a clear intimation of the Mind of CHRIST on practical questions—He says, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.”¹ CHRIST then, finds an illustration of the power of prayer in the natural sphere, and sees in the child’s solicitation of a gift from a parent, and in the readiness of the parent to grant what is good for the child, a representation of the action of prayer on our heavenly FATHER—a blurred and feeble image, indeed, because of the evil which is in our nature, and so He adds, “if ye then, *being evil*, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your FATHER which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?”² The prayer which CHRIST Himself has taught us, authorizes, too, belief in petition, for it consists of seven petitions for spiritual and temporal blessings. Again, when the disciples were standing before the withered fig-tree and wondering at the rapidity with which its leaves had shrivelled up, CHRIST reminded them of the omnipotency of prayer—“all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive”³—a truth which He repeated again in His discourse with them before He suffered, when He willed to impress them also with the thought of His Mediation, “Verily,

¹ S. Matt. vii. 7.² Ibid. 11.³ S. Matt. xxi. 22.

verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the FATHER in My name, He will give it you.”¹ By word then and by example, CHRIST proclaimed the efficacy of prayer.

The Apostles with one consent, both by practice and exhortation, enforce the same doctrine. S. Paul writing to Philemon expressed the belief that through his prayers he would be liberated from prison, “I trust that through your prayers I shall be given to you.”² S. Peter in the chamber of death “kneeled down and prayed,”³ and thus brought back to the body of Dorcas the spirit which had fled. S. James asserts the restorative power of prayer—“The prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the LORD shall raise him up.”⁴ S. John re-echoes the words of his Master, “And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us. And if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him.”⁵

Thus, throughout the successive Revelations of GOD, whether in the Old Testament we look at the practice of Patriarch, Law-giver, or Prophet ; or, in the New we listen to the teaching of CHRIST, and of His Apostles, there is one continuous witness to the belief in the power of prayer.

Likewise, the mind of the Church has been from the first clearly expressed on this point. The “law of believing” and the “law of praying” ever follow one another, the one is the

¹ S. John xvi. 23.

² Philemon 22.

³ Acts ix. 40.

⁴ S. James v. 15.

⁵ 1 S. John v. 14, 15.

expression of the other. The *practice* of the Church may be at once ascertained by reference to the ancient Liturgies; we find in them prayers for various benefits, e.g. for "victory over enemies," "deliverance from adversities," and "from the difficulties of this world," for "cleansing from all impurity of flesh and spirit," "for them that journey, are sick, labour, are in captivity," &c., for the "peace of the world and Church," for "forgiveness of sins," for "unity and charity," &c. Petition enters largely into those earliest Forms of Worship, and has ever held its place in the Service-books of the Church. And the *doctrine* of the Church concerning prayer—"the law of believing"—is as easily discovered by reference to "ancient authors" and Councils.

Justin Martyr, for instance, tells us how after trying successive systems of philosophy, he himself was brought to CHRIST—how when walking by the sea-shore a venerable man met him, and bade him resort to prayer, in the midst of his mental difficulties and dissatisfaction, "Pray, before all things, that the gates of light may be opened to you." And the result was, "a fire was kindled in his soul;" he became a Christian and an apologist. Another says, "seek without doubting, and you shall know the mercy of the LORD, that He will not forsake thee, but will grant thy petition."¹ Again, "the prayer of the just is the key of heaven; petition ascends, Divine mercy descends."² S. Jerome re-

¹ Hermas, Mand. lx.

² S. Augustine.

lates a mercy of GOD granted to prayer—"In our times too we have seen hosts of locusts cover Judea, which afterwards, by the mercy of the LORD, when the priests and people, 'between the porch and the altar,' i.e. between the place of the Cross and the Resurrection, prayed the LORD and said, 'Spare Thy people,' a wind arising, were carried headlong 'into the Eastern sea and the utmost sea.'"¹ Again, "GOD wills to be asked, wills to be forced, wills with a certain importunity to be conquered."² S. Chrysostom speaks of prayer "as the parent, source, and root of all goods, and those innumerable." But we are not left to gather from the writings of the Fathers, the teaching of the Church as to the power of prayer. Again and again in Councils,³ as from time to time misbelief on this subject arose, has the Church asserted prayer to be not only an act of worship, but also a means of gaining from GOD what we need.

To those who denied the need of grace, and consequently of prayer also; to those "who denied that it is through grace we are brought to pray;" to those who resolved all prayer into the prayer of good works; to those who regarded prayers of petition as incompatible with conformity to the Divine Will; the reply of the Church was ever the same, viz. the affirmation of the efficacy of prayer, as a supernatural action, an instrument by virtue of which the Divine Will is accomplished.

¹ Dr. Pusey's Joel, p. 123.

² S. Gregory.

³ At Carthage, Orange, Valence, &c.

From the rapid survey which we have now taken of the teaching of Holy Scripture, and of the Church, it is at once manifest, that all who believe in the inspiration of the Bible and in the claim of the Church to be "the pillar and ground of the truth,"¹ are committed to a belief in the power of prayer. The doctrine that prayer acts as a second cause in the fulfilment of the Divine purposes, and consequently produces results both in the spiritual and physical world, is a matter of faith and not of opinion, to those who have already admitted the authority of Revelation and of the Church. Yet to notice the objections which have been brought against this doctrine, is a matter of necessity, for two reasons : first, the spirit of the age in which we live, which breathes in the current literature of the day, with which we must be all more or less familiar, and is characterised by unbelief or doubt as to this power of prayer, imposes on us this task ; secondly, the fact that there are souls, apart from the infecting atmosphere around them, who are oftentimes molested by temptations as to the efficacy of prayer, renders it a duty, in treating of the "Life of Prayer," to attempt to help them. On the one hand, we encounter the "oppositions of science falsely so called ;"² on the other, difficulties are suggested as to the Divine Perfections, so that now for awhile we must assume an apologetic tone, and endeavour to give "a reason of the hope that is in" us.³

¹ 1 Tim. iii. 15.

² 1 Tim. vi. 20.

³ 1 S. Pet. iii. 15.

II. Difficulties in accepting the doctrine of prayer may arise either from an over-statement of the doctrine itself, or from a forgetfulness of its nature, or from a certain incapacity in the mind itself to deal with the subject.

With regard to the first, it is not uncommon to hear prayer represented as a means whereby the Divine Will is *changed*. This exaggeration of the doctrine of prayer is mentioned and condemned as an error by Aquinas—"they say that the disposition of Divine Providence is variable, and that by prayers . . . the disposition of Divine Providence is changed." Again, it is often not sufficiently kept in the fore-front, that the efficacy of prayer is a *mystery*, a truth insoluble by the reason of man, a truth which may be defended against the different attacks of reason, but which in its essence we cannot bring down to the level of the human understanding so as to leave nothing to be explained. Reason may answer reason, but for reason to attempt to deal with a mystery as with a mathematical problem, is both to forget the nature of a mystery and the limits and province of its own powers. Further, the bent of mind, which is the result of close and constant attention to one class of studies, may incapacitate us for entering with impartiality into another, and consequently from doing that other justice. Thus, it has been noticed, how the habitual application of the mind to that which is going on within itself, enfeebles the powers of observation of the external world—how the encouragement of abstract thought

often weakens the historical faculty ; in the same way, the study of physical science, when pursued alone, unfits the mind for dealing with the problems of the spiritual world. The satisfaction which the intellect derives in the sphere of the necessary, produces in it often a positive distaste for the investigation of the probable, the moral, and the spiritual ; and thus, I premise, as one of the causes of difficulty in the acceptance of the doctrine of prayer, the tone and temper of mind with which the subject is often approached.

The objections to the efficacy of prayer may be divided into three classes—those, grounded on its alleged incompatibility with the Divine Perfections ; those which take their origin in its supposed impossibility, because of the fixity of natural laws ; and those which are of a practical nature, and concern man himself.

And first, prayer is said to present a difficulty, when it is viewed in relation to the Divine Mind. One of the absolute Perfections of GOD is His Omniscience ; He has revealed Himself as One able to penetrate into the secret recesses of our hearts—thus “the righteous GOD trieth the reins and the hearts”¹—“I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins”²—“Thou understandest my thought afar off”³—“the Word of GOD . . . is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight : but all things are naked and

¹ Ps. vii. 9.

² Jer. xvii. 10.

³ Ps. cxxxix. 2.

opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."¹ Is it then reasonable to bring before Him our thoughts and desires, as if He did not know them already? Why spend time in telling another that which he knew, before the desire and thought were formed in us? But—is it unreasonable to act thus, or is this a true representation of the purpose of prayer? We often seek to gain from others by entreaty, that which they long ago knew we wanted; we again and again proffer the same petition, surely not with the intention of informing them of our need, but for the sake of influencing their will; their previous knowledge of our wishes, does not hinder us from persevering in pressing them upon them. If previous acquaintance with our thoughts and wishes, does not make it unreasonable for us to continue to supplicate creatures, why should it be a hindrance in approaching the Creator? Moreover, an untrue statement of the purpose of prayer lies at the root of this objection; we do not pray in order to intimate to GOD our desires. CHRIST when He enjoined prayer, guarded us against this notion—"your FATHER," He says, "knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him."² Prayer is a means of soliciting the will more than of informing the mind; it is "the interpreter of" our "desire," whereby we seek to influence the Divine Will. GOD has commanded this act for our sakes—"it is not necessary to direct our prayers to Him, in order to manifest to Him our needs and desires"—as the

¹ Heb. iv. 12, 13.

² S. Matt. vi. 8.

subjects of some great king who lived in a far region, and depended on postal arrangements for his knowledge of their condition—"but that we ourselves by the consideration of those necessities, might be brought to seek Divine help." By prayer we heighten the sense of our need; and by formulating it in our minds, we press upon ourselves the thought (which we might otherwise sometimes forget) of our dependence upon His Divine Majesty.

But further, it is contended, that, whatever may be the subjective effects of prayer, to regard it as a power capable of bending and directing future events, as "a controlling force over the processes of nature and history," is inconsistent with Divine Foreknowledge. GOD not only sees all things, but *foresees* all things—"I am GOD, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning"¹—"Thou understandest my thoughts long before."² To regard GOD as only knowing the past and present, is to render His Wisdom finite. "*All* things are naked and opened"³ to Him. If then GOD knows everything which is to happen; if the vista of the future is now before His Eyes, so that He beholds not only the general outline, but every object in the landscape, and sees the untrodden paths by which each one of us must travel to his end, what can be the use of prayer? Surely to *know* that an event is to take place, is to know that it *must* be.

Here I would have you observe, that this objection does

¹ Isa. xlvi. 9, 10.

² Ps. cxxxix. 2.

³ Heb. iv. 13.

not affect prayer only, but all human action ; we are at once in the district of that universal problem—the difficulty of harmonizing the Divine Foreknowledge with human freedom ; we are in the presence of those highest truths, which, like the doctrine of the Being of the Triune GOD, wear the appearance of contradiction. If we forego prayer because of this theoretical objection, to be consistent, we should sit with our hands folded, and give up all human exertion. All second causes must fare alike, if we desist from praying because the future is a settled matter. Some have attempted to extricate themselves from the difficulty, by denying the one doctrine ; others, by denying the other. On the one hand, they have argued that the Divine Prescience does not extend to free and undetermined actions which could not, say they, from their nature be calculated on : on the other, there have not been wanting those who have disbelieved in human freedom. But it is not by hanging before the Divine Mind the curtain which hides futurity from us, neither is it by depriving man of his responsibility and excellence as a free agent, that we can dispose of this difficulty. S. Augustine says, “GOD has as many witnesses to His Prescience as He has prophets,” and calls it “most manifest madness to confess GOD, and deny His knowledge of the future”—Prophecy settles the question of Divine Foreknowledge. With equal clearness, the doctrine of human freedom is revealed to us ; and thus it is not by the denial of one of these principles, but by the acceptance of

both, that the truth as to the nature of GOD and man is preserved. "Both," says S. Augustine, "are to be held; the one that we may believe aright, the other that we may live aright."

But whilst we must leave these truths in their irreconcilability, it may help us to bear in mind, that fore-knowledge is not necessarily fore-ordination, for were the two identical, GOD would become the author of evil. From the existence of moral evil, we may conclude that there are other causes at work besides the First Cause. If to fore-know were necessarily to pre-determine, then the prophets would become the causes of the fulfilments of their predictions. Truths are foretold, because they are going to happen, do not happen simply because they are foretold.¹ The very perfection of Divine Foreknowledge lies in the fact, that GOD not only foresees ends, but also contingent causes, and takes them all into account; so that our prayers themselves are foreseen, and have their rightful place as factors in the workings of Divine Providence. And further, we are liable to forget when we treat of GOD's Foreknowledge, how far we are going out of our depth. We may be drawn on in our delight in contemplating a Divine Perfection, until—like rowers who have been pushing out upon the deep without a backward look, we suddenly discover how far we are from shore. For after all, what do we mean by Divine Prescience? by attributing *fore-knowledge* to

¹ Origen contra Celsum.

GOD, we are introducing an element of time into the Mind of the Eternal. *Presentiality* is the only way (says Archbishop Bramhall) of reconciling man's freedom and GOD's Foreknowledge.¹ That the Mind of GOD is unaffected by the passage of time, that the Eternal can have no common measure with it, brings home to us the fact, that in ascribing to GOD Foreknowledge, we are using a term suitable to man's finite powers of comprehension, and then dealing with a difficulty which the imperfection of our language has raised.

As to the objection, then, to the efficacy of prayer grounded on the Divine Foreknowledge, we reply—such an objection extends to all human action, reaches into mysteries which are far above our comprehension, wrongly identifies Divine Foreknowledge with Divine Predestination, and arises partly from the employment of a term inadequate to express the Divine Wisdom. But when two truths are in variance, the one practical, the other speculative, it is our duty to act upon that which is within our reach. All laws and governments, rewards and punishments, religion and morality, honour and shame, take into account or spring from as a fundamental axiom, human liberty, and by praying we are only acting upon the same principle; we

¹ "The readiest way to reconcile contingency and liberty with the decrees and prescience of GOD . . . is to subject future contingents to the aspect of GOD, according to that presentiality which they have in eternity."—*Bramhall, Works*, p. 709.

look for results from our prayers in the same way as we look for results from our other efforts, and in neither case should we allow the theoretical difficulty of reconciling GOD's knowledge of the future with man's freedom, to interfere with our labours and hopes.

We pass now, from the objections which relate to the Divine Mind, to those which more immediately concern the Divine Will. The *efficacy* of prayer is said to be incompatible with the Immutability of the Divine Will; the *need* of prayer, to be a disparagement of Divine Goodness and Liberality. We will take these allegations separately. Changelessness is one of the conditions of the Divine Life; no Perfection is more plainly revealed—"I am the LORD, I change not,"¹—"they," says the Psalmist, speaking of the heavens, "shall be changed, but Thou art the same."² S. James again, describes GOD as "the FATHER of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."³ If, then, the Will of GOD be Immutable, what is the utility of prayer? for by prayer we attempt to change or influence the will of another.

This question arises both from a misconception of the Divine Immutability, and of the purpose of prayer. Immutability is not the same as *necessity*; on the contrary, Divines have laboured to show how in GOD Immutability and the highest Freedom of Will meet. There is one form of freedom, it is true, which GOD does not share

¹ Mal. iii. 6.

² Ps. ci. 26, 27.

³ S. James i. 17.

with us—"GOD is not a man, that He should lie ; neither the son of man, that He should repent"¹—GOD has "the blessed necessity" through which He is not able to be unjust, but He is perfectly free in all other respects. There are three choices within the power of freewill²—that of acting or not acting, of choosing this or that good, of choosing this or that evil ; and the two former of these are exercised supremely by the Divine Will. Thus David says, "Whatsoever the LORD *pleased*, that did He in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places."³ And GOD, by the mouth of the prophet, describes Himself as open to act in this way or that, according to the conduct of His creatures—"If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land : but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword."⁴ GOD is Immutable within the sphere of His own Being, because He is Simple, Eternal, Perfect, and nothing in Himself can pass into a higher perfectness or activity ; but by creation He reveals Himself in the sphere of the mutable, in which He wills to manifest His Freedom. Some, in speaking of the Divine Volition, have used the terms "first and second Will," or "antecedent and consequent Will of GOD :" meaning by the former, the will of GOD acting without relation to circumstances ; by the latter, the will of GOD dependent on certain circumstances or second causes—by the former the will of GOD working

¹ Num. xxiii. 19.

² Petavius, lib. v. cap. iv.

³ Ps. xxxv. 6.

⁴ Isa. i. 19, 20.

absolutely and alone ; by the latter, the will of GOD as it seems to modify and adapt itself according to the behaviour of the creature. Thus, there are instances in Holy Scripture, where the Divine Will *seems* to be changed by the conduct of man—e.g. Hezekiah's death was predicted, and yet by prayer his life was lengthened—Nineveh's destruction was announced, but when they cried "mightily to the LORD, GOD repented of the evil that He had said He would do to them ; and He did it not."¹ The evil with which Ahab was threatened was, on his repentance, removed from him.² The "Prophecy of commination" is all of this nature, it reveals what will happen, unless certain circumstances intervene between cause and effect to prevent the occurrence.

Perhaps we may find a trace of this combination in man. Strength of will is manifested by faithfulness to certain principles of conduct, but not by lack of pliancy in matters where those principles are not involved. Strength of will, on the contrary, stands behind readiness at every turn to be moved by and to comply with the wishes of others ; whereas weakness of will, is often marked by great obstinacy. So in GOD, whilst Immutability is essential to His Nature, as the One who "continueth holy ;" yet in His relation with His creatures, where no contradiction to His other Attributes is incurred, there is Freedom ; and as He was at first free to create, so now He works all things "not by the obligation of necessity, but according to the choice of His

¹ Jonah iii. 10.

² 1 Kings xxi. 29.

Free Will."¹ We must be careful, lest we identify the Immutability of GOD with necessity, thereby converting the Divine Personality into a machine, and reducing the All-ruling Mind to the level of the "Fates" of the heathen.

Moreover, the objection we are considering misrepresents the purpose of prayer; it is based on the idea that prayer is an instrument whereby the creature endeavours to change the counsels of the Eternal, which is an exaggeration of the doctrine of prayer. The position claimed for prayer is, that of a certain action by means of which the Divine Purposes are accomplished. We pray "not to *change* but to *fulfil* the Divine Will," hence one of the dispositions for acceptable prayer is conformity to the Will of GOD; we pray and act, in order to *do* the Will of GOD. GOD in His Providence not only appoints certain results, but also makes those results contingent on the intermediate causes, which have a certain relation to those results. GOD's Will is done through human agency—"Thy Will be *done* in earth as it is in Heaven"²—"My meat is to *do* the Will of Him that sent Me"³—and prayer is one form of human agency whereby that Will is fulfilled. It would be even wrong to pray for that, which GOD had clearly revealed to be contrary to His Will; we may only pray for that, about which His Will is unknown, or apparently favourable, believing that in His Providence He deigns to use prayer as a factor without the employment of which certain results would not follow.

¹ S. Ambrose.

² S. Matt. vi. 10.

³ S. John iv. 34.

Thus, the doctrine of the efficacy and need of prayer, rightly stated, does not clash with the Perfection of Divine Immutability.

A further charge has been laid against prayer in relation to GOD'S Will ; the need of such intervention is taken to be a disparagement of Divine Liberality and Goodness. Since "nothing is more dearly purchased than that which is purchased by prayers,"¹ therefore, it is said, as GOD is most liberal, it is more fitting that He should bestow His blessings without being asked for them. This ancient objection is one to which two replies may be given. In the first place, GOD *does* give innumerable things without the intervention of prayer,—He openeth His hand, and filleth all things living with plenteousness ; He "maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust ;"² and, secondly, GOD in His Wisdom has devised this plan of petitioning Him in our necessities, that He might bestow a double blessing—the gift, and contact with the Giver, the latter having, as we have seen, a transforming effect on the worshipper, whilst it acts as a reminder of the relation of dependency upon Him who is "the Giver of all good gifts." Prayer, then, rather witnesses to, than obscures the Liberality of GOD.

Perhaps, the most plausible objection in reference to the Divine Perfections, is that which is based on the incompatibility of prayer with our ideas of Divine Greatness ; its

¹ Seneca.

² S. Matt. v. 45.

plausibility lies in the fact, that it comes to us under the mask of reverence and profound regard for the Divine Majesty. Is it consistent, it is said, with the Infinite Majesty of the Most High, that He should hear the prayer of an insignificant creature—that He Who created and sustains numberless worlds, should attend to the cry of some poor sinner? It is indeed wonderful, that He “the High and Lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity”¹ should deign to listen to our prayers, but all things are wonderful with God. Yet are we not trusting too much to *our* conceptions of Divine Greatness and of human insignificancy? We conclude with the Stoic, that greatness involves a contempt for detail,² because in man we rarely find the powers of comprehension and minuteness combined. We notice a division of these in human shadows of greatness; in one man, precision of detail, carefulness of particulars, keenness of analysis, regard for finish; in another, grasp of great principles, ability in generalisation, rapidity of induction, capacity for ruling. But though it may be generally true, that these qualities are found apart in man: it must be remembered, first, that creatures are too limited in their capacities to represent in its totality the Divine Greatness, and therefore one chiefly reflects one side of it, another, another; and further, that there are exceptions even amongst men to this experience, and some are found who in some degree combine the great

¹ Isa. lvii. 15.

² “Magna dii curant, parva negligunt,” Cicero, de Nat. Deor.

and the small, who are as capable, for instance, of forming the policy of a country or of dealing with the difficulties of international law, as of entering into the details of finance or the finest distinctions of language. In GOD we find the perfection of this combination, of which rare genius sometimes provides us with a distant illustration. As in GOD the highest activity is blended with the deepest repose, so “the infinitely great” and “the infinitely little” are at once the object of His Divine Care. He not only created the orbs of light, the mountains, and the sea, but the fibres of each leaf, and the petals of each flower, and painted the smallest shell with its various tints,¹ the beauty of which can only be seen with the microscope. And as in nature, so in Revelation, GOD manifests Himself as not indifferent to detail; the smallest incident or object falls under His Providence—“are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your FATHER. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.”² Divine Greatness combines the upholding of the worlds with the closest attention to the most minute event, and therefore prayer is not inconsistent with the majesty of Heaven.

But further, besides a fallacious estimate of Divine Greatness, is there not also at the base of this objection a false view of human insignificance? Man is insignificant, it is true, when viewed in relation to GOD; but He is not insignificant as the object of Divine care, in comparison with

¹ E.g. the shells of the Foraminifera.

² S. Matt. x. 29, 30.

other creatures. We are too apt to measure greatness by the material size of an object, and not by its moral and spiritual worth ; and therefore we conclude that Divine Providence is less unworthily engaged in directing vast bodies, than in listening to the cry of the human soul. David for a moment felt the insignificancy of man compared with the great objects of nature, and wondered at the Divine interest in him—"what is man, that Thou art mindful of him?"¹ but he presently turns to the grounds of his real greatness both present and future,—Thou madest him "a little lower" than the angels, to crown him with glory and worship. The Psalmist fully impressed with man's material littleness, was also fully alive to his spiritual greatness, in that in the scale of being he was only "lower than the angels," and possessed a capacity for future bliss and honour. Even in material things, bulk is not always the measure of value, as the precious gem bears witness. Man, as he has a soul more valuable than all material things,—which will alone outlive this present scene, is surely more worthy than they are of the Divine Care ; and hence I conclude that the objection to prayer on the score of man's insignificancy and its incompatibility with Divine Greatness, will disappear before a juster conception of man's position as a spiritual and immortal being, and a more worthy estimate of the Divine Majesty. We must beware, lest from applying human notions to the Divine Mind, we regard GOD as one so ab-

¹ Ps. viii. 4, 5.

sorbed in dealing with that which is vast and general, as to leave no room for attending to that which is particular and individual. Still, let us with the Psalmist, wonder at the Divine Condescension—"Who is like unto the LORD our GOD, that hath His dwelling on high; and yet humbleth Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and earth."¹

We have now canvassed the leading objections to prayer which are grounded on its seeming incompatibility with the Perfections of GOD—with His Omniscience, Foreknowledge, Immutability, Liberality, and Greatness. Without attempting the solution of a mystery, the thoughts we have advanced may be of use in repelling the temptations, which sometimes beset the faithful soul concerning the efficacy of prayer; and, in general, we must remember, that it is He Who has revealed Himself as All-wise, Changeless, Almighty, Liberal and Great, Who has also promised to hear and answer prayer; so that in His Mind that incompatibility, of which we have been treating can have no place. From our finiteness, from the fact that now we "know" only "in part," we see but scattered and broken rays of Divine Truth, which are so refracted, that we cannot trace them up to their common source and unity.

On the first class of objections we have dwelt at length, as lying more distinctly within the province of divinity, as affecting human minds more generally than those which are the product of a particular study, and as forming the more

¹ Ps. cxiii. 5.

common ground of temptation. Those who make physical science their pursuit, imagine the fixity of natural laws to preclude the possibility of an answer to prayer, at least beyond the spiritual sphere. The ground of their objection is, that, as far as they have examined they find in nature that certain causes produce certain results ; this order they find everywhere as far as they have reached, and they conclude, that the unsearched will prove to be under the same law of order as that which has been searched ; this order is so invariable, this “Reign of Law” so ‘adamantine,’ that they cannot conceive the possibility of any interference with it : and therefore—to expect an answer to prayer is to expect a miracle. It may be worth while to observe, that, although an answer to prayer may be compared to a miracle as involving a movement of the First Cause : yet the two are quite different in other respects, for the one is an *extraordinary* event, whilst our contention is that the other is a *normal* mode of the action of Divine Providence ; the one is a *manifest* modification or suspension of natural law, whilst the other is *secret* and incapable of test. A miracle is an unusual event which is vouchsafed in order to draw attention to some messenger from GOD or to ratify a Divine Revelation, or is the concomitant of some exalted attainment in sanctity ; whilst prayer is a power of all times, and within the reach of all. The very purpose of a miracle obliges it to be a conspicuous deviation from the ordinary course of nature ; whilst an answer to prayer, where it comes out into the reach

of human cognizance, so veils itself with the processes of nature as to preclude all certainty as to its Divine origin.

In the first place, the *limits* of human knowledge as to physical causation deprive this objection of its force ; it is grounded on an inference, and an inference from a very limited area of knowledge, to the immense and unfathomable regions of the unsearched, and perhaps unsearchable. We take a leap when, from the uniformity which we experience, we come to the conclusion that Natural Law is universal ; such a conclusion is conjectural, not scientific—“the reasons for this reliance (i.e. as to the universality of Natural Law) do not hold good in circumstances unknown to us, and beyond the possible range of our experience.”¹ Moreover, as to the invariability of Physical Laws, there are exceptions which show that the expression has its limits even within the sphere of human experience. There are instances in which GOD does interfere with the action of a law, and suspends it at a certain point where its action would clearly become harmful. But if such interventions could not be discovered in the world of matter ; the power of man—who is made in the image of GOD—to control, direct, and counteract natural laws, at once disturbs the doctrine of the inevitable sequence of cause and effect. The free-will which can project a stone upwards or detain it from falling downwards, despite the law of gravitation, is but a single illustration of the truth, that mind can inter-

¹ Mill, Logic, Vol. ii. p. 108.

fere with the successions of matter. And if this be so with the finite mind, are we to make the Infinite Mind less free than it, and to make GOD the captive of His own laws !

Secondly, this objection to the efficacy of prayer assumes that an answer to prayer must involve a perceptible interference with the sequence of cause and effect, and so introduce an element of confusion and uncertainty, where all before was governed by a fixed order. But prayer may be answered without any such dislocation of causes and effects. Science, it must be remembered, is only able to trace a few links of this mysterious chain of causation ; it cannot explain to us how it is connected with the Throne of GOD ; it deals only with that which is proximate, while Religion deals with the Ultimate. Prayer touches the secret springs of action far beyond the reach or cognizance of scientific investigation ; prayer addresses the First Cause, who can set in motion a series of effects which may reach us in the natural order without the slightest observable disturbance. Science is as one regarding the interaction of different parts of some complex musical instrument ; Religion looks behind it, to the One who is fingering the keys. As one has so clearly and forcibly expressed it, GOD "can adapt the forthgoings of His power to all the wants and all the prayers of His dependent family. For this purpose He does not need to stretch forth His hand on the inferior and visible links of any progression, so as to shift the known succes-

sions of experience, or at all to intermeddle with the lessons and the laws of this great schoolmaster. He may work in secret and yet perform all His pleasure, not by the achievement of a miracle upon nature's open platform, but by the touch of one or other of those master-springs which lie within the recesses of her inner laboratory. There, and at His place of supernal command, by the fountain-head of influence, He can turn whithersoever He will the machinery of our world, without the possibility by human eye of detecting the least infringement upon any of its processes."¹ And it is the absence of this visible appearance "upon nature's open platform" of the effects of prayer, which has caused its power to be ignored. When the cholera was raging in 1866, some ridiculed² the idea of *praying* to be delivered from the scourge, and trusted only to the efficiency of certain sanitary improvements; and a recent writer takes much the same line, when he seems to regard "the force"³ of such prayers to lie in the fact that they act as a stimulant of sanitary reform. The power of prayer is disbelieved, because the very disturbance of the natural sequence with which it was charged, cannot be traced. One part of the mystery of prayer is that it operates secretly; its effects elude the senses—it touches the chain of

¹ Chalmers' Works, vol. iii. p. 624.

² "A Protest against the Prayer for the Cholera," and "Pall Mall Gazette."

³ Rev. Stopford Brooke, "CHRIST and Modern Life," Sermon on "the Force of Prayer."

causation at a point in the series which is beyond the ken of man, and produces its results without any violation of the laws of nature.

Further, this objection seems also to arise from viewing the order of nature as apart from its Creator—as though, by it He had raised a hindrance to His own Freedom, and was removed from us further and further as every new discovery of cause and effect was made good ; and from the assumption, that we can know something of the method of the Primal Agency from the action of those causes which are within the reach of investigation. With regard to the first, by “the laws of nature,” those who believe in a Personal GOD, mean only the regular mode of His working—“can we help regarding the physical laws of creation as His personal habits ; the moral order of Providence as the unfolding of His character?”¹ GOD is not to be regarded as a limited Monarch restricted by the laws of the Constitution, for the system of Nature is but the expression of His Own Will. From the way “the laws of nature” are sometimes spoken of, it might be almost supposed that they were living agents, and that GOD had been relegated by them to the back-ground. And, secondly, when we conclude that the First Cause *must* act precisely in the same way as those few second causes act with which we are familiar, is this not to forget that the difference between the First Cause and these others is one not of degree but of *kind* ;

¹ Martineau, “Endeavours after the Christian Life,” p. 16.

for the First Cause is self-derived, and from Him flows the Causative influence which sets in motion all the rest. Of His Agency we can know but little, how He sustains the worlds in being, how He adjusts the different forces He has lodged in the Universe; and yet this objection to prayer is based on the supposition that we are so capable of judging of the method of Divine Government, as to be able to exclude from it one factor for which GOD has Himself left a place, because *we* may not be able to see how this spiritual force "prayer" can work without introducing disaster and confusion.

That the efficacy of prayer is a mystery, has been already admitted, and therefore the mode by which GOD answers prayer we cannot know. Whether, as some have thought, He acts *immediately* and yet veils the isolated event from discovery, or acts through the agency of ordinary laws; whether He employs second causes, of the existence of which we have no knowledge, or creates anew the physical conditions, the matter or force, or both, requisite to produce the result, we cannot determine; but, that the invariability of natural laws precludes the possibility of GOD'S answering our prayers is an assertion, which the limited knowledge we possess of physical causation and of the Primal Agency of the Almighty, renders altogether unwarrantable.

Lastly, objections to the practice and utility of prayer have been raised in reference to man himself. It has been said, "Is it not better to occupy yourself in practising

virtues and in the fulfilment of the duties of your state, than to spend time in praying?" A favourite artifice in controversy, when we want to disparage or dishonour any truth or practice, is to place it in such a way, as though an alternative must be made between it and some other truth or duty; and this is resorted to, when prayer and action are put in opposition to one another. The maxim, which has before been quoted, "Pray and work," contains the answer to this objection. Neither work nor prayer must be omitted. To pray and not to employ the means placed within our power, would be to dissociate what GOD has conjoined. He who bids us pray, bids us also do with our might every other duty. It may be, that there are those who do not rightly balance their duties, and who by the sweetness and rest of prayer may be drawn aside from the irksome task; as also, there are those who are of an active turn of mind, and are too ready to sacrifice prayer for work, but such abuses do not affect the general principle, that it is only by combined prayer and action that we can succeed.

Moreover, it must be borne in mind, that for the right fulfilment of duty and for the exercise of virtues, prayer is requisite on account of their inter-dependence, so that the two *cannot* be separated; and prayer, instead of being placed in antagonism to work, must be regarded as its indispensable adjunct. To grow in virtue, to do all things for the glory of GOD, to labour well for time and for eternity, we need grace; and grace, as we have already

seen, is gained through prayer. Experience teaches us that those who have formed habits of prayer, are active and industrious in the business of daily life, and are marked by a sense of the value of time. Prayer is, indeed, one remedy for sloth, whether that disease infect the mind, the soul, or the body. Frequent contact with the Life of GOD—the Life which is all action and energy—quicken the sluggish powers of corrupt nature, and imparts to our faculties something of its vigour and brightness. Those who in early morning hold communion with their Maker, go forth braced by this exercise for the discharge of the duties of the day, catch and give out something of the spirit of His life, and prove by their activity that prayer and work go together.

But once more, whilst we admit, it may be said, the invigorating effects of prayer, must it not after all often be a waste of time, when regarded as petition, for often as a fact are not prayers ineffectual? In answer to this, we have only to bear in mind, that in prayer we leave the results to GOD in humble submission to His Holy Will; the answer may be different from what we desire, and still be a fulfilment of our petition. “We pray for health, and God gives sickness,” says Bishop Taylor. “The prayer is really answered, if it be a sickness which carries us to eternal health.” The reply is the same with regard to contradictory petitions; GOD can answer both in different ways, according to the real needs of the two supplicants. From this it will be evident that the power of prayer cannot be tested by

results, for results will often not coincide with our desires ; and moreover, as we are not acquainted with all physical causes and their interaction, it would be impossible to ascribe as a certainty any ordinary event to the force of prayer : yet there are occurrences which come within the experience of many, marvellous coincidences, restoration to health when all human hope was gone, conversions from sin in most unlikely subjects, which to a devout mind are sufficient evidence of its efficacy, though not enough to convince the gainsayer, or to satisfy those who presumptuously seek a sign from heaven.

Our brief review of the different objections to prayer, grounded on its incompatibility with the Divine Perfections, its impossibility viewed in relation to the fixity of the laws of nature, its inutility with regard to man, must now be brought to a close. The main thought to be grasped with reference to the first class of objections, is that prayer is a means not of *changing* but of *fulfilling* the Divine Purposes,—that God in the perfect government of His Universe, appropriates human desires, and in some wondrous manner takes them into account and makes them an element of His administration. As to the difficulty of reconciling prayer with physical law, we must cultivate intellectual lowliness, bearing in mind how little we know of nature's secrets, and how much less we know of God's modes of acting ; we must accept the light of Revelation as our guide, where science leaves us in darkness, regard-

ing the one as the complement of the other. And as to the inutility of prayer on the side of man, how opposite to experience is this objection, for prayer is found to be a source of energy, a spring of life, a necessity to man for the right discharge of all other duties, a power which has results which are for his benefit, whether they are in accordance with his wishes or not.

Every man has a certain portion of the Divine Will, the execution of which has been made to depend upon his faithful co-operation with GOD, and one part of that co-operation lies in the exercise of the power of prayer. Prayer is, then, if this view be taken of it, a spiritual force, in the due employment of which there is a great responsibility; it is a talent, for the use of which we must give account; it is a high privilege and blessing, for a sure promise is annexed to it—"let him ask in faith, nothing wavering . . . and it shall be given him"¹—and a greater than an Apostle has ascribed to it a sovereign power—"Whatsoever ye shall ask the FATHER in My name, He will give it you."²

¹ S. James i. 5, 6.

² S. John xvi. 23.

Lecture IV.

CONDITIONS OF PRAYER.

“Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss.”—S. James iv. 3.

THE next thing, after we have made good a possession, is to know how to turn it to account. In the last Lecture, having traced the continuity of the belief in the efficacy of prayer from the days of the Patriarchs to the Dispensation in which we live, and noted the marvellous effects which were produced by prayer as abiding witnesses to its power ; we then attempted to meet some of the leading objections, which prayer, in the sense of petition for spiritual and temporal benefits, has called forth. We had to reconcile this gift with the Perfections of the Giver, with which it seemed to some at variance ; we had to call attention to the limits of human knowledge in the sphere of physical laws, and to show how prayer may be answered without any visible disturbance of that settled order, the contemplation of which so regales the scientific mind ; we had to justify the practice of prayer from the insincere

charge of encroachment on other duties, and from the reproach, that it was a waste of time. Having thus then endeavoured to make good our possession, our next business is to see how we are to use it.

We are still treating of prayer only as petition; as a means of gaining something from GOD, the bestowal of which depends on the rightful employment of this agent. And here I would notice, before entering upon the consideration of the "conditions of prayer," that we are justified in using prayer for *definite* blessings and for the removal of *definite* evils. There have been those who, whilst they admit the power of prayer in general, will not allow that prayer should be made for any special and distinct blessing; who agree with the opinion of the heathen philosopher, which was to the effect "that nothing else should be sought from the immortal gods, but that they should bestow good things," that is, that no definite form of good was to be asked for. The reasons which are given for this avoidance of specific requests are, that GOD must know better than we do what is wanted, and that for us to seek any thing in particular is to interfere with the Divine Will. It may be replied, that these reasons if carried to their legitimate consequences would exclude all petitions, whether general or particular; and that the second is based on the fallacy, that by prayer we dictate to GOD and seek to change His Will. But we have positive authority for seeking definite things from GOD. CHRIST Himself both by word and

deed has taught us to pray for specific benefits; in the LORD'S Prayer we have prayers for separate blessings, and in CHRIST'S intercession for S. Peter, we have an instance of prayer for a particular virtue of a particular person. Moreover, those who came to CHRIST for healing not only made general supplications for mercy, but laid their specific needs before Him; and He Himself drew them on to ask distinctly for what they wanted, as when He questioned the blind man who had appealed for pity, "*What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?*" and he said, "LORD, that I may receive my sight."¹ So again, S. Paul prayed definitely concerning the thorn in the flesh, "For *this thing* I besought the LORD thrice, that it might depart from me;"² and the Apostle in like manner bade the Philippians let their "*requests* be made known unto GOD."³ It is clear, then, from Holy Scripture, that we are to pray not only in general terms of supplication, but also with definite petitions for the spiritual or temporal good of which we stand in need; and it is evidently to such definite prayers S. James alludes, otherwise the fact that they were not answered would not have been known, for—after rebuking those who do not pray at all, he proceeds (notwithstanding the promise of infallibility in regard to prayer) to notice, that we pray and yet have not what we pray for—"ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss."

Prayer, then, to be efficacious must be gathered upon

¹ S. Luke xviii. 41.

² 2 Cor. xii. 8.

³ Phil. iv. 6.

certain points, and must be exercised with certain conditions. It is a spiritual force, which like all other, has its laws and limits of action. CHRIST says, "ask, and it shall be given you;"¹ S. James says, "ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask *amiss*."² There is an infallible force in prayer, if we can only lay hold of it, and direct it aright, but the simple asking is evidently not enough. There are conditions which are requisite to render petitions of avail before the Throne of GOD, and into these it will be our next step to inquire.

The Conditions of Prayer may be considered first, in reference to the thing which is prayed for; secondly, as they relate to the person who prays; thirdly, as to the manner of praying. Defect in either respect may deprive prayer of its efficacy, or weaken it.

I. The promise given to prayer, is conditional, and not absolute, as touching the thing which is prayed for, and therefore we may fail in gaining an answer to prayer in consequence of praying for that which is wrong in itself, or which would be fraught with danger to its possessor. Prayer is not a power entrusted to us, like that of free-will, which we may exert for good or evil, for weal or woe; it must be used for good, either present or ultimate. What we pray for, it must be consistent with the Divine Perfections to grant. The heathen in their prayers often sought that which would gratify their evil passions; the satisfaction of

¹ S. Matt. vii. 7.

² *κακῶς*.

a vicious thirst for gain or revenge, or the success of some lustful design, would form the subject of their petitions; but they were consistent in one respect, for they credited their gods with those very vices, for the indulgence of which they prayed to them. Deities who were idealised passions, would be naturally invoked for the furtherance of those passions. To pray to a Holy GOD for the fulfilment of some evil desire, and to suppose that He will grant our petition, is to degrade GOD in a way which He Himself has denounced—"thou thoughtest wickedly, that I am even such a one as thyself,"¹ and to make Him an accomplice in our sins. "He who asks evil from GOD, judges and thinks GOD the author of evil." Thus, S. James adds the further reason why those to whom he referred, asked and received not, viz. that they prayed for the gratification of their "lusts"²—"ye receive not, because ye ask amiss, *that ye may consume it upon your lusts.*" "He asks amiss who, dismissing the love of the supernal, seeks only the lowest goods, and those, not for the support of human frailty, but for the excess of unrestrained pleasure."³

But whilst we are treating of that for which we may not pray, and seeing how prayers of human passion are incompatible with Divine Holiness, we are naturally led to touch upon a difficulty which many have felt in using the imprecatory language of the Psalter, in such passages as these :

¹ Ps. l. 21.

² ταῖς ἡδοναῖς.

³ Bede, quoted by Corn. à Lapide in loc.

—“let death seize upon them, and let them go down quick into hell ; for wickedness is in their dwellings and among them ;”¹—“let their table become a snare before them. . . . let their eyes be darkened that they see not let their habitation be desolate let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous.”² So again, “Set Thou a wicked man over him ; and let Satan stand at his right hand let his prayer become sin let his days be few ; and let another take his office let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow,”³ &c. It cannot be denied that these inspired utterances have a very startling sound ; the passion of revenge seems to revel in the varied expressions of malediction, and the tongue of the Psalmist to be fired with human vindictiveness. Different interpretations have been given of the meaning and purpose of these verses. It has been said that they should all be read as predictions rather than imprecations. The prophet, “after the mode of imprecating, predicts what he saw was about to be ;”⁴ and this interpretation is defended, sometimes on grammatical grounds, and sometimes on the ground that it was the custom of Jewish prophets. The employment of the future tense in the original is said to justify us in turning what is expressed in our version as a wish, into a simple declaration of what was to come to pass ; yet the future under special circumstances has some-

¹ Ps. lv. 15.

² Ps. lxi. 23—28.

³ Ps. cix. 6—9.

⁴ Bellarmine in *Psalmos*, p. 444.

times a jussive or optative force ; whilst on the other hand the prophets sometimes employ the imperative for strong affirmation or for predicting a “doomed futurity.”

Again, another way of dealing with the difficulty, is to find in these imprecations the outpouring of the soul’s hatred for sin, sin being personified, or represented in the concrete, (as it is in the Epistle to the Romans,) because apart from a subject it could not be apprehended. Thus the devotional purpose of these verses would be to stimulate and express one side of the virtue of contrition, in which the Psalmist enjoins the rightful use of a human passion, “Ye that love the LORD, *hate* evil.”¹ Others have separated these vindictive utterances from all reference to human penalties, and have seen in them simply a vehement affection for the Divine Justice and Honour. According to this view, the soul is wholly united with, and absorbed in the contemplation of Divine Vengeance. As in another place, the Psalmist says, “The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance : he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked ;”² and as the souls under the altar cried with a loud voice, “How long, O LORD, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood ?”³ And as GOD hath “no pleasure in the destruction of the living,” but in the manifestation of His Perfections ; so the soul simply yearns for the expression of Divine Justice, and depicts

¹ Ps. xcvii. 10.

² Ps. lviii. 10.

³ Rev. vi. 10.

with the imagination, without any thought of individuals, the scope and consequences of its exercise.

Moreover, these imprecations have been regarded as not altogether wanting in love even for the sinner upon whom they were to fall. For it is said, they were desires not simply for his punishment, but for his cure, that "the sins might be destroyed, but the man remain," as when the Prodigal "came to himself"¹ through temporal affliction; or, if some of these maledictions seem final, still good was wished him, for by dying he would cease from sin, and therefore his penalty be no longer increased. S. Augustine says further, that benefits from witnessing Divine judgments accrue to the good, by which they are enabled to become better.

Whatever explanation of the difficulty may seem to our minds the least unsatisfactory, there are two general thoughts which remove all such prayers from becoming precedents for imitation: first, they are divinely-inspired moulds for conveying predictions of the miserable end of Judas, and the calamities of the Jews, through reference to past histories such as those of Dathan, and Abiram, and Ahithophel; and secondly, they breathe the spirit of the Old Testament rather than of the New. Our LORD has taught us that there were acts and words in keeping with an earlier Dispensation, which yet did not rise to the higher level of charity which characterised His Teaching. Thus,

¹ S. Luke xv. 17.

when the disciples desired to call down fire from Heaven upon the churlish Samaritans—an act permitted, be it remembered, to the prophet of Israel—He rebuked them in those significant words, “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.”¹

These passages in the Psalms, then, though useful as triumphant expressions of the hatred of evil, are in no wise types of petitions which, without the guarantee of inspiration, are to be reproduced by us ; but are rather to be seen, where they are, as suffused with the richer glow of that Divine Charity which shines back upon them from the New Testament. There are times, it may be true, when it is permissible to pray for a temporal evil as a means of trial to oneself ; but this is rarely advisable with regard to others, for fear of danger to charity or of any movement of envy or hatred, and is never to be done when the one who prays must be the agent of inflicting that evil. Of all prayers, which are prompted by evil passions, or have their indulgence for their object, the language of the Psalmist still holds good, they are “turned into sin.” It is evident, then, that we may not pray for that which is evil, or prejudicial to our eternal interests.

Having seen what we may *not* pray for, we are now in a better position for considering what are legitimate subjects for petition. The good things which are given to us by

¹ S. Luke ix. 55, 56.

GOD are either spiritual or temporal : under the former are included our salvation and perfection, and all the means which directly lead to and insure those results, e.g. pardon for sins, strength against temptation, final perseverance ; under the latter, “ all the blessings of this life.”

We will take temporal goods first, and spiritual after. The term “ temporal goods ” is so wide that we must employ a subdivision, for the sake of clearness and because of the practical issues which are involved. Amongst temporal goods there are those which are rightly and fittingly desired, and those also which are only (when at all) relatively desirable : the former class I will name “ human goods ” to distinguish them from their less respectable relations—they are such as concern our health, integrity of body, sanity of mind, strength, natural life, &c. ; the latter class we will call “ worldly goods,” which are not desirable for their own sake—they are riches, fame, honour, success, position, &c.

With regard to both classes of temporal goods, to seek them as our Ultimate End, so that our thoughts and affections centre in them and find in them their rest, is sinful. It is of the essence of deadly sin, that it makes an end of a means ; as it is the fault of lesser sins, not rightly to relate the means to the end. To pray for temporal, to the utter neglect of spiritual things, is especially wrong in a Christian, because the spiritual and eternal have been more distinctly laid open to him. We cannot compare the Old Testament with the New, without seeing that temporal goods, through

the dimness of the Revelation of the world to come, held a higher place in the estimation of the Jew, than they can retain in the mind of a Christian. The Vision of the Eternal, imparted by CHRIST and His Spirit, gave to temporal goods their true measure—"life and immortality" are brought "to light by the Gospel."¹ Hence such expressions as these embody the spirit of Christianity—"Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life;"² "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen;"³ "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for CHRIST; yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of CHRIST JESUS my LORD, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things."⁴ And therefore to set the affections on things on the earth is now especially sinful, for to desire, pray for, and seek them, has not the excuse of former days—but it is deliberately to choose the temporal in preference to the eternal, after the latter has been offered. The revelation of the Eternal, then, heightened the evil of turning to the creature, and made it to become a greater sin to pray for some passing benefit or pleasure as the ultimate object of life.

After this principle has been laid down—that all temporal goods, whether human or worldly, must not be sought for, save as related to our Final End; we shall be able to

¹ 2 Tim. i. 10.

³ 2 Cor. iv. 18.

² S. John vi. 27.

⁴ Phil. iii. 7, 8.

proceed with less diffidence to show, that prayers for temporal blessings may be rightly used, and in what manner.

That human goods are permitted subjects for petition, may be proved by reference to the Gospels. The multitudes which gathered round the Son of Man were drawn to Him in great measure by bodily needs ; they brought their friends, or came themselves to be healed. The blind man prays, "LORD, that I may receive my sight;"¹ the leper, "If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean;"² the deaf, the dumb, the lunatic, the possessed, were brought to Him for restoration of body or of mind. And to those prayers for human benefits He listened without rebuke, and answered them by bestowing the desired blessings. To pray, then, for health, life, strength, preservation of sense or faculty, has the sanction of CHRIST. And in praying for such things, it is not requisite always to keep *consciously* before the mind their relation to our Final End ; it will suffice that, as they are good and fitting to our nature and condition, and a part of GOD'S first Will for us, they are in themselves related to our Beatitude. The soul may frame its supplication in the hour of trial, by the bed of sickness, or in the presence of danger, without rising at the same moment above the thought of the temporal blessing which is being sought. Was there any other thought in the blind man as he persisted in his cry, "JESUS,

¹ S. Luke xviii. 41.

² S. Matt. viii. 2.

Thou Son of David, have mercy on me," than that of the restoration of this world's light to his eye-balls? or again, did the leper seek aught else but the removal of the foul tetter from his skin? or did the Canaanite mother think of aught else but the deliverance of her child from the contortions of her malady? and yet JESUS was gracious unto them. At any time a temporal need may press home upon us, and then the power of prayer may be for the occasion so called into exercise as to appear absorbed by the immediate demand upon it; yet there is no danger in thus praying, when the relative value of the temporal and spiritual has been already grasped, and has become a principle of life.

But temporal blessings must be always prayed for *conditionally*, because it is impossible for us to know, whether they will, or will not be prejudicial to our eternal interests. It has been sometimes urged that in this respect temporal goods do not differ from spiritual, in that both must be only conditionally sought; a spiritual gift, it is said, can be abused as well as a temporal, and made to stand in the way of our progress in holiness. Yet there is a difference between them; the perversion of a spiritual gift may be only something accidental, whereas the temporal good may be in itself a hindrance to the receiver, and contrary to the Divine purpose which has not been made known concerning it. Attached to every prayer for temporal things, then, there must be understood, or expressed, the clause—"as

may be most expedient for" us, until we know the Will of GOD concerning the thing we are asking from Him. However, the condition, as well as the relation to beatitude in the gift we are seeking, may be taken for granted without being stated; for GOD knows the heart, and that the special thing is asked in ignorance, and would not be sought, if it were known to be against His Will. The supplicant has, if it may be reverently said, an understanding with GOD, if his life is ruled according to that utterance of the Redeemer—"not my will, but Thine be done,"¹ each knows the other, and the soul which leads a life of prayer has confidences with Him, and a treasury of past experiences. However, whether it be only implied or be expressed, there must ever be this limitation to prayer for human goods, and consequently uncertainty as to the special form in which according to the Wisdom of GOD, the answer will be given.

With regard to the other class of temporal goods, that is, "worldly goods," such as riches, influence, and the like, there is great danger in seeking them, even when they are desired with the best motive—that they might be used for the Glory of GOD and the benefit of man. There is a fear, lest that which was prayed for with the purest intention, when given, should prove a snare to the soul—"they that will to be rich," says S. Paul, "fall into temptation."² Sometimes also the desire which seems noble, has in it some latent

¹ S. Luke xxii. 42.

² 1 Tim. vi. 9.

form of self-love, and upon what appears to be a fair flower, may be found the trail of avarice or pride; the prayer, apparently so pure and disinterested, may have in it an element of corrupt passion so subtle as to be concealed from the one who prays, who sees in the future, great wealth or power expended on good works, but does not see nature craving exaltation and self-prominency. And what is more to the point, it was not by such means as these JESUS and His disciples fulfilled their mission; He for our sakes became poor, gathered around Him those who were poor and who gave up the little they possessed to follow Him, for the weapons of their warfare were spiritual and not carnal, and consequently were mighty to the pulling down of the strongholds of Satan. Whilst then we should use wealth, influence, or power, which GOD has placed in our path, for the furtherance of His kingdom, it seems—considering the dangers which surround such things, and the opposite method which CHRIST employed—that we should rarely, if ever, make them the subject of our petitions.

We now come to solid ground, as we pass from the consideration of the place which temporal things should or may hold in our prayers, to deal with petitions which concern spiritual blessings only. Spiritual goods differ from the former in two great respects. They must be sought *primarily*; and prayers for them, need not be guarded by any implied or expressed condition.

In the prayer which CHRIST Himself has taught us, we have not only all that can be rightly desired, but we have a model as to the arrangement and relative *order* of our desires. The first thing to be desired, according to the LORD'S Prayer, and therefore the first petition to be made (for prayer is "the interpreter of desire,") is for the Glory of GOD—"Hallowed be Thy Name" expresses His glory in Himself, "Thy kingdom come," His glory in us; the second desire must have regard to the means whereby we can glorify GOD—"Thy will be *done* in earth as it is in heaven," points to the means on our side, the fulfilment of the Divine purposes; "Give us this day our daily bread," proclaims the need of grace from GOD'S side; the third desire is for the removal of hindrances to this end, which are threefold, viz., sin, temptations, and penalties, and thus the soul is taught to pray with regard to the first, "forgive us our trespasses;" with reference to the second, "lead us not into temptation;" and as touching the third, "deliver us from evil." Thus, the whole of "the LORD'S Prayer" may be interpreted in relation to the Invisible, and in this light discloses the order and direction which our spiritual desires should take amongst themselves, and their priority over all others. It is not until we come to the fourth petition, that the temporal is linked to the spiritual—"The temporal good we seek when we say, 'Give us this day our daily bread,' the spiritual good has already been sought in the three earlier petitions." The

Glory of GOD, then, the advancement of His kingdom, the fulfilment of His Will, must occupy the first place in our prayers. The LORD'S Prayer is a compendium of all prayer, and clearly are we told by it that we must give to spiritual things the first place.

CHRIST by word and example constantly impressed upon the minds of His disciples the pre-eminent claim of all that was spiritual. To be anxious only, or chiefly, for temporal things was, according to Him, to cast in your lot with those whose hopes were limited to this passing scene, for "after all these things do the Gentiles seek." CHRIST at once added what was to be the opposite temper of mind of His followers, "but seek ye *first* the kingdom of GOD and His righteousness."¹ Again, when He had given the promise to His disciples, "whatsoever ye shall ask the FATHER in My name, He will give it you,"² He tells them that "hitherto" they had "asked nothing in His name." S. Augustine remarks that this statement at first sight seems strange and contradictory. For had not S. Peter prayed to remain on mount Tabor, that he might enjoy the delight of beholding his Master in His ante-dated glory? Had not James and John prayed for the right hand and the left in CHRIST'S kingdom? It is true, they had asked for those things, but according to the Saint, they were, in comparison as "nothing." For S. Peter desired a continuance of the sensible joy which

¹ S. Matt. vi. 33.

² S. John xvi. 23.

he experienced from the Vision, S. James and S. John the honour of the first places in an earthly kingdom—things which did not stretch out into the Eternal; things which, however great, were, from the temporal ideas or motives associated with the prayers for them, as “nothing.” In the very promise too, there is a limitation—it is “whatsoever ye shall ask *in My name*” ye shall receive. “In My name,” implies something more than ‘through My Merits, through My Cross and Passion,’ or ‘through My all-prevailing Intercession,’ the effect of these words is, to render it a necessary condition of claiming the promise, that the thing sought should be in accordance with the Mind and Will of CHRIST Himself—something which He in His own Heart would seek for His members.

And as by word so by His actions, CHRIST ever asserted that the interests of another world must hold the highest place in our prayers. When He prays, it is for the conversion of His fallen apostle, it is for the salvation of man, it is for the advancement and unity of His kingdom, it is for the increase of the FATHER’S Glory; if He prays in working bodily cures, still they are wrought with a directly moral or spiritual purpose. In these prayers of CHRIST Himself, we have revealed to us what is nearest His Heart, and what consequently should occupy the first place in the petitions of the Christian. And yet, notwithstanding the relative pre-eminence of spiritual to temporal interests, which is set forth in the LORD’S Prayer, enjoined by the

teaching and Example of CHRIST, and theoretically admitted by all who believe in another world—prayers for deliverance from temporal evils are marked by an earnestness and gain a sympathy, which spiritual objects rarely awaken. It is the impending famine, the spreading pestilence, the portents of war, which stir the heart of a nation and bend it low before its GOD in supplication; so in private life, it is the dangerous disease, it is the approach of death, the ruin of bright hopes, which call forth the agony of intercession; the *sensible* evil, that which touches us now and by an actual experience, is that which is ever apt to overtop and cast into the background spiritual and eternal interests, and therefore we must be on our guard against and hold in check this encroaching tendency, and maintain the rightful position of supremacy in our petitions, for the things which belong to our everlasting peace.

There is another characteristic of prayer for spiritual benefits, it can be offered *unconditionally*. The presence of a condition in a prayer is necessitated, either by some doubt of GOD'S Will as to the bestowal of the thing which is sought, or some doubt of the goodness of the thing sought, either in itself, or relatively to the circumstances of the supplicant. Now in spiritual things we know GOD'S Will—"this is the will of GOD, even your sanctification;"¹ as to the thing sought—pardon, peace, light, purity, strength, we know also that they are good. The Psalmist

¹ 1 Thess. iv. 3.

prayed for them without a condition, "heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee."¹ "Grant us Thy salvation."² "O send out Thy light and Thy truth, let them lead me ;"³ and they are good relatively to us, for spiritual benefits cannot be hindrances to our salvation.

But here it may perhaps be said, spiritual things are liable to abuse as well as temporal—an objection which has been already glanced at, and of which the amount of truth there is in it we must ascertain, that we may know how far petitions for spiritual goods should be unconditional.

"Spiritual things" is so comprehensive a term that it must be dealt with in the way in which "temporal things" were treated ; it must undergo sub-division—there are *essential* spiritual gifts, and those which are only *accidental* and for others. By the first, is intended all that appertains to personal sanctification, such as, forgiveness of sins, strength against temptation, perseverance, everlasting life : by the second, certain "gratuitous gifts" for influencing others ; or, spiritual endowments, such as powers of contemplation, sensible sweetness in devotion, special attractions, high vocations. Now the gifts which lie in the thoroughfare of the spiritual life are those which may be the subjects of unconditional prayer to GOD ; but those which belong to the byways, may not be sought without the limitation "not my will, but Thine be done."

There is sometimes a temptation to seek the accidental

¹ Ps. xli. 4.

² lxxxv. 7.

³ xliii. 3.

to the forgetfulness of the substantial in spiritual things, as the former are apt to feed self-love or self-complacency. Thus, we may be drawn to pray for showy virtues—the right and the left in the kingdom—virtues which bring a name and create a reputation, whilst we should be better employed in asking for solid goods, contrition, lowliness, or the fear of the LORD ; we may pray for a power of contemplation, for the sake of the sweetness of its rest and oblivion, whilst it is not the gazing up into Heaven, but the doing of the Master's work, which is our lot ; we may pray for the crown of martyrdom and keep the eye fixed on some distant greatness, whilst we should rather be seeking the grace of patience for our daily trials, which are already too much for our tempers—but we think we can compensate for present failure by imagining what we *would* do, if we could only have the destiny of a S. John Baptist or a S. Andrew. Or again, we may pray for wealth, because life is toilsome and the cross galls our shoulders, whereas we should rather pray for continuance of life, than for entrance into Paradise, as life is the time of service, the seed-time of eternity—but nature seeks relief, and wants all to be over, and to come down from the cross, whereas grace says, he that endureth to the end shall be saved ; or, once more, we may pray for high vocations, special gifts for acting upon others, forgetful, that “ every man hath his proper gift of GOD, one after this manner, and another after that,”¹ and,

¹ 1 Cor. vii. 7.

that illustrious gifts expose the soul to self-exaltation, and are often more beneficial to others than to those who possess them: these are some instances of misdirected desire for spiritual things of the second kind, which do not enter into the essence of the life, but are its accidental excellencies or accompaniments, and are liable to abuse, and therefore cannot be prayed for in an absolute manner.

Spiritual things then, meaning thereby, the solid virtues of the Christian life, forgiveness of sin, overthrow of self-love, mortification, growth in grace and in likeness to JESUS—these may always be prayed for without a condition by every man, for “GOD our SAVIOUR” “will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth,”¹ and upon these, holiness depends. It has been observed, as a law of the distribution of light and heat in the natural world, that the substances which reflect most brilliantly the light which falls upon them, are those which do not absorb the light, and therefore do not become hot in the same degree as substances of a dark and rugged exterior; so in the spiritual life, where the grace which is given is at once reflected far and wide, the soul from not appropriating the gift may remain cold and cheerless, whilst the dark substance, the life which is hidden, so absorbs the Divine Heat which the Sun of Righteousness pours upon it, that those who come into close contact with it know the heavenly glow which is concealed beneath. And

¹ 1 Tim. ii. 3, 4.

all the graces which constitute that hidden life, and relate to salvation—contrition, compunction for sin, humility, mortification, resignation, are spiritual things which may be sought from GOD with the *certainty* that they will be granted, as far as the subject of the prayer is concerned ; for to add a condition to such prayers, would be to distrust the efficacy of prayer in the very sphere of its unrestricted exercise, and to dishonour Divine Faithfulness and Love.

The conditions of prayer as far as the thing prayed for is concerned, from the lowest to the highest subject of petition, have been now considered ; we have seen what cannot be prayed for—that which is evil and prejudicial to our salvation ; what may be prayed for, but conditionally and subordinately—temporal goods ; what must be prayed for, primarily and absolutely—spiritual goods.

We must now turn from the thing which is prayed for, to the person who prays ; and see, what are the conditions of acceptable prayer in reference to the supplicant.

II. That the state of the person who asks a benefit is a matter of consequence, may be learnt from the reflection of the action of prayer when it is addressed to creatures ; we are very much influenced by the relation of the petitioner to us, in granting a favour. CHRIST appeals to this fact of human experience, when He says, “if ye being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your *children*.”¹ To be

¹ S. Matt. vii. 11.

in a state of grace, to have the privilege of the adopted child, then, is a ground of acceptance with GOD; whilst on the other hand, if the heart is set on sin, and has no covenanted relation with GOD, however right the thing asked for may be, the prayer will be of no avail. Solomon says, "he that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination."¹ The Psalmist distinctly asserts that an evil disposition in the petitioner deprives prayer of its power—"if I incline unto wickedness with my heart, the LORD will not hear me."² So in the book of Job, we are reminded of the need of personal cleansing to render prayer acceptable to GOD—"if thou prepare thine heart and stretch out thine hands towards Him; if iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away . . . for then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot."³ Isaiah tells us the effect of not following this advice—"when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide Mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make your prayers I will not hear: your hands are full of blood."⁴

In the New Testament we find the same truth—at the healing of the blind man, it was tersely expressed by him, "we know that GOD heareth not sinners,"⁵—words which must be taken with certain limitations, as we shall presently see. We might proceed further in this direction, and affirm, that not only is a state of grace a ground of

¹ Prov. xxviii. 9.

² Ps. lxvi. 18.

³ Job xi. 13—15.

⁴ Isa. i. 15.

⁵ S. John ix. 31.

acceptance with GOD, but to ensure all the effects of prayer is a necessity. The prayer "which proceeds from the good desire of nature" may be heard by GOD; and actual grace which is at work everywhere, may give to the movement of the human soul a supernatural quality; but, unless the soul itself is in a state of grace, the act of prayer cannot lay up a reward above, or be the source of spiritual refec-tion—these are results of prayer which must have their root in charity. But we are at present concerned alone with petition, and have only to consider the effect of the condition of the supplicant on the efficacy of the prayer; and in this respect the utterance of the blind man, though "the saying of one not yet fully illumined," contains a truth which is clearly affirmed by S. John himself, that in order to gain our requests, our hearts must not condemn us at the very time we are making them known to GOD—"if our heart" says the Apostle, "condemn us, GOD is greater than our heart and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward GOD. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight."¹

Prayer unites the soul to GOD, but we cannot conceive of that union, unless there is some likeness between the terms of it, "for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with

¹ 1 S. John iii. 20—22.

darkness?"¹ The soul which is in a state of sin cannot perform any supernatural action, the corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit, the poisoned spring cannot give forth pure waters. Reason itself would tell us that one who was constantly offending GOD, would not be likely to be heard by Him when he prayed—"With what face," says S. Augustine, "can you ask GOD to do what He promised, if you do not what He commands."

This truth then being admitted, that a state of grace is a ground of acceptance with GOD, from it flows another, which is this :—the more perfect the state of grace is, the more potent the prayer; in other words, the nearer the soul is to GOD, the greater is the efficacy of its petitions. Holiness gives power to prayer, not only because those who are in a high state of grace pray better and with greater intensity than those who are careless or have reserves in the oblation of themselves to GOD; but also on account of inwrought sanctity, the prayers of the holy are more acceptable and efficacious. From their nearness to GOD, from the closeness of their union with CHRIST, from the greater measure of the Spirit which indwells them, they can lay hold of this spiritual force with a firmness, and direct it with an energy, which souls in lower states cannot attain to. As an illustration, we may refer to the difference of bodily strength in states of health and sickness; we have in robust health, powers of exercise and endurance, which in times

¹ 2 Cor. vi. 14.

of illness, or in weakness of constitution, we do not possess ; and those powers, too, we can increase and toughen by discipline and habitual use. Similarly, the soul which is in vigorous spiritual health, with its faculties developed and exercised,—and on account of this faithfulness, too, specially loved by GOD—has manifestly a power of prayer beyond those who are of feebler capacity and attainment.

In Holy Scripture, we find the prayers of persons who are near to GOD by personal sanctity or high office, represented as having a special potency. In Abraham's intercession for Sodom, and in Moses' intercession for Israel, we have instances of this. In the latter case, GOD represents the prayer of His servant as a restraint upon His anger—"Let Me alone, that I may destroy them, and blot out their name from under heaven."¹ So again, the power of holiness in the Presence of GOD, is alluded to by GOD Himself—"Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My heart could not be toward this people."² And in the prophecies of Ezekiel, we have a similar acknowledgment—"though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness."³ GOD implies, that if anything could influence Him, it would be the prayers and the presence of His Saints, which in these cases were insufficient to turn away His wrath from others. And the power of their sanctity was not confined to their life-time, but their past faithfulness

¹ Deut. ix. 14.

² Jer. xv. 1.

³ Ezek. xiv. 14, 20.

and the Divine Goodness of which they were the subjects, were brought before GOD as of value in the present—"O LORD GOD, turn not away the face of Thine anointed : remember the mercies of David Thy servant."¹ At all times it has been felt, that those who are near to GOD by holiness or office, have some special grounds of acceptance with Him : this feeling prompted the Israelites to ask Samuel "to cry unto the LORD"² for them, and Saul likewise ; and Simon in like manner besought S. Peter—"pray ye to the LORD for me."³ Thus, Divine revelation and human instinct alike bear witness to the truth, that GOD'S favour is towards His Saints.

And if on earth, holiness is a power with GOD, we may conclude that the prayers of the Saints who are before the Throne have still greater efficacy. The Saints need them no longer for themselves, so that there can be no division of interests or conflict of duties as in the case of those who are still in a state of probation and uncertainty ; they can pray too with the fulness of illumination, for "in Thy light we shall see light," whilst here we are often in error ; they can pray, too, with a fulness of charity such as is found only in Heaven ; they can pray with an eagerness of zeal which the attainment of the vision excites, as they *see* what to us is an object of faith—"ye shall tell my father," says Joseph, "of all my glory . . . and of all that ye have *seen* ; and ye shall haste and bring down my father

¹ 2 Chron. vi. 42.

² 1 Sam. vii. 8.

³ Acts viii. 24.

hither ;”¹ they can pray with a higher union in a state of glory, when the last remnant of corruption has been removed, “for they are without fault before the Throne of GOD.”² As the Psalmist looks up to the myriad hosts of pure and blessed spirits, when he would fain exalt his GOD more worthily, and bids them supplement his feeble efforts with their more vigorous faculties—“praise the LORD, ye angels of His, ye that excel in strength ;”³ so we, if we would see prayer in its highest exercise, in the climax of its potency, must look for it in the Courts above—to those who by nearness to GOD can touch more closely, and, as it were, move the Divine Heart by their petitions.

In estimating the effect of the condition of the supplicant upon the efficacy of the petition which he offers to GOD, we have as yet been looking up ; we have seen that a state of grace is a ground of acceptance, and the higher that state is, the higher in proportion is the potency of the prayer ; but now we must also look down for a moment, to see how those in a state of sin are also heard, when they pray.

There are limits to be carefully assigned to that saying to which we have already adverted, “GOD heareth not sinners.”⁴ The first is that by “sinners” we must understand, those who *at the time of praying* are bent on evil, and are hardening their hearts against the impressions of Divine grace. For in the deepest gloom of a soul which has given itself up to a life of sin, and has enveloped itself with

¹ Gen. xlv. 13. ² Rev. xiv. 5. ³ Ps. ciii. 20. ⁴ S. John ix. 31.

a darkness which may be felt, there are momentary coruscations of Divine light—as a gleam of sunshine is sometimes seen to find its way through the dense and murky clouds which have long hung over some city, or light up for a moment some remote corner which we had thought inaccessible to its rays; and if that soul respond for the time to that illumination of grace, and send up some pious thought or desire to the distant Heaven, though without any intention of giving up sin, yet that prayer may be heard, and detached from the taint of its earthly origin, may find acceptance, and gain an answer, through His Infinite Mercy who “maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good.”¹ Again, “sinners” are heard, when they pray to GOD officially, when they are the appointed ministers of His Church, and offer up to GOD the prayers which they recite in the name of the congregation. As it is said of “evil ministers,” “in the ministration of the word and Sacraments,” “the effect of CHRIST’S ordinance is not taken away by their wickedness;”² so the efficacy of their prayers, as far as others are concerned, is not destroyed by the fact that they are unworthy of their sacred office, and approach GOD in a state of sin. By “sinners” too, must be intended those who are in a conscious state of enmity against GOD, and not those who from some latent fault or defect of repentance of which they are not aware, are not in His friendship. But by far the most important limitation to the assertion, “GOD heareth

¹ S. Matt. vi. 45.

² Article xxvi.

not sinners," remains to be noticed,—it is that GOD heareth sinners *when they turn to Him*, though from the lowest depths of sin ; if there is a moment, we may be sure, when the Divine attention is, so to speak, arrested, when angels gaze down in breathless interest, it is when the cry goes up from some sin-stricken soul—"GOD be merciful to me a sinner."¹ Amid the din of angry voices, amid reproaches and revilings on Calvary, the ear of JESUS caught the accents of the prayer of the dying criminal—"LORD, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom."² In one respect, such prayers are heard in preference to the petitions of the highest Saint, for they mark the birth-pang of a soul ; the cry for mercy may be, but the day of small things as far as the spiritual life is concerned, as birth is in the natural life, but whatever may be the after-developments, it differs in kind from them, it belongs to the sphere of the creative ; and thus in the first burst of a genuine contrition, there is, we are told, a movement of joy amongst the choirs above, nay, in the heart also of the Good Shepherd Himself, and by his acceptance of that cry and quick response to it, He relegates the hard-sounding utterance we are considering to its proper sphere of wilfulness and obduracy, and fulfils His own promise—"him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out."³

We have now considered the state of the person who

¹ S. Luke xviii. 13.

² S. Luke xxiii. 42.

³ S. John vi. 37.

prays, in its bearing on the prayer which he offers ; and have traced how grace on the one hand, and sin on the other, in the supplicant, affects the efficacy of his petitions. It remains for us to see what is requisite in the act itself of praying, for its due performance ; so that in this respect we may not “ask and receive not,” because we “ask amiss.”

III. There are certain conditions which ought to accompany the act of praying, in order to ensure success. Prayer is a momentous action, and must therefore be performed in a becoming manner ; and a defect in this respect, though the thing prayed for be right, and the soul that prayed in a state of grace—may hinder the accomplishment of its petitions. As in the reception of the Holy Eucharist, it does not suffice, that the soul be in a state of grace, but it is also of importance that certain dispositions should be actively excited as a preparation for the sacred Gift, without which its full benefit cannot be realised ; so, in the act of praying, whatever may be the habitual state of the petitioner, it is necessary that at the time it should be accompanied with the exercise of those virtues which render it acceptable to GOD. The first of these is faith.

The dispositions which are required in prayer are illustrated by the virtues which CHRIST demanded, or formed, in those who approached Him in order to gain from Him some benefit, during His Public Ministry. A belief that He could do what He was asked, was an essential for the performance of a miracle—“Believe ye that I am able to do

this?"¹ is the question which goes before the act of power. When the father of the lunatic child put the condition in the wrong place—"if *Thou* canst do any thing, have compassion on us and help us," JESUS corrected his error and said—"if *thou* canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth."² The absence of faith hindered the outgoings of Divine power—"He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief."³ Faith, where it was possible, was an indispensable condition, in those who asked for a miracle. In like manner in order to secure the results of prayer, the same virtue is called into demand—"all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, *believing*, ye shall receive."⁴ "What things soever ye desire when ye pray, *believe* that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."⁵ So S. James makes faith *the* condition—"let him ask in faith, nothing wavering, for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea . . . let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the LORD."⁶ "If faith fails," says S. Augustine, "prayer perishes."

It must be observed, that the faith which should accompany an act of prayer, is of a special kind ; it does not consist in the acknowledgment of the Unseen, or in the acceptance of Revealed Truth generally, but has direct reference to the Promises of GOD which concern prayer. To "waver" is to entertain some doubt as to the efficacy of prayer ; to pray with faith, is to believe in its power. Yet it must not

¹ S. Matt. ix. 28.² S. Mark ix. 23.³ S. Matt. xiii. 58.⁴ S. Matt. xxi. 22.⁵ S. Mark xi. 23.⁶ S. James i. 6, 7.

be supposed, that in order to pray acceptably, we must always feel quite certain of obtaining our requests; we must feel quite certain that as far as GOD is concerned, He has the power to hear and answer prayer, and that He uses it as an instrument of His Providence, but in temporal things at least, the bestowal of what we ask may not be expedient for us, and therefore absolute certainty of gaining it cannot be entertained. We may pray with a full faith in the power of prayer, and yet not know whether our petition will be granted; we can find instances of such tentative prayers in Holy Scripture. When David fasted and prayed for his child—"who can tell," says he, "whether GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?"¹ So again, when the Ninevites cried "mightily to GOD," they said, "who can tell if GOD will turn and repent and turn away from His fierce anger?"² And GOD heard that prayer. The faith which realises the Divine Power and Goodness is also ready to leave itself in the hands of Divine Wisdom; it retains its hold on the Promise of GOD, though the answer to prayer may take a different shape from that which was desired; it beholds the Divine Perfections not only in themselves, but in relation to this Promise, and sees the Power, Wisdom, and Goodness of GOD set in motion, so to speak, by prayer, and occupied in answering it. It is this faith in the Divine Promise made to prayer, which is the prime disposition for praying aright, but a faith which, be it

¹ 2 Sam. xii. 22.

² Jonah iii. 9.

remembered, takes in also the conditional nature of that promise, for it is only "if we ask anything *according to His will*, He heareth us."¹

Another disposition for praying aright, and one which touches so closely on the first as to render its separate treatment a difficulty, is to be found in the exercise of hope. Faith and hope are very different virtues in themselves; but when faith is occupied in laying hold of God's Fidelity to His Promises—and this is its employment in the act of praying—it touches very closely on the province of hope. However, hope contributes something over and above that, which faith gives to the efficacy of our petitions; for CHRIST not only demanded faith, but evidently tried to inspire those who came to Him for the purpose of gaining some miraculous blessing, with hope and confidence. When the palsied man was brought into His presence, He exhorted him to "be of good cheer,"² to "have confidence." CHRIST willed that the sufferer should hope for himself, that the boon which others sought for him would be granted. Again, when the ruler besought CHRIST to come down and lay His hand upon his daughter, CHRIST by His Providence had arranged that the woman with an issue of blood should touch His garment and be healed on the road to the ruler's house, thereby arousing in the latter, confidence that the same mighty power would be exerted in his behalf.

It was this confidence which was tested and displayed

¹ 1 S. John v. 14.

² S. Matt. ix. 2.

by the hindrances which sometimes had to be surmounted, before CHRIST could be reached or His help obtained ; it was manifested by the blind man who, when the disciples rebuked him that he should hold his peace, cried so much the more ; it was manifested by the friends of the palsied man, who overcame the material obstacle which was in their path, and “let” the sufferer “down through the tiling” which was “upon the housetop ;”¹ it was manifested by the Canaanite mother, whose confidence enabled her to triumph over what seemed to be rebuffs from JESUS Himself.

And in these approaches to CHRIST on earth, we have an image of the affections which should be stirred when we approach GOD in prayer now ; we must “therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need ;”² we must, like the father of the faithful, “against hope” believe “in hope ;”³ and this trust is a special homage to the Divine Goodness, which has itself a promise appertaining to it—“they that trust in Thee, shall never be confounded.”

The fact that hope is required besides faith, may be concluded from the nature of prayer itself, for “prayer is the voice of hope.” It would be unreasonable to imagine that a prayer could be offered to GOD for something, when the soul utterly despaired of receiving any answer to it ; yet we can conceive of a soul having a full belief in the Divine Promise made to prayer, though destitute in a particular

¹ S. Luke v. 19.

² Heb. iv. 16.

³ Rom. v. 18.

instance of any hope of laying hold of and of appropriating that Promise. There is a difference then, between faith and hope—though they blend in one object—in that they can be distinguished, when viewed in reference to the nature of man : for by the one, we have a clear mental realization of the Promise ; by the other, we apply that truth to our needs, make it our own, and stimulate the will to respond to it. And though strength of hope ought naturally to follow upon firmness of faith, yet we know how conviction and action, mind and will, are liable to be divorced. Prayer then must be sustained by hope ; we must not unduly dwell either upon the magnitude of the thing asked, or the unlikelihood of its bestowal, or our unworthiness to receive it, but rather turn to the Merits of our Mediator, “in whom,” S. Paul says, “we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him ;”¹ and to the Fatherhood of GOD, as our LORD Himself, in the prayer which He has given us, has directed, that this second disposition for praying acceptably may be elicited and sustained.

But this confidence must be flanked by another virtue, to hinder it from excess. Though it be true, that “the prayer of the timid does not reach the heavens,” it is also to be remembered that the prayer of the presumptuous only reaches Heaven to be beaten back to earth. Confidence must be held in check by lowliness. Thus—to go back again to the Public Ministry of CHRIST—those who came to

¹ Eph. iii. 12.

CHRIST for benefits, humbled themselves in His sight when they sought them; the leper came "and worshipped Him;"¹ the woman of Canaan came "and worshipped Him;"² Jairus "fell at His feet;"³ the Samaritan "fell down on his face at His feet."⁴ The image of acceptable prayer, which CHRIST Himself depicted in the parable, was of one who "standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, GOD be merciful to me a sinner."⁵ CHRIST sought to create humility where it was wanting, or to perfect and display it in those who were strong in it; He reminds the woman of Samaria of her sin, to bring her to herself and humble her; He rejected the Syrophenician woman with those crushing words, "it is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs,"⁶ knowing the wealth of virtue which would be laid open by her ready acceptance of the humiliating title. And nature itself teaches us, that the proper posture of one who craves mercy or forgiveness is that of humility, and how inconsistent it would be to exhibit pride when asking for a gift. In presenting our requests even before earthly monarchs, we should come into their presence with every mark of homage and subjection; and if such feeling and behaviour be right when we supplicate the kings of earth, what self-humiliation should accompany our approach

¹ S. Matt. viii. 2.

³ S. Mark v. 22.

⁵ S. Luke xviii. 13.

² S. Matt. xv. 25.

⁴ S. Luke xvii. 16.

⁶ S. Matt. xv. 26.

to Him "who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and LORD of lords!"¹

And lowliness should be a virtue, which should not only be present as a habit in the soul, but be in action, whilst we offer our petitions to the Most High. It should be called out by the consideration, on the one side, of the Majesty of Him whom we address; and on the other, by the thought of our own nothingness in His sight, of our natural corruption, of our personal sins and shortcomings, and of our utter dependence upon His support both in the natural and supernatural life. Its exercise is an important contribution to the power of prayer, and invests it with a sort of attractiveness in the sight of GOD. We are repeatedly told, how this grace draws Him to listen to and to answer prayer—"He forgetteth not the cry of the humble"²—"LORD, Thou hast heard the desire of the humble; Thou wilt prepare their heart, Thou wilt cause Thine ear to hear"³—"While the King sitteth at His table," the "spikenard"⁴ of lowliness rises up to Him with delightful fragrance. Both S. James and S. Peter remind us that GOD "giveth grace unto the humble."⁵ And GOD Himself by the prophet has described the kind of person He will regard—"to that man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word."⁶

¹ 1 Tim. vi. 15.

² Ps. ix. 12.

³ Ps. x. 17.

⁴ Song of Solomon i. 12; S. Luke vii. 37.

⁵ S. James iv. 6; 1 S. Pet. v. 5.

⁶ Isa. lxvi. 2.

There is but one disposition more which is necessary, if we would secure the whole force of prayer—for attention in prayer will be more fitly considered when we come to treat of “vocal prayer”—and that is, perseverance. The dispositions which have been hitherto taken into account, faith, hope, lowliness, belong to the act itself of prayer; perseverance concerns the continuation or repetition of that act. For the importance of this virtue in praying, we shall again refer to CHRIST’S words and acts. The precept of prayer is framed in language which denotes both the reiteration of the same desire, and that with increasing earnestness—“*Ask*, and it shall be given you; *seek*, and ye shall find; *knock*, and it shall be opened unto you.” CHRIST in the parables of “the friend at midnight,” and of “the unjust judge,” distinctly attributes success in prayer to the “importunity”¹ of the supplicant. Again, by His acts, He teaches us to continue “instant in prayer,”² for He Himself continued whole nights in prayer to GOD;³ and in His Agony, He again and again returned to the struggle, praying “more earnestly,” and “the third time, saying the same words.”⁴ Likewise, in dealing with those who came to Him for blessings, He sometimes delayed to be gracious, in order that the petitioner might exercise perseverance in seeking Him. This was signally the case with the woman of Canaan, in whose supplication some⁵ have found an

¹ S. Luke xi. 8; xviii. 5.

² Rom. xii. 12.

³ S. Luke vi. 12.

⁴ S. Matt. xxvi. 44.

⁵ Bourdaloue and Massillon.

example of all the dispositions which are required for praying successfully ; time after time was her petition rejected, and herself almost scorned, yet in the end she won, and —by the delay the very power of prayer was the more manifest.

GOD promises to answer prayer, but He does not bind Himself to answer it at the time we think best. There are reasons for delay, some doubtless inscrutable, but others which are in some degree within the reach of our comprehension ; delay may be occasioned by the fact that our dispositions need to be ripened before, according to the Divine Providence, an answer to prayer can be granted ; or, again, another time may be better for us to receive the benefit for which we have besought GOD ; or, again, some past sin may for a while suspend the Divine favours, or make them more difficult of attainment, as a needful discipline ; or, the delay may be for the purpose of heightening our sense of the benefit, when granted. If the only object of prayer were the bestowal of the things sought, then we might have expected that the process of seeking them would not be unnecessarily protracted ; but when we bear in mind that, beside the answer, GOD has in view, perhaps as the deeper reason of prayer, the transforming effect upon the creature of contact with Himself, we may not be surprised when, by the postponement of answers to prayer, He makes that intercourse with Himself more continuous and so more productive.

Moreover, the struggle itself in perseveringly pressing upon GOD our petitions, is lucrative in several ways; it lays up store above, where patient faithfulness is not unrewarded; it has a sanctifying effect, for the inner life grows through the exercise of those virtues which prayer calls into operation. When Jacob wrestled with the angel and prevailed—when he seemed to hold the messenger of Heaven unwillingly in his grasp, until he wrung from him a blessing—Jacob's name was changed to Israel, "for as a prince" had he "power with GOD and with men, and prevailed;"¹ the change of name betokened an advance of spiritual life, in consequence of the struggle. And a third effect of persevering and finally successful petition, is to be found in the witness it bears to the power of prayer—to ourselves, and if known, to others also—for, as in seeking any thing from one another, it is not in that which is given at once, that we find an evidence of the power of our solicitation, but in that which has been again and again refused, and at last is, as it were, almost extorted from another; so when GOD grants our requests, after He has long refused to do so, we *seem* to conquer Him by our entreaties, and thereby the potency of prayer is conspicuously manifested. GOD "wills to be forced," to quote again S. Gregory's words, "wills by a certain importunity to be conquered, for we are told, 'the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.'"

¹ Gen. xxxii. 28.

Many an answer to prayer, is lost through the lack of this disposition of perseverance ; and there may be not only loss but sometimes even sin, in soon giving up prayer when the petition is not granted ; when, for instance, we abandon it in a spirit of impatience, distrust, or rebellion. We must, then, if we would avoid this danger, pray “always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit,” and, as S. Paul adds, watch “thereunto with all perseverance,”¹ or, as he expresses it in another Epistle, “continue in prayer ;”² and we should also bear in mind, that perseverance in prayer ensures those other effects which have been referred to, and is therefore on many grounds important in the spiritual life.

The conditions of prayer have now been considered, as they relate to the thing prayed for, the person praying, and the act of prayer itself. We have seen how it is possible in each respect to “ask and receive not because” we “ask amiss”—how the postponement of the eternal to the temporal, or the evilness or falseness of the thing sought, may hinder the action of prayer ; how evil allowed in the heart of the petitioner may incapacitate him for laying hold of this spiritual force, and so rob prayer of its power ; and thirdly, how a fault may attach to the act of praying, and so its results be impaired or forfeited by the feebleness of our endeavours.

With regard to the thing asked, we learn the great importance of giving priority to spiritual interests in our

¹ Eph. vi. 18.

² Col. iv. 2.

prayers, and the necessity of praying with conformity of will, especially when temporal goods are sought ; but in all, we must seek the guidance of the HOLY SPIRIT, for He “helpeth our infirmities,” and without His assistance, “we know not *what* we should pray for as we ought.” Further, as the power of prayer depends also on the state of the petitioner—unrepented sin and the allowance of bad passions, on the one hand, hindering or quenching it ; and, on the other, the presence of holiness heightening it—our failure in prayer may flow from the general failure of our spiritual life, and therefore be a call to us seriously to examine ourselves in order to correct, with the help of GOD’S grace, what is at fault, and to supply what is lacking ; whilst the knowledge that the success of prayer depends on growth in holiness, may provide an additional motive for its cultivation. And lastly, the dispositions which are required in praying, teach us the momentousness of the act itself, and the need of keeping those virtues bright, burnished, and ready for use, which enrich our supplications.

It may appear from this survey of the ‘conditions of prayer,’ that they are so various and so many as to make it difficult not to “pray amiss.” But it must be observed, that we have traced this power of prayer from the lowest to the highest degree of its operation, from the cry of the sinner to the intercession of the glorified saint, and have not only dwelt on what was requisite in order to avoid praying amiss or to no purpose, but also have considered the states

and affections which add potency to prayer, and go to make up its ideal exercise. We have dwelt with prayer as with any natural force—seen how it acts both in the most unfavourable and in the most favourable circumstances. And, moreover, the anatomy of a spiritual act in all its bearings, will of necessity cause it to wear a complex appearance; though the act itself may in its living exercise be most simple, and attended with no embarrassment on account of the many sources of its strength. The matter may be summed up in few words—if we turn from sin and seek GOD, if we turn from earth and seek Heaven, if in prayer we exert all our spiritual energies, we shall be heard; and we shall have no cause to join in the lament of the soul in captivity—“When I cry and shout, He shutteth out my prayer,”¹—but shall be able from our own experience to bear witness to the power of prayer—and each one will then make those words of humble rejoicing his own—“GOD *hath* heard me; He hath attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be GOD, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me.”²

¹ Lam. iii. 8.

² Ps. lxvi. 19, 20.

Lecture V.

MENTAL PRAYER.

“Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.”—
Ps. xix. 14.

WE have been solely occupied in the third and fourth Lectures with that species of prayer which is termed petition ; noticing the authority for it, the objections against it, and the conditions which are requisite for its efficacy. We described it as one of the four kinds of prayer, when prayer is distinguished by the purposes for which the soul approaches GOD ; viz., to praise Him, to thank Him, to propitiate Him, or to invoke His help. But although ‘petition’ is thus represented as only a fourth part of prayer, it has an importance of its own beyond the rest, and therefore it only is added to the formal definition of prayer.¹ Praise, thanksgiving, deprecation of Divine wrath, are devotional acts which are concluded between the soul and GOD ; petition is something more than the elevation of an affection of the soul to GOD, it touches the secret

¹ P. 19.

springs of causation and acts upon the spiritual and material world—GOD thereby appropriating human desires, and taking them into account in the administration of His Providence—and therefore we have devoted so large a space to the consideration of this kind of prayer. Moreover, in vindicating petition, we are indirectly doing a service to the other kinds of prayer; for, to harmonize the Divine Mind and Will with it, is to present the Perfections of GOD to the soul as the worthiest object of praise; to find scope for it amid the unvarying laws of nature, is to maintain the doctrine of Divine Freedom, without which the very notion of gratitude is impossible, and propitiation, fruitless.

We now pass to another division of prayer: that which we have referred to, depends upon the motive of the soul in drawing near to GOD; this, upon the manner of the act of prayer itself. The Psalmist, having prayed that he might be cleansed from sin, and “innocent from the great transgression,” proceeds further to desire that he may become pleasing to GOD—“Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in Thy sight.” In these words he provides us with the main division of prayer, based on the organ or faculty which is employed in it: by “the words of my mouth,” vocal prayer is suggested; by “the meditation of my heart,” mental prayer is described. Mental Prayer is transacted entirely within the soul; vocal Prayer is that which employs the ministry of the tongue, or in some other way finds

expression. In considering these kinds of prayer, I shall reverse the order of the Psalmist, and take internal prayer first, both on account of its importance as the soul of all prayer, and also as it is the first in the order of production, for "out of the abundance of the heart" the "mouth speaketh;"¹ on the other hand, the order of the Psalmist is that of acquirement and attainment, we learn in childhood first to *say* prayers, afterwards to *think* them, and we govern our words as a step towards the healing of "the inward parts." All prayer is either mental or vocal: the former includes meditation and contemplation; the latter embraces vocal, public, and intercessory prayer; it remains for us to consider each of these kinds of prayer as they fall under this principal division.

First, we will deal with the practice of Meditation, the authority for it, the dignity and importance of it, and the acts or parts of which it is composed; secondly, we will briefly regard contemplative prayer; and lastly, we will examine a difficulty which is often experienced in the performance of these devotions.

I. If we examine the Holy Scriptures, and the writings of the Saints, we shall find authority for the practice of Meditation. We will look at the successive Revelations of God, as we did when we were dealing with the prayer of Petition, for instances and enforcement of mental prayer. It must not, however, be expected that references to Medi-

¹ S. Luke vi. 75.

tation will be as frequent and direct as they were in the case of Petition ; for the latter is a matter of obligation, the former of devotion—the latter that which touches upon the outer world, the former that which is transacted in the world within.

And first we will turn to the Old Testament. In the Patriarchal period, such expressions as “Enoch walked with GOD,”¹ “Noah walked with GOD,”² or GOD’s command to Abram, “walk before Me, and be thou perfect,”³ may be taken as involving a habit of mental prayer, but it is in the history of Isaac we first find meditation spoken of. “Isaac,” we are told, “went out to meditate in the field at eventide.”⁴ He “went out” so as to be alone, and “in the field” amid the objects of nature, and “at eventide” when the heat and toil of the day were past, and the time itself was calculated to foster a pensive mood of soul. And here it may be observed, that the language of the Jews is rich in words which depict this inner process of the mind—meditation. The word employed in the verse which has been quoted, signifies “to produce or bring forth,”⁵ and in its literal sense refers to the budding of plants, whilst the word “the *meditation*⁶ of my heart” rather portrays the act of communing with oneself. Isaac, then, went forth to meditate—to evolve thoughts

¹ Gen. v. 24.

³ Gen. xvii. 1.

⁵ Gesen. Lex., 788.

² Gen. vi. 9.

⁴ Gen. xxiv. 63.

⁶ Gesen. Lex., 215.

and affections from his inner being, as the shoot or sprout is developed out of the parent stem. No term could more aptly picture the process of meditation, by which the mind under the action of Divine grace, becomes a germinating principle; and thoughts, affections, and resolves, are its buds, flowers, and fruit.

When we pass from the simplicity of Patriarchal devotion to the complex system of the Jews, we find meditation enjoined, and the subject of it appointed. Moses thus bade the people to consider the law, "set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you;"¹ Joshua, after the death of the law-giver, gives the same exhortation, "thou shalt meditate" in the book of the law "day and night;"² and we find the Psalmist's ideal of the righteous man, includes obedience to this precept as a primary feature—"His delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law doth he meditate day and night."³ Meditation is a term frequently in the mouth of the Psalmist—"Consider my meditation"⁴—"let the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight"—"I will *meditate* also of all Thy work and I will *meditate* of Thy doings,"⁵—a verse which contains two different words for meditating.

In the New Testament, meditation either as an act or a disposition of mind occupies a prominent place. The

¹ Deut. xxxii. 46.

³ Ps. i. 2.

⁵ Ps. lxxvii. 12.

² Josh. i. 8.

⁴ Ps. v. 1.

HOLY SPIRIT, through the Evangelist S. Luke, reveals to us how the Blessed Virgin stored up within her mind as a precious treasure the events of the Infancy of CHRIST. Very little is told us of Mary, but this is told us twice¹—“But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.” And again, after new Mysteries had been added, “but His mother kept all these sayings in her heart.” It was the Blessed Virgin and S. John—those who were alike marked by this meditative disposition, who were found at the foot of the Cross, gazing in silence on the Bleeding Form, when others who had pondered less upon Divine Truth, could not persevere unto the end—“JESUS, therefore, saw His mother and the disciple standing by, whom He loved.”² The habit of meditation is a ground of perseverance, because of the power which it gives to pierce through the appearance and to lay hold of the Reality; for endurance results from “seeing Him Who is Invisible.”³ CHRIST Himself affords an example of this kind of prayer; in those long prayers when He spent all the night on the mountain-top, or when He withdrew into the desert, or into the garden where He “ofttimes resorted,”⁴ we may conclude that He was engaged not only in repeated petition and intercession, but that during those periods He was holding communion with the FATHER and exercising the powers of His Human Soul in that intercourse. The

¹ S. Luke ii. 19, 51.

² S. John xix. 28.

³ Heb. xi. 27.

⁴ S. John xviii. 2.

words, "He went up into a mountain apart to pray,"¹ have been invariably understood to refer to mental prayer; and it may be remarked, that the term employed for prayer both here and in the Gospel of S. Luke, where that Evangelist says, CHRIST "went out into a mountain to pray and continued all night in *prayer* to GOD,"² is not that used for petition, but that which is employed to denote prayer in general. That our LORD commended the habit of meditation, and preferred the mind which was of a contemplative cast to that which was restless and spent itself in over-activity, may be gathered from the approval which He gave to Mary and the rebuke with which He visited the anxiety of Martha; the one who "sat at JESUS' feet, and heard His word,"³ was said to have chosen the better part and that which should not hereafter be taken from her. And when in the Sermon on the Mount, a reward is promised to prayer, it was evidently something more than petition which was intended by that secret converse with the FATHER, to which CHRIST alluded.

The Apostles again, by word and example, would lead us to regard prayer in this extended sense. Of them, we are told, that, after the Ascension—when they were waiting for the Coming of the HOLY GHOST—they "continued" "in prayer and supplication;"⁴ "prayer" again here is a general term, and stands for all approach to GOD, whilst "supplica-

¹ S. Matt. xiv. 23.

² S. Luke vi. 12, "ἐν τῇ προσευχῇ."

³ S. Luke x. 39.

⁴ Acts i. 14.

tion" refers to petition.¹ And S. Luke in another place describes them as occupied during that period in "praising and blessing God."² We may gather from these passages, that the Apostles spent the interval between the departure of the Second Person of the Deity and the arrival of the Third, in a sort of retreat, giving themselves up to spiritual exercises as a preparation for the reception of the Guest, Whose Coming had been promised to them. S. Paul's sojourn in Arabia³ after his conversion was probably passed in a similar manner, "in religious meditation" before entering on his active ministry. When the same Apostle was giving advice to Timothy as to doctrine and practice, he bids him "meditate on these things"⁴—exercise thy mind upon them—"that thy profiting may appear to all." Perhaps also the remarkable expression of S. Jude, "praying in the HOLY GHOST,"⁵ may be interpreted of mental prayer.

In the writings of the Saints, again, we have constant reference to the practice of meditation. S. Ambrose bids us "exercise ourselves in meditation before conflict that we may be prepared for it," and in a striking passage, describes the nutritive effects of meditation; he says, "we

¹ The first term denotes "prayer" in general, *precatio*; the second, "a special character or form of it, 'petition,' *rogatio*." Bp. Ellicott on Eph. vi. 18, also 1 Tim. ii. 1. But "*καὶ τῆ δεήσει*" is here omitted in the most ancient MSS.

² S. Luke xxiv. 53.

³ Gal. i. 17, 18.

⁴ 1 Tim. iv. 15.

⁵ S. Jude 20.

ought for a long while to bruise and refine the utterances of the heavenly Scriptures, exerting our whole mind and heart upon them, that the sap of that spiritual food may diffuse itself into all the veins of our soul, &c.”¹ S. Augustine, in words which we shall have occasion to quote again, enumerates the steps which lead up to “prayer,”—“meditation begets knowledge, knowledge compunction, compunction devotion, and devotion perfects prayer.”² S. Basil enjoins mental prayer, as a means of exercising the faculties of the soul. S. Gregory mentions the morning as a fitting time for meditation; he says, “as the morning is the first part of the day, each of the faithful ought at that moment to lay aside all thoughts of this present life, in order to reflect upon the means of rekindling the fire of charity.” So again, “as GOD is not on the surface, they apply themselves to meditation, they examine at the root their own thoughts . . . they cease not by all means to search for GOD, and burn with the desire of knowing more and more of Him.” S. Bernard represents meditation and prayer as the two feet of the soul, by which it ascends; the one showing its needs, the other turning to GOD for their satisfaction. S. Theresa describes meditation as “a thing essential to Christian life.”³

It is not of course intended, that by these references to

¹ De Abel et Cain, lib. ii. c. vi.

² Lib. de Spir. et anima, c. 50.

³ Via Perf. c. 16.

interior prayer, both in the Holy Scriptures and the writings of the Saints, the particular mould into which meditation has been usually cast since the sixteenth century is authorised ; except in so far as that was only an anatomy of what must have always existed implicitly—the unfolding in an orderly manner of that which had hitherto been done without conscious method, for it is based upon the constitution of the human soul. S. Ignatius did for this practice, what the schoolmen did for patristic doctrine, he systematized it. We are not now referring to “the Spiritual Exercises” themselves—wonderful enough, as they are, to favour the tradition as to the way the Saint drew his inspiration—but to the method which is usually associated with his name ; and with regard to this, it must be borne in mind, that meditation, whatever may be its special form, in its essence remains the same, viz. the exercise of the powers of the soul upon Divine Truth in the Presence of GOD, and for this—the inferences which have been drawn from Scripture, and the quotations which have been made, supply a true basis of authority.

Our next step will be to point out the dignity and importance of this kind of prayer : its dignity will be found in its nature ; its importance will be seen from its results. Its dignity is at once proclaimed by the fact that meditation is converse with GOD, and converse too, of a close and intimate order. Meditation is not satisfied with appearing before GOD as a supplicant, offering for a minute or two a

request, and then withdrawing from His immediate Presence; neither is it content with speaking to Him only in the accents of fear and remorse, though such must ever form a part of it; but meditation involves a continuing for a while in communion with GOD, and allows the intercourse to be one of a tender and affectionate nature, growing into a holy familiarity and friendship. S. Chrysostom, speaking of it, breaks forth into wonder at the thought of the Divine Condescension—"who can but wonder and marvel," says he, "at such goodness and benevolence, as that which GOD declares towards us men, Who bestows upon us so great an honour as to deign to admit us to hold converse with Himself, and to lay before Him our vows." Others have described meditation, as the highest foretaste of Eternal Bliss; thus, S. Augustine in his Confessions records the joy which he experienced when his soul found its resting-place in GOD—"Sometimes Thou bringest me to certain feelings of tenderness, and to an extraordinary sweetness, which, should it still increase, I know not what would happen."¹ To enter from the outward into the inward, from the bodily to the spiritual, to reduce all sense-impressions so that the soul may be still and wait on GOD, to remain face to Face with GOD, to exercise the highest acts of virtue towards Him, to listen for and respond to His Voice,—is surely a preparation for Heaven, and when this practice of mental prayer has been in some degree attained, it is sometimes

¹ S. Aug. Conf. x. 40.

accompanied with an earnest of our inheritance, a foretaste of Beatitude.

The importance of the practice may be estimated by its results. Prayer, as we have seen, is capable of producing four results ; it may either have the effect of reparation for the past, or it may lay up a reward for the future, or it may obtain gifts from GOD, or be a source of spiritual influence. The value, therefore, of any kind of prayer will very much depend on the vigour with which these ends are attained, and on the width of its fruitfulness. Now in meditation, there is a fertility as to these four results, beyond all other kinds of prayer ; which will be manifest, if we examine them in order.

CHRIST has promised, that prayer shall be rewarded by the FATHER which seeth in secret ; because prayer, when rightly performed, is in itself a good work. And in all good works, that which GOD chiefly looks to and regards is the contribution of the heart, and not merely the outward action. But meditation is a species of prayer which is entirely inward ; its acts are those of the soul itself, which are done to the FATHER in secret, they are the purest expression of religion and charity, the utterance of the heart itself in the Divine Presence—"My heart hath talked of Thee, Seek ye My face ; Thy face, LORD, will I seek." If, then, GOD is said to number our flittings, and to put our tears into His bottle—to note all things in His book, surely He treasures up those vital actions of which medi-

tation consists—those thoughts, affections, and purposes of our inmost being, to be rewarded in the day when “He will make manifest the counsels of the hearts.”¹

In reference to Reparation, meditation, from another point of view, which will appeal to the experience of many, has a marked place. Works of reparation and penitence, it is always felt, should be accompanied with some toil and effort. Sins of omission are simply occasions in the past, when we have wrongly withdrawn ourselves from that universal law of toil which was one penalty of man’s transgression. To make reparation for these neglects—in the language of Scripture, to redeem the time—we strive with God’s grace to perform the selfsame actions with greater regularity and intensity; we show our sorrow for past laxity, by doing works which are difficult and involve some strain of our powers. And meditation—whatever may be the joy which is experienced by those who have formed the habit of it—is, in its earlier stages, and occasionally at all times, a work which requires considerable effort, and cannot be duly performed without much cost to the soul. There is in the cultivation of mental prayer, a demand made both on the body and the soul. For, to attain any excellence in it, the mortification of the flesh is a preliminary necessity; the control of bodily passions and appetites is required, in order that the spiritual side of our complex nature may preponderate, else the corruptible body will press down

¹ 1 Cor. iv. 5.

the soul, and take away its capacity or relish for spiritual things. And in the act itself of meditation, every one will know, that at times effort is necessary to sustain the thoughts, and to follow obediently the lights and inspirations which are vouchsafed by the Spirit; there is the effort of will which is required to *make* the mind think, there is the effort of will without which the affections may remain quiescent, and there is the effort of will in making the resolve. Thus, in whatever light we view the act of meditating, we see it is one which is not accomplished without toil, and therefore may be classed with those works which have a reparative value. Meditation is a species of prayer which from its difficulty richly produces this effect; and this is the case more directly when the omission in the past, has been in the matter of prayer and of the worship of Almighty GOD—the reparation is then not only general, not merely effort to be put into the scale against past inertness, but special, since it is the employment of effort in that very direction in which it had been wanting, and so a reparation in kind of that of which GOD had been defrauded.

Prayer of Petition, again, forms a part, as we shall presently see, of meditation, and is most potent when offered under the influence of it. Meditation affects petition, by maturing those dispositions which give power to our supplications. It will be remembered,¹ that certain virtuous affections in the act of praying, were regarded as a necessity

¹ Lecture IV., pp. 130—141.

for the acceptance of the prayer itself. Now at no time are those virtues in more active exercise than in that of meditation ; the length of this devotion has the effect of exciting our spiritual gifts and graces, so that clearness of vision, deep self-humiliation, fervour of confidence, constancy of purpose, are all ready at hand to accompany the petition, and to render it acceptable at the Throne of Grace. "Whilst I was musing," the Psalmist says, "the fire kindled,"¹ through intercourse with GOD, the soul gathers something of the Divine Heat ; when the Disciples walked with JESUS on the road to Emmaus, they remembered the unearthly glow which His words excited—"Did not," said they, "our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way;"² meditation, by stimulating that flame of affection, and by calling out the faith, the trust and the lowliness of the soul, adds strength and vehemency to the petition, and thus contributes to another effect of prayer.

The fourth result of prayer is perhaps more readily seen to be brought about by meditation, than the rest ; and indeed, if it be not exclusively attributable to it, it certainly is rarely to be discovered apart from the practice of it, I refer to the transforming influence of prayer. Meditation, it has been said, has a generative effect, and therefore it has been described as "the root of all virtue." All actions and desires arise from thoughts, and mental prayer is said

¹ Ps. xxxix. 3.

² S. Luke xxiv. 32.

to have this creative quality, because it is "the seminary of holy thoughts." Through it, holy thoughts are sown in the soul, new views of GOD, of His Being and Perfections, or new aspects of some truth or mystery of the Life of CHRIST, or a new insight into the soul itself; these beget new aspirations and desires, and lead to resolves, efforts, and finally to actions, all of which date from the reception of the holy thought during meditation. To meditate, therefore, is to nourish the root of the tree, it is to instil into it new sap and new vigour, which will terminate in outward growth of leaf, flower, and fruit. It is evident, then, that meditation, in which there is long and fervent contact with GOD, will take away more than any other kind of prayer, impressions of His Life, will gain from converse with Him Divine Knowledge and Divine Love, and so exert a transforming influence upon those who are diligent in the exercise of it. The dignity of meditation in itself, and its importance because of its rich productiveness in the fruits of prayer, we have now considered; we have found, that, whether it be regarded as a good work which stores up favour with GOD, or as an act of compensation for past neglect, or as a means of adding force to our petitions, or in point of its subjective effect on our life—it outstrips other kinds of prayer in the number and quality of its effects.

The authority for, and the dignity and advantages of the habit of meditation, have hitherto occupied us. We shall

now attempt an analysis of the act itself of meditation, in order to discover its different parts and their mutual bearing, and with the further object of gaining such an acquaintance with its frame-work as may assist us in the practice of it.

Meditation is an exercise of our inner powers, an action of the soul ; to trace its different parts, will therefore require us to notice the movements of the several faculties of the soul.

In entering into meditation, there are certain preliminary acts of devotion which are usually performed. The soul places itself in the Presence of God and adores Him—falling down before Him, as if visibly Present, and attended with the Celestial Court ; a prayer is then made, in which we acknowledge our nothingness in the Presence of His Majesty, express sorrow for our sins, offer our faculties to Him to be guided by Him, and invoke the assistance of the HOLY GHOST. Before meditating, it is customary to store up some subject in the memory, by reading it, perhaps the night before ; and to recall it in the morning. S. Bernard, or the author of the treatise “on the manner of praying” in his works,¹ makes a great point of the “reading,” and seems to regard it as essential ; he says, commenting on the words, “seek, and ye shall find”—“seek by reading, find by meditating, knock by praying, and it shall be opened unto you by contemplating. Reading places solid food into the

¹ S. Bernard, Tom. V. p. 649—660. Ed. Gaume.

mouth, meditation masticates and breaks it." It is customary at the time of meditating to depict the scene, place, or circumstances, of the event upon which we are to dwell, in order to arrest the imagination, and to hinder distractions; this is called "the first prelude," or "the composition of place." If the subject which we have chosen is not an event but a truth, and one incapable of material representation, some illustration or result of it, or even a sentence, may provide us with the first prelude—e.g., if a virtue, its expression in some part of the Life of CHRIST; if a Divine Perfection, its manifestation in Heaven; if a precept of the Gospel, the words which contain it. Some may find the simple remembrance of the subject they have read, a sufficient help. In the next place, a prayer is offered, that the special fruit of the meditation may be gained. This differs from the preparatory prayer which is made for the general purpose of meditating aright; in that this has in view some particular end, which is consistent with the subject which has been chosen for meditation; the former therefore will be always the same, the latter will vary.

The memory recalls the subject as clearly as possible, taking each point separately which has been designed for consideration. The act of the memory is not that simply of literal recollection, as of something which has been learnt, but of the subject with its attributes and bearings. Thus, such questions have to be answered by the memory as, "who said or did this?" "to or for whom?" "why?"

“when?” “how?” &c. The subject having been thus accurately proposed, the understanding begins to work upon it—begins to penetrate the truth. Meditation has been called “the studious investigation of a hidden truth;” of course, a Divine “truth” is meant, and the “investigation” not speculative but practical, and undertaken in a spirit of love and devotion—as the Psalmist prays, “let the meditation of my *heart* be acceptable in Thy sight.”

The soul acquires knowledge in two ways, from without and from within: from without, it is approached through the channels of the senses; from within, it possesses knowledge, by intuition, reflection, and Divine illumination. The external world is a reality through contact with it: through union between the object and the sense, the impression is received; light, reaches the eye; sound, the ear; touch, the hand; and hence the object is seen, or the idea taken in, or the form felt and known. By the repetition of these impressions, we amass knowledge, and the visible world becomes a reality to us. Without the repetition of the impressions, our acquaintance with different objects diminishes and is finally lost. We forget places which we have not seen for a long time, or retain an incorrect notion of them. In a similar manner, the reality of the Unseen World is gained, and the consciousness of it sustained. As with the external world there must be contact with it, through the senses; so with the Unseen there must be contact, through the faculties of the soul and

the powers of the inner life ; and this contact must be repeated and habitual, in order that the consciousness of the Unseen may be preserved. The soul in meditation is fixedly directed to some truth or mystery of the faith, which is seen with the inward light of the Spirit, and under His guidance makes good to itself some portion of the spiritual and invisible world. We may learn divine truths by means of the senses, but we *realise* them by reflection and by direct spiritual contact with them. Teaching from without must be supplemented by teaching from within ; the Dispensation of the Spirit must follow that of the Son of man—"when He the Spirit of Truth is come, He will guide you into all truth,"¹ is the promise of CHRIST Himself—a promise which was not only fulfilled in the case of the Apostles themselves, and in the Church "the Pillar and ground of the truth,"² but also in some degree belongs to each soul, for it is written, "they shall be *all* taught of GOD."³ In this realisation of the Invisible, we have one great result of meditation ; meditation counterbalances the power of the visible and external world—a power which exerts itself imperiously over the mind by the constant and direct assertion of itself through the organs of sense ; and it imparts a strength of endurance and courage, through "seeing Him Who is invisible."⁴ Through this exercise of the understanding, a vital hold is gained on the mysteries of Religion—"the eyes of"

¹ S. John xvi. 13.

² I Tim. iii. 15.

³ S. John vi. 45.

⁴ Heb. xi. 27.

the "understanding being enlightened" we "know what is the hope of" our "calling, and what the riches of the glory of" the "inheritance in the saints."¹ "Meditation," to recur to S. Augustine's words, "begets knowledge."

But this knowledge, as it has been already remarked, must not be only a firmer grasp of the truth in question itself, and of its relation to other truths, but—what is more to the point—must lie in its practical bearing on our spiritual life. Meditation has its ultimate end, not in knowledge, but in action. It is the business of the understanding to apply the truth upon which it gazes, by putting to itself such questions as these:—"What conclusion ought I to draw from this?" "how have I failed as to this in the past?" "how shall I do in the future?" "what means shall I use?" "what will stand in my way?"

The knowledge of Divine Truth is obtained by means of meditation, for through it the human mind becomes a sanctuary of holy thoughts, which are so transfused into it as to become a part of itself. S. Paul says, "We have the mind of CHRIST;" but this knowledge is sought in meditation not for its own sake as a possession of the intellect, but for the further purpose of exciting desire and action by its presence. The impression which was received in meditation survives the actual contemplation of the truth, as sensations remain after contact with the material objects has ceased; and each repeated meditation deepens the engraving on the soul,

¹ Eph. i. 18.

but this depends on the response which the soul gives to the revelation. Here we pass to the third part of a meditation, the exercise of the will and of the affections. A dry intellectual light may suffice the philosopher, but a meditation cannot be concluded in the mental sphere alone; the heart as well as the head must be laid under contribution, meditation is not only a *receptive* but also a *responsive* act. The mind dwells on the spiritual vision in order to stimulate the affections—"whilst I was musing, the fire kindled." One difference between the Life of GOD and that of the creature lies in this; the creature possesses powers which are dormant, until they are called into play, whilst GOD is Unchangeable, the purest Energy and Action; there are parts of our being which are silent, until they are, as it were, played upon in order to produce sound and harmony, and this arises partly from the necessity of our nature, partly from our corruption. We have to arouse these affections, and to cry with the Psalmist, "awake up, my glory"—to call upon "all that is within" us. Even the highest and purest creatures seem capable of fluctuation in their devotional acts, for they are represented as crying one to another, as it were to excite into a still keener intensity the rapture of their adoration; and with us, who are naturally slow, and sinfully insensible to spiritual things, this process of eliciting the affections has to be oftentimes strenuously performed. Thus, spiritual writers recommend us to bring to bear certain motives upon

the heart, which are likely to move it, and make it respond, such as these—"what advantage will this be to me!" "how sweet, if I can accomplish it!" "how easily may this be done!" "how dreadful the results, if I neglect it!" Such considerations,—through the HOLY SPIRIT who not only illuminates the understanding but also touches the heart by His inspirations, produce affections of sorrow for past failure, love of virtue, desire to grow in this or that form of loveliness; the virtues of faith, hope and love, are exercised, and to the call, "seek ye My Face," the soul makes the response, "Thy Face, LORD, will I seek."¹

It is at this point in the meditation, in which a more definite sense of our needs in regard to the matter under consideration is excited, and amid the warm movements of the affections, the soul begins to turn to petition, seeking Divine help to overcome the vice, or form the virtue, or sustain the habit, whatever it may be, or to go on to perfection. "Meditation," to quote again S. Augustine's words, "meditation begets knowledge," then knowledge touching the heart produces "compunction; compunction, devotion; and devotion perfects prayer." But the prayer of petition, when it is offered in meditation, assumes the character of pleading with GOD; it is not, as at other times, only asking Him for something, but in the holy familiarity which springs up between the soul and GOD during a fervent meditation, the bestowal of the bless-

¹ Ps. xxvii. 8.

ing is urged upon the Divine Heart on various grounds. In different directions the soul turns, to find reasons on which to plead with GOD, and to press upon Him its petitions. The Divine Perfections naturally present the first ground. In Holy Scripture, GOD'S Attributes are appealed to as reasons for His hearing prayer and granting our requests—"turn unto the LORD your GOD : for He is *gracious* and *merciful*."¹ "Have mercy upon me, O GOD, according to Thy *Lovingkindness*."² "To the LORD our GOD belong *Forgiveness*."³ So again the Psalmist bases his hope of an answer on the Divine Fidelity, "in Thy *Faithfulness* answer me, and in Thy *Righteousness*."⁴

Again, the soul will turn to the Mediator, to His Cross and Passion, to His Sacred Wounds, to His Infinite Merits, to His all-prevailing Intercession, and will cry in deep self-humiliation, "Look upon the Face of Thine Anointed,"⁵ on "JESUS CHRIST, the Righteous," for He is "the Propitiation for our sins."⁶ Or, reaching forth towards GOD from beneath, the soul may plead with GOD on the ground of the favour He has shown to His Saints, as Moses did at the foot of the Mount—"Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Thy servants, to whom Thou swarest by Thine own self."⁷ Likewise Solomon, at the Dedication of the Temple, pleaded GOD'S mercies and promises to David his father.⁸ And

¹ Joel ii. 13.

² Ps. li. 1.

³ Dan. ix. 9.

⁴ Ps. cxliii. 1.

⁵ Ps. cxxxiv. 9.

⁶ 1 S. John ii. 1.

⁷ Exod. xxxii. 13.

⁸ 2 Chron. vi.

GOD, in the days of Hezekiah told him, that He would defend Jerusalem” for “His servant David’s sake.”¹ Or once more (though this may seem a more dubious ground, yet for it too we have a “warranty of Scripture”) when the soul is depressed and tempted to despair, or at any rate to be distrustful, it may even turn, when such a course is possible, to the thought of its past faithfulness to grace, recalling times or even acts of diligent service, with deep lowliness and simplicity ; after this manner, Hezekiah, when he prayed that his life might be lengthened, appealed to his past integrity—“Remember, now, O LORD, how I have walked before Thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in Thy sight.”² And Nehemiah likewise—“Think upon me, my GOD, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.”³ And S. John assures us, that “if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards GOD”⁴ that He will hear our petitions. In these different directions, the soul may seek for grounds on which to plead with GOD, remembering, that it is not from any reluctance on His part to grant our requests, that He permits us to urge these various claims upon His Attention ; but that we may be drawn closer to Him by our supplications, may exercise virtues, and gain a deeper impress of the Divine Character and Personality by these appeals.

¹ 2 Kings xx. 6.

³ Nehemiah v. 19.

² Isa. xxxviii. 3.

⁴ 1 S. John iii. 21.

But the will is not only employed in exciting the affections, or in prompting these petitions for Divine Help ; its final action lies in the resolve, with which the meditation should conclude. All leads up to this, and upon faithfulness in forming and fulfilling the resolution lies the fruit of this devotion. The resolve should be practical—something to be done or avoided, and during perhaps the same day, in the morning of which the meditation has been made ; it should be definite—something, the fulfilment or neglect of which may be clearly noted ; it should be solid—something pertaining to the duties of life, to salvation and holiness ; and it should be made humbly, distrustful of self, and trustful in GOD, wholly relying on His grace to be enabled to carry it out. The effect of the meditation should not be general but particular, and should bear upon some fault of character, or temptation to which we are liable, and at that time likely to be exposed. Self-knowledge is required, for making a good practical application of the subjects on which we meditate ; and therefore the habit of self-examination aids mental prayer. By meditation we grow in the knowledge of GOD ; by self-examination, in the knowledge of the soul : and these two forms of knowledge, which S. Augustine prayed to obtain—“ LORD, make me to know Thee, and to know myself”—keep pace one with another, act and react one on the other. As we grow in the power of discerning the movements of the soul, we discover our sins, we are enabled to

distinguish between them, and we draw a sort of spiritual chart, to which we can refer in order to form a specific resolution which shall be in keeping with the subject of our meditation; besetting sins, deadly sins, venial sins, infirmities, propensities, occasions of sin, kinds of sin, are as so many rocks and quicksands, eddies and currents, shallows and buoys, to be avoided in our course, and when one or other of these is sighted, we have to tack accordingly.

It can never be too strongly impressed upon those who meditate, that they are not to indulge in mere reverie or fanciful roaming of the imagination; but they are to bear in mind, that every thought and affection should tend to some practical issue, which will fit them for the better fulfilment of the duties of their state. We ought then, at the end of every meditation to make a resolve to do better in something—making it as definite as possible, not expecting to do too much at a time, but to go on step by step, “here a little and there a little,”¹ in humble dependence on the grace of GOD.

As in entering upon meditation, there are preliminary acts of devotion, so at its end, it is usual to close with some prayers and colloquies. Some make a sort of recapitulation of the meditation, and gather up the fragments that remain that nothing be lost; then an act of thanksgiving for the lights and inspirations of the HOLY SPIRIT, which have been vouchsafed during prayer; an act of

¹ Isa. xxviii. 10.

contrition for infidelities to grace; and finally an act of oblation, in which all is offered to GOD through the Merits of JESUS CHRIST. It has been recommended, after the meditation is finished, to make some brief record of the thoughts which GOD has given during it, and of the resolves which have been formed; and to preserve some feature of it, as an ejaculation. The advice of S. Francis under this head is well known—"I bade you gather a little bouquet of devotions. When walking in a beautiful garden, most people are wont to gather a few flowers as they go, which they keep, and enjoy their scent during the day. So, when the mind explores some mystery in meditation, it is well to pick out one or more points that have specially arrested the attention, and are most likely to be helpful to you through the day."¹

We have now seen the different parts or acts of which a meditation is composed, and described what may perhaps be termed the machinery of the practice. We must add before leaving this portion of our subject, a word of caution, lest we should be open to the charge of dogmatising upon a matter in which every one has perfect liberty. It is not intended that the plan of meditation which has been analysed is the only one; or that, when it is adopted, the order in which the faculties of the soul have been represented as being called into exercise, must be rigidly followed; but it has been chosen, because it is the ordinary

¹ Devout Life, p. 77.

method, and the natural one. As in acquiring a language or an art, there are certain rules for learning it, which seem dry and technical, but when it is acquired, these rules are carried out with ease and even unconsciously ; so in meditation, when the habit is gained, the soul goes through the different steps, without any thought of those directions, by the careful observance of which the practice of mental prayer was formed. And as there are those who, forsaking the ordinary way of teaching, devise shorter and, as they conceive, easier roads to the attainment of a language or art ; so there may be some, who, not willing to follow the beaten path, choose some other method of gaining the habit of meditation : it will suffice, however, in both cases, if the end is gained, whatever be the means whereby it was reached. But it will be found, that, whatever differences may appear on the surface as to the plan and mode of meditating, in its root and essence the act will in the main accord with the account we have given of it, which is based on the organism of the human soul.

II. Mental Prayer includes another kind of prayer besides meditation, which is that of Contemplation. We shall treat this most briefly, because the gift of Contemplation is one which is very rarely possessed. It is said, too, on the natural side to require certain qualities of mind and character, and seldom to be vouchsafed except after a process of spiritual trial and purification ; so that, in passing from the consideration of meditation to that of contempla-

tion, we feel that we are going off the thoroughfare into the by-ways of Religion. Moreover, to deal with the subject at all adequately, would need a separate treatise, so full of resources is mystical theology. We cannot, however, altogether pass over this sublime kind of prayer, both because in "the Life of Prayer" it ought to find some place for the sake of completeness; and also from the fact, that, although as a permanent gift it is a rare endowment, yet it is sometimes vouchsafed as a transient favour in times of prayer and meditation. We will first notice the special features of Contemplation, as distinguished from Meditation; and then, its kinds and degrees.

Meditation, it has been seen, demands effort; it involves a mental process, the arrangements of considerations and deductions from them; in it, we start with certain reasons, and arrive at certain practical conclusions. Now in contemplation there is nothing of this kind; there is no labour in attaining Truth, but the soul is said to behold it *intuitively*, and to remain fixedly gazing upon God. Viewed in reference to the understanding, contemplation is the employment of the highest faculty in the highest sphere of truth, in a simple and direct manner, as the bodily eye sees external objects. Definitions of the act of Contemplation, agree in attributing to it this directness of mental action; it is "the simple gaze at Truth,"¹ it is "the intent and free gaze of the mind,"² it is "the true and sure gaze

¹ S. Thom., Sum. 22, q. 180, 1. ² Richard, S. Vict. Benj. Maj. c. 4.

of the mind.”¹ Another mark of Contemplation is to be found in the great exercise of the affection of *wonder* and admiration, which results from it; some regard this as its chief characteristic. S. Bernard speaks of it, as “admiration of Majesty,” and S. Augustine, as “sweet wonder at clear Truth.” The amazement of delight fills the soul as it beholds the things of GOD, their greatness, surpassing beauty, mysteriousness; so that, it is ready to join in the anthem of those who “stand on the sea of glass,” and say, “Great and marvellous are Thy works, LORD GOD Almighty . . . who shall not fear Thee, O LORD?”² In meditation, wonder is only one of many affections which are called forth, and that only during a part of it; but in Contemplation, it is the prime and continuous posture of the soul, as it was with the prophets in times of vision, “I saw, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake,”³ “I was astonished at the vision.”⁴

Again, Contemplation is said to have in it a certain *fore-taste of eternal bliss*; it produces not only wonder, but “delightful wonder.”⁵ Wonder is a complex sensation, into which several ingredients enter, from the preponderance of one or more of which it assumes a special tint or colour; fear, lowliness, joy, curiosity, all enter into it, any one of which may be regnant; in contemplative wonder,

¹ S. Bern. de Consid. c. ii.

³ Ezekiel.

⁵ “Jucunda admiratio.”

² Rev. xv. 3, 4.

⁴ Daniel.

joy is in power, and towers above the rest ; it is a wonder radiant with a foretaste "of eternal sweetness," that which S. Peter tasted on the Mount of Transfiguration, when he rapturously cried, "LORD, it is good for us to be here,"¹ and the Psalmist referred to, when he said, "Taste and see how gracious the LORD is."² Although Contemplation is a mental act, it is prompted by love, and "terminates in love;" and hence the joy and delight of the soul in the close embrace of GOD—"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered the heart of man the things which GOD hath prepared for them that love Him. But GOD hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit."³

Another feature of Contemplation is its *repose*; joy is sometimes boisterous and exciting, the joy of Contemplation is restful and calm, it closes the senses to the external world, it follows the bidding of the Psalmist, "Be still, and know that I am GOD."⁴ Contemplation is ever associated with the idea of rest. If we speak of a person as one who is of a contemplative disposition, we mean one in whom there is the absence of hurry, who gives himself to thought more than to outward action, who has a peaceful eye and gentle manner. In contemplation, not only is the action of the senses suspended, but the faculties of the soul itself rest, for in it "the mind is resting in GOD."⁵ "Turn again," says

¹ S. Matt. xvii. 4.

² Ps. xxxiv. 8.

³ I Cor. ii. 9, 10.

⁴ Ps. xlvi. 10.

⁵ S. Bernard, "Contemplatio, est mentis in Deum suspensæ."

the Psalmist, "unto thy rest, O my soul."¹ Mary "*sat* at JESUS' feet and heard His word."² In meditation, the soul is on a journey; when Contemplation is granted, the soul rests because it is at its end, in GOD—"and so He bringeth them to the haven where they would be."—This rest, however, must not be regarded as the absence of all activity, but as that most perfect action which brings with it satisfaction and peace. Absence of activity brings no rest, to those who are made for action; their rest, lies in the repose of each faculty when it has found its predestined sphere of exercise. Neither must this rest be exaggerated into one of such indifference to all things, as to quench the desire for one's own salvation—an error which has several times in the history of the Church been a fruitful source of trouble—on the contrary, this peace in part arises from a certain confidence as to the future, which the soul obtains from those drops of joy which are in Contemplation vouchsafed to it, and which are intended to sustain it during the days of its pilgrimage.

The *union* of the soul with GOD is another mark, and the final object of Contemplative Prayer; and this union is said to be of two kinds, active and passive. The former consists in the perfect correspondence of the Human Will with the Divine Will; it is more than submission, it is joyous co-operation with the Will of GOD. S. Paul was an example of this spirit, when rising from the ground at

¹ Ps. cxvi. 7.

² S. Luke x. 39.

his conversion, blinded to earth, he cried at once to GOD—“LORD, what wilt Thou have me to do?” in this conformity, by which our own wills and judgment are perfectly offered up to GOD, lies the highest expression of Divine love, and so of union, for “he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in GOD and GOD in him.”¹ The passive union is one of a mystical nature, in which, instead of the rising of the will of man to GOD, GOD seems to descend and to flood the faculties with His own Presence; memory, understanding, and will, being placed at His sole disposal. This leads to sublime forms of union which are found only in supernatural states, into which we need not now enter, such as extasy, and rapture, of which S. Paul again is an example, when he comes “to visions and revelations of the LORD” and speaks of himself as “caught up to the third heaven,” “whether in the body or out of the body,” he could “not tell.”²

The leading features of Contemplation have been now noted, intuitive gaze upon Truth, admiration, foretaste of bliss, repose, and finally union with GOD of a high order. Before leaving this exalted theme, we will glance for a moment at the kinds, and some of the stages of, Contemplative Prayer.

Contemplation is divided into that which is intellectual, and that which is affective;³ that is, into two sorts of prayer, in which the action of the understanding or that of

¹ 1 S. John iv. 16.

² 2 Cor. xii. 1—3.

³ These are sometimes called *cherubic* and *seraphic*, as the cherubim are conceived to be angels especially of light; the seraphim, of love.

the will, respectively preponderate ; the head and the heart contribute in both cases, but unequally. This first kind of Contemplation, being intellectual, is based upon and aided by those virtues and gifts of the Spirit which perfect the mind ; thus, faith, wisdom, understanding, knowledge, are all required and put to account in it. The objects which are before the soul in this Contemplation, are the Holy Trinity, the Divine Perfections, the Incarnation, the Holy Eucharist, the Heavenly Court, the works of GOD. In it, different degrees of prayer may be attained, one of which is called "the prayer of silence;" David seems to refer to this when he says, "Silence is praise to Thee, O GOD, in Sion."¹ The soul's inability to express its sense of the Divine Majesty, is itself a species of acceptable worship. But besides the silence of amazement, there is the silence of attention, the stillness of soul, which is preserved in order to catch the faintest whispers of the Divine Voice, a condition like that of Samuel when he said, "Speak, for Thy servant heareth,"² or, that which the Psalmist enjoins, "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear."³ There are times, when nature itself seems hushed into silence, when there is a quietness and clearness of the atmosphere, which make distant sounds audible, and distant objects appear near ; as when, for instance, by the sea at eventide, the surface of the deep

¹ Ps. lxxv. 1, S. Jerome's interp.

² 1 Sam. iii. 10.

³ Ps. xlv. 10.

seems scarcely creased, and the measured ripple of the waves, like a feeble pulse, may be heard from some far-off shore, and through the limpid air the coast-line from point to point may be distinctly traced—such is an image of that inward stillness of soul which hearkens for every movement of the Divine Life, and is able to gain a clear insight into the relations of Divine Truth. Another degree of this kind of Contemplation, is “prayer in obscurity.” Of GOD, we are told “clouds and darkness are round about Him.”¹ And of Moses, that he “drew near to the thick darkness where GOD was.”² And “the LORD spake . . . out of the midst of the thick darkness.”³ Mystical writers represent this darkness as arising not from the withdrawal but from the excess of light, like the darkness which the eye experiences when dazzled by a sudden blaze of light. This differs from the former state, in which each object was seen clearly; in this obscurity, the faculties are so overwhelmed with the radiance, that nothing is, as it were, separately discerned, but there is a new consciousness of the whole, and a sense of awful nearness to GOD. There is also a state of prayer, in which the soul is so deprived of all other joys save that of the Divine Presence, that it is said to be “asleep” or “entombed.” The words in the book of Canticles, “I sleep but my heart waketh,”⁴ have been often referred to this degree of contemplation, as also those of the

¹ Ps. xcvi. 2.

² Exod. xx. 21.

³ Deut. v. 22.

⁴ Song of Sol. v. 2.

Apostle, "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with CHRIST in GOD."¹

The second kind of Contemplation being affective, is founded on love, and involves the exercise of the virtue of charity, and of those gifts of the Spirit which perfect the will; and therefore, their increase. As many as ten degrees of this Contemplation have been enumerated, of which we can only briefly describe some. The first is that of "*fire*," a term which is employed to depict the ardour of devotion, as when the two disciples exclaimed—"Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way;"² the second degree is said to be attained, when this inward fire breaks out into *flame*, thus, the Spouse speaking of love says, "the coals thereof are coals of *fire*, which hath a most vehement *flame*,"³ by this is represented the upward, active, fervent ascent of affection after affection towards GOD; another degree is *solitude*, when there is a temporary withdrawal of spiritual delights to intensify desire, when the Beloved "had withdrawn himself and was gone,"⁴ or was standing near, yet hidden, as when the Magdalen wept by the empty Tomb; and another degree is that of *soliloquy*, when the soul rejoices with itself on His return—"I found him whom my soul loveth. I held him and would not let him go."⁵ "For a small

¹ Col. iii. 3.

³ Song of Sol. viii. 6.

⁵ Song of Sol. iii. 4.

² S. Luke xxiv. 32.

⁴ Song of Sol. v. 6.

moment have I forsaken thee ; but with great mercies will I gather thee ;”¹ and the tenth degree is that of *wounded love*—“ I am,” says the Spouse again, “ sick of love.”² A fervent love for GOD is accompanied with pain, like that of an inextinguishable thirst—“ My soul is athirst for GOD, yea even for the living GOD, *when* shall I come to appear before the presence of GOD”³—a love unable to be repressed ; and in the saints so intense, as sometimes to exhaust the natural strength, and to make itself, it has been said, manifest by pallor of the countenance.

Such, in brief, are the marks, kinds, and degrees of this sublime species of prayer—Contemplation. There are two things to be remembered, before dismissing this portion of our subject. The first is, we have dealt exclusively with Contemplative Prayer, and have not entered upon what is called “ the Contemplative Life,” and therefore the sketch we have made is of practical importance, and may be of use to those who are beyond the precincts of the cloister. There are some who have the gift of Contemplation, and still are called to lead an active life ; it must not be supposed, that contemplation and action are incompatible. One of the effects of Contemplation is a great love and zeal for our neighbour’s good, for contemplation sustains and quickens the love of GOD in the soul ; and the love of GOD and of our neighbour, are but two expressions of one virtue, two flames of one fire.

¹ Isa. liv. 7.

² Song of Sol. ii. 5.

³ Ps. xlii. 2.

And secondly, although we have treated Contemplation and Meditation as two separate forms of Mental Prayer, yet they must not be regarded as so distinct, as that the one does not sometimes run into the other; or, that one person can only pray in one way, and another in the other. There is no pillar between the two territories which marks the confines of both; in the course of Meditation, GOD sometimes bestows the quiet, restful gaze of Contemplation; or at one period of life, the Spirit of GOD may lead to one kind of prayer, at another time, to another; and therefore, it is of great consequence in prayer, that the soul should follow Divine attractions; that it should remember that Mental Prayer should be carried on with freedom of spirit, and not be performed in such a business-like manner, as never to rest in it, or turn aside from the lines of thought which were laid down in the preparation. On the contrary, he who would meditate with fruit must entirely yield up the powers of his soul to the guidance of the HOLY GHOST, and rest, when the Heavenly Visitant calls, prizing those occasions when "His Divine Majesty" brings Him "to the banqueting-house," and vouchsafes to him a taste of the joys of Contemplation. And so, with regard to the different points of the meditation, we need not use all of them, unless they are required, but should follow the advice of S. Francis of Sales, "if your mind finds sufficient matter, light, and fruit, wherein to rest in any one consideration, dwell upon it, even as the bee

which hovers over one flower so long as it affords honey.”¹

III. We now proceed to speak of a difficulty which many experience in the practice of Mental Prayer, I refer to dryness of spirit. This, when perhaps neither sloth, occupation, nor pleasure have caused us to omit or to make irregularly our meditation—has made us desist. It may be useful then, to inquire into the causes of this difficulty, the purposes of it, and the way it is to be endured.

At the first approach of this malady, it is necessary to examine into the cause of it, so that, if possible, the cause may be removed. There are three directions in which the cause may be sought; first in the conscience, secondly in the state of health, thirdly in the Providence of GOD. The soul, from some sin, which perhaps is hidden, may have forfeited the favour of GOD. Thus the Psalmist, lost the sight of GOD’S countenance by yielding to a presumptuous thought—“ I said in my prosperity, I never shall be moved, Thou, LORD, in Thy goodness, hast made my hill so strong. Thou didst hide Thy face from me, and I was troubled.”² All sins have shadows, but some, such as sins against charity and purity, have darker shadows than others, and shut out the light. Then there is a dryness which comes from nature, which is caused by bodily infirmity or temperament, and which will accordingly disappear on the return of health—“ the voice of joy and *health* is in the dwellings

¹ Devout Life, Part ii. chap. v.

² Ps. xxx. 6, 7.

of the righteous.”¹ This health is primarily of course spiritual, but body and soul are so closely knit together, that the one is always liable to affect the other, and therefore the “corruptible body” is said to press “down the soul.” Another cause of dryness of spirit, is to be found on the side of GOD; He sends it as a spiritual trial, and this form of it is the most severe. It may not only be the absence of consolation, of sweetness in prayer and delight in devotional exercises, but also a distressing state, in which GOD seems altogether to have forsaken the soul, and to have left it in its darkness, nakedness, and corruption. “Oh that I were,” says Job, “as in months past, as in the days when GOD preserved me; when His candle shined upon my head . . . when the secret of GOD was upon my tabernacle.”² It was this sense of the withdrawal of GOD which the Psalmist revealed, when he cried, “My GOD, my GOD, why hast Thou forsaken me?”³ And again, “Why art thou so heavy, O my soul, and why art thou so disquieted within me?”⁴ and “hide not Thy face from me, lest I become like unto them which go down into the pit.”⁵ In one or other of these three directions, the cause of dryness of spirit will exist; but it may not be possible to say with certainty, whether it arises from spiritual trial or from fault or infirmity, it will be sufficient to make a diligent

¹ Psalm cxviii. 15.

² Job xxix. 2—4.

³ Psalm xxii. 1.

⁴ Psalm xlii. 5.

⁵ Psalm cxliii. 7.

examination of conscience, and if no definite sin is discovered, to leave the matter in the hand of GOD.

With regard to the purposes of this suffering, they are manifold, and may be viewed in reference to GOD, to our neighbour, and ourselves. GOD may send dryness into the souls of those who have experienced delight in prayer, in order that they may realise that the gift which they had enjoyed, was one undeserved, and freely bestowed by GOD's Goodness ; or again, the withdrawal of this delight in prayer, may have the purpose of hindering vanity and self-complacency—faults often near at hand in times of devotion ; or again, the gift may temporarily be taken away, in order that the Giver Himself may be sought more purely and disinterestedly, and that our desires may be enlarged, as when a parent by putting away some pleasure, causes a child to cry after him. The purpose of dryness in prayer may relate to our conduct with our neighbour : to be always in the light, to be always full of spiritual comfort, may hinder the outgoings of compassion towards others ; we sympathise with those who suffer, when the hand of GOD has touched us ourselves, the vigorous find it difficult to feel for the weak, those who know not by personal experience what temptation is, rarely are able to help the struggler, those who do not know what sorrow is are poor comforters, so desolation qualifies us for imparting sympathy to others ; and this is of especial importance, in the case of those whose office it is “to bind up the broken-

hearted" and "to comfort all that mourn."¹ Moreover, it may be GOD's purpose, that by a distaste on the one side of our life, we may be drawn to cultivate the other ; by the absence of consolation in prayer, we may be led to the greater practice of active virtues, to perform deeds of service to others, and instead of continuing to gaze up into Heaven, may be stimulated to try a little more to bring Heaven about those for whom we are called to labour, or on whom we should exert our influence. And lastly, with regard to ourselves, there are purposes for which GOD may send dryness, whatever may be our stage of progress in the spiritual life : thus, penance for past sin—sin forgiven, but of which spiritual penalties remain, may be the explanation of dryness, in which GOD's purpose is the deeper purification of the soul ; or again, dryness may be intended by Him for the cultivation of virtues, such as faith, patience, resignation, trust, which grow in seasons of darkness ; or once more, it may be a process through which the soul is to attain some high state of union with GOD, as in Contemplative Prayer. Such are some of the purposes for which dryness of spirit may be sent ; and the examination of conscience and of state, will be necessary again, in order to profit by the trial, as it was requisite for the possible discovery of its cause.

From whatever source it arises, in bearing this dryness, we must exercise conformity to the Will of GOD, offering

¹ Isa. lxi. 1, 2.

ourselves to bear whatever He thinks fit,—“O LORD, if Thou wilt me to be in darkness, be Thou Blessed ; if, in light, be Thou again Blessed.” Yet we may pray for the removal of dryness or darkness, as the Psalmist did—“LORD, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us.”¹ “O send out Thy light and Thy truth, that they may lead me.”² “Comfort the soul of Thy servant, for unto Thee do I lift up my soul.”³ “My soul thirsteth after Thee, as a thirsty land ; hear me speedily, O LORD, my spirit faileth.”⁴ Further, in the midst of desolation, we may sustain the soul by reflection on the past, and expectation of the future ; treasuring up past experience of light, and awaiting with confidence its return, as David again, in his desolation remembered the things that were past, how he went with the multitude into the house of GOD with the voice of joy and praise, and how he also expected a return of joy—“I shall *yet* praise Him, Who is the health of my countenance and my GOD.”⁵ But we have a higher model, to which we should ever turn when the heart is desolate ; there is One Who can give sympathy and is “mighty to save,” Who Himself as He trod “the winepress alone,” went through the anguish of an awful desolation—it is to Him Who cried upon the Cross, with a loud voice, expressive of His agony—“My GOD, My GOD, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”⁶ We can unite all withdrawals of light or

¹ Ps. iv. 6.

² Ps. xliii. 3.

³ Ps. lxxxvi. 4.

⁴ Ps. cxliii. 6, 7.

⁵ Ps. xlii. 11.

⁶ S. Matt. xxviii. 46.

of comfort with that Suffering, bear them in the strength of it, and so obtain some portion of its Merit. There is one caution, which is very needful, whilst speaking of the way to bear dryness in prayer, and that is—we must be on our guard against the temptation to give up the habit of mental prayer, because of this dryness; and against the delusive pretext, that prayer without feelings can be of no avail, and is not acceptable to GOD. On the contrary, oftentimes, more grace and favour with GOD are obtained by the prayer which brings no comfort to us, and which is undertaken only through a sense of duty and faithfulness. GOD may delight in that which gives us no delight, because He regards our improvement rather than any passing pleasure which the act may bring us; we must therefore be content with the Divine Delight, and patiently endure the trial, knowing that “the trial of our faith” is “much more precious than of gold that perisheth,” and will at last “be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of”¹ CHRIST.

The authority for, dignity of, and different parts of, Meditation, have now been explored; Contemplative Prayer, intellectual and affective, as another kind of mental prayer, has been briefly touched; and finally we have discussed the difficulty of dryness of spirit, examining its causes, purposes, and the ways of bearing it aright. The importance of meditation, as a part of each day’s spiritual work, cannot

¹ 1 S. Pet. i. 7.

be over-stated. Perseverance has been felt to depend so much upon daily meditation, that their intimate connection has passed in some countries into a proverb. What has been said on Contemplation, will only concern those to whom GOD has imparted this gift (except when an occasional accompaniment of meditation,) and with regard to them, it must be so used as to produce a deeper love for GOD and man,—they must strive to unite the calmness of Mary with the activity of Martha, and so, by their combination, approach nearer to the CHRIST-life; whilst they “sit at JESUS’ feet and hear His words,” they must also imitate His Life who “came not to be ministered unto, but to minister,”¹ for “the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit”² not only himself, but others also. The difficulty of dryness of spirit, which especially affects mental prayer, will be no hindrance, if only notwithstanding it, we are steadfast in our resolves; and the darkness will not be without an occasional ray of light. As when the moon is in crescent, there are a few bright points still visible upon its unilluminated part; and those bright points are supposed to be peaks of mountains so lofty as to be able to catch the sunlight; so in the darkness of the soul, the withdrawal of grace is not total, but there are still, as it were, certain eminences, which the Sun of Righteousness now and then touches with His glory. But whatever the dryness or the darkness be, if we persevere, the light will return at

¹ S. Matt. xx. 28.

² 1 Cor. xii. 7.

last ; and if, with the Psalmist, we have longed after God “in a dry and thirsty land where no water is,”¹ we shall also with him be able to say—“my soul” is “satisfied as with marrow and fatness,” for Thou didst turn again and refresh me, and hast brought me out of the depths of the earth, and comforted me on every side.

¹ Ps. lxiii. 1, 3, 5.

Lecture VI.

VOCAL PRAYER.

“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men.”—1 Tim. ii. 1.

MENTAL Prayer differs from Vocal, in that, in the former the mind alone is employed; in the latter, the tongue also. In the examination of Mental Prayer, we were concerned with the operations of the memory, the understanding, and the will; in dealing with Vocal Prayer, our attention will be directed to the agency of the bodily organs, and to external assistance. The life of Prayer would be incomplete, if our devotions were exclusively mental. The Psalmist prayed not only that “the meditation of” his “heart,” but also that “the words of” his “mouth” might be acceptable to GOD; and in another place, he says, “my heart and my *flesh* rejoice in the living GOD.” When S. Paul exhorts “that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men,” he is evidently alluding

to prayers which were to be accompanied by some outward expression, that is, he was solemnly enjoining the practice of vocal prayer.

The words themselves have received several interpretations. Some have thought that the terms "supplications, prayers, intercessions," were used by the Apostle not for the purpose of describing different sorts of prayer, but that, by the employment of cumulative language, he might the more enforce the importance of prayer in general; that he piled up words which had various shades of meaning, only with the view of impressing the mind of Timothy with the one substantial idea of which they were the garments. But with regard to this explanation, it must be said that it is very unsatisfactory; for, beside the fact that it is not a reverent mode of dealing with Revelation, to resolve the terms which the Apostle accumulates, into a mere rhetorical sentence—when the words are evidently not synonyms, such a course is inadmissible.

Others have referred the four terms, "supplications, prayers, intercessions, giving of thanks" to the different members of a prayer, or collect, which was in use in the Church; or even to the different parts of the Eucharistic Liturgy. It is well known that S. Augustine explained the passage in this latter way: "supplications," according to him, pointed to that part of the Divine Liturgy, which preceded the Act of Consecration; "prayers," to the time of Consecration; "intercessions," to the devotions which

followed the Consecration ; and “giving of thanks,” to the conclusion of the Service.

In the dispositions of the soul again, some have sought for one explanation of the Apostle’s meaning. Thus, it has been said, the ruling idea in the act of offering “supplications” is, that of our own unworthiness and vileness ; in offering “prayers,” the thought of the Divine Majesty and Holiness is uppermost ; in using “intercessions,”¹ fervour or urgency in pressing some definite petition upon GOD is the characteristic ; in “giving of thanks,” of course a grateful love is the leading emotion. Whilst a fourth view, is based on the meaning or use of the words themselves. According to this explanation, by “supplications” is intended deprecations, or prayers for the aversion of evil ; by “prayers,” petitions for good ; by “intercessions,” a close and individual intercourse with GOD ; and by “giving of thanks,” thanksgiving for benefits which had been vouchsafed.

Now whatever interpretation is selected, the general drift of the words which are under consideration, remains the same, which is this :—S. Paul was urging upon his son Timothy the primary duty—“I exhort, therefore, *first* of all”—of teaching his flock, that prayers of various kinds should “be made,” that is, offered ; and further, that these prayers should be also used in public. In this latter statement, I am but following the stream of commentators, who regard the direction which is contained in these words,

¹ ἐντεύξεις ; postulationes, Vulg.

as relating to Public Worship. "The Apostle having (in the first chapter of this Epistle) instructed Timothy as to the matter of preaching, proceeds in the next place to give him further orders concerning other Ecclesiastical matters ; and ' first of all' and chiefly, concerning the Public and Common Prayers of the Church."¹ And the context also shows, that the Apostle had in his mind the arrangements of Divine Service, for he presently says—"I will therefore that men pray everywhere,"² that is, in "every place of customary resort, everywhere where prayer is wont to be made," and that "the woman learn in silence with all subjection."³ The prayers which were enjoined by the Apostle, were also to have an intercessional character, for they were to be made "for all men." The words, then, of the Apostle, open up a wide field before our view, leading us to consider Vocal Prayer itself, for the less is included in the greater ; then, Public Prayer ; and lastly, Intercessory Prayer. First, we will examine the authority for, the advantage of, and some modes of using Vocal Prayer.

I. There have been those who have denied the utility of Vocal Prayer altogether, who regard all formal prayer with suspicion or dislike, except perhaps "the LORD's Prayer." Their objection is based on the truths, that "GOD is a Spirit ;" and that prayer, to be accepted by GOD, must

¹ Bull, Sermons, Vol. ii. 543.

² 1 Tim. ii. 8.

³ 1 Tim. ii. 11.

proceed from the heart. They say, to *speak* to GOD, is to approach Him in a material manner, and to treat Him as if He had bodily organs, and would hear through them what we say. It is on the same grounds, that all worship which is not exclusively spiritual is denounced, and ceremonial observances regarded as superstitious. Whilst, however, we are as fully possessed as they are, with the thought of the Spirituality of GOD, and admit the sinfulness of drawing nigh to Him with the lips, while the heart is far from Him ; we do not forget, that man is a being spiritual only in part, and also that GOD has clothed Himself with a Human Form, so that, as we look up, we behold not only GOD Himself, but the Glorified CHRIST, who wears at the FATHER'S Right Hand our Flesh. As man is composed of body and soul, so each should contribute its share to his acts of worship.

The practice of using the voice and other outward expressions and signs in praying, is authorised by the teaching of the Holy Scripture, and by the Church. In the book of Psalms, where we should naturally turn for reference on this subject, we find constant allusions to the use of the voice in prayer, e.g., "Unto Thee will I cry, O LORD my Rock, be not silent to me : lest, if Thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit. Hear the voice of my supplications, when I cry unto Thee."¹ "GOD hath heard me ; He hath attended to the voice

¹ Psalm xxviii. 1, 2.

of my prayer.”¹ “LORD, I cry unto Thee: make haste unto me; give ear unto my voice, when I cry unto Thee.”² “I cried unto the LORD with my voice; with my voice unto the LORD did I make my supplication.”³ Again, in the prophet Hosea, GOD bids Israel return to Him in this manner: “take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto Him, Take away all iniquity; so will we render the calves of our lips.”⁴ They were to bring with them “not costly offerings,” but “words; worthless as mere words; precious, when from the heart; words of confession and prayer;” and they promised to “render the calves of their lips,” that is, their uttered thanksgivings, which would be in lieu of the thank-offerings of the law.

CHRIST, and His Apostles, both by precept and practice, teach the necessity of vocal prayer. When the disciples asked CHRIST to teach them to pray, and He in reply gave them “the LORD’S Prayer,” He prescribed its vocal recitation—“When ye pray, say, Our FATHER, &c.”⁵ And He Himself employed words, and used outward signs in prayer, as when at the grave of Lazarus—“JESUS lifted up His eyes, and *said*, FATHER, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me;”⁶ and again, in His Intercessory Prayer, He is described by the Evangelist as praying audibly—“JESUS lifted up His eyes to Heaven, and *said*, FATHER,

¹ Ps. lxvi. 19.

³ Ps. cxlii. 1.

⁵ S. Luke xi. 2.

² Ps. cxli. 1.

⁴ Hos. xiv. 2.

⁶ S. John xi. 41.

the hour is come, glorify Thy SON ;”¹ and in the Agony, we are told, He “prayed the third time, using the same *words* ;”² and S. Paul in a remarkable manner depicts the vehemency of CHRIST’S prayers and their outward expression—he says of Him, that “in the days of His flesh . . . He offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears.”³ The Apostles, as a body, we find engaged in vocal prayer on the deliverance of Peter and John—“When they heard that, they lifted up their voice to GOD with one accord ;”⁴ and S. Paul, writing to the Romans, bids them “with one mind and one *mouth* glorify GOD.”⁵

The Church, without giving any express precept on the subject, has always regarded the use of vocal prayer as of the highest importance. “Words,” says S. Augustine, “are necessary for us to impress upon us our needs, not to inform GOD of them.” And S. Cyprian, when speaking of the LORD’S Prayer, describes the FATHER as recognizing the words of His SON, when we use them. Another gives it as his opinion, that—“after the tradition of the Church, vocal prayer is an obligation imposed on every Christian.” And the customs of Christians in all ages, bear witness to the fact, that vocal prayer is a necessity of our nature.

Having seen the authority for the employment of vocal prayer, we will in the next place consider its advantages and

¹ S. John xvii. 1.

² S. Matt. xxvi. 44.

³ Heb. v. 7.

⁴ Acts iv. 24.

⁵ Rom. xv. 6.

purposes. And first, it gives expression to the inward desire of the soul by utterance, and therefore is a *relief*. It is natural to us to speak when the heart is full—out “of the abundance,” says our LORD, “of the heart,” the “mouth speaketh.”¹ You do violence to an instinctive yearning, if you do not grant the heart this relief, of telling out its needs, its griefs, its sins, its burdens. The Psalmist describes the agony which he endured from not acknowledging his sin—“Whilst I held my tongue, my bones consumed away through my daily complaining,”² and, although these words refer primarily to the burden of sin, they mark the effect of the violation, in a single instance, of an universal law of our nature—that law in obedience to which, the soul seeks to give out through the instrumentality of the tongue, the sorrows, the aspirations, the hopes, the fears, the longings, the needs which are pent up within it. Language, moreover, is not only the channel through which thought flows forth, as gathered waters well out from an opened lock; language has a reflexive effect on thought itself. By speaking, our ideas become clearer; we gain greater power of analyzing and defining them, when we have the opportunity of telling them forth; and the material which was fusing in the mind is thereby cast into a shape and fixed in a mould for permanent use. Language is therefore not only the interpreter of thought, but also its anatomist, its fertilizer and preserver. As words, then, are the spontaneous outcome of a desire

¹ S. Luke vi. 45.

² Ps. xxxii. 3.

which is implanted in us, to communicate with one another what is passing within, whereby spirit holds converse with spirit through the medium of the flesh; so, we feel the need of the same sort of intercourse with Him, Who is “the GOD of the spirits of all flesh,”¹ and find it in vocal prayer: and as by words we not only express, but also enrich our thoughts in giving them forth to others; so in supplication, utterance will often have the further advantage of rendering definite or of amplifying, those desires which we want to bring before GOD.

But vocal prayer has another effect on the worshipper, beside that of making the thoughts clearer, or of adding to them—it excites devotion. S. Augustine and other writers, have placed this as the first advantage of vocal prayer; he says, “We pray with the voice, that we may excite ourselves to devotion.” Again, “Words excite interior devotion, whereby the mind of him who prays is raised to GOD,” and Aquinas adds the reason, “For it is by apprehending external signs the mind of man is moved, and consequently the affection.”

We have seen that the soul of man is acted on in two ways, from within and from without; and as that which reaches us through the organs of sense, touches us very keenly, therefore the sensible signs of prayer often recall the soul and excite its fervour—“that desire may effectually ascend upward for the obtaining of Divine gifts,

¹ Num. vi. 22.

it is necessary that our affection be fervent, and thought collected, and our expectation sure and firm ; and because our heart is often lukewarm, often scattered, often fearful through remorse for sin hence it is, that the LORD wills us not only to pray mentally but also vocally, that our affections may be excited by the words, and the recollection of our thoughts, by the meaning of the words.”¹ Thus, the utterances of prayer re-act on the soul, and—so close is the union between soul and body—the faculties of the one are often stirred by the exercise of the other.² As an illustration of the effect of uttered words on the heart, I would point to the act of confessing sin. Whatever may be the previous knowledge which the soul possesses of itself, and the sorrow which it has in consequence called forth, how does the very enumeration of its offences, stir a deeper compunction than any which had been before experienced. Another instance of the effect of the uttered word upon the heart, may be found in the way in which, in times of bereavement, when the sorrow is fresh and keen, we are obliged to avoid the mention of the name of the departed one, because we could not utter it, or another could not hear it without “breaking down ;” such sounds not only reach the outer ear, but touch inner chords too delicate

¹ S. Bonaventure, Brevil. v. c. 10.

² Thus, to impress anything deeply on the memory the aid of the senses is called in. We are advised to repeat *aloud* what we would remember ; to *look* at it, if in print ; and to *write* it ; so that sound, sight, and touch might combine in helping us to retain it.

and sensitive to bear the vibration. And not only do the utterances of prayer, or the sensible signs which are used, stimulate devotion, they sometimes serve the further purpose of bringing back the errant spirit, which, from quickness of thought or the flicker of the imagination, soon wanders from the prayer which it was engaged in offering.

Thirdly, on an independent ground, vocal prayer might be urged as a necessity, viz. as an element of the homage we owe to GOD, for the body must have its offering as well as the soul. We have already alluded to that species of false spirituality, which affects contempt for the body and for bodily worship. The body, it must never be forgotten, is an integral part of our being; our soul is not like an angelic spirit, complete in itself, and without need of a material organism; our flesh was created by a distinct act of GOD to be the eternal vestment of the human spirit, and to provide that spirit with fitting instruments through which it might operate, and without which it has but a maimed life. When the Apostle tells us of his longings to be “delivered from the burden of the flesh,” he pauses to discriminate, and explains that it was not the flesh itself—“not for that we would be unclothed,” be, that is, “naked” spirits—that he desired to be freed from, but “mortality,” the flesh, that is, in its mortal condition; he felt that to be “unclothed”¹ was to be in an imperfect state, and one

¹ 2 Cor. v. 4.

contrary to the first Will of GOD. The body, then—being not a mere temporary environment of the immortal spirit, but its home, its correlative, its partner in reward or woe, as in deeds of shame and of nobleness—must yield its distinctive homage, must place its various powers to the service of the soul, and join with it in the worship of GOD. The musician needs the instrument upon which to play, and the body is the instrument through which the soul of man expresses itself—an instrument, moulded by the impress of the kindred spirit, and in harmony with its qualities. Thus David in the Psalms calls upon his tongue to aid him in the praises of GOD—“Awake up, my glory;” he speaks of the tongue, as the gift which is his “glory,”¹—the gift of excellency, which distinguishes man from the beast, the gift through which the HOLY GHOST betokened His Presence, and which He chose for His agency—with this as well as with all his inward powers, he would render homage to the Most High. S. Paul says, “the body”—not only the soul—“is for the LORD,”² and bids us “present” our “bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to GOD.”³ Vocal prayer, then, in addition to mental, is necessary as one element of the homage of the body, and one which is so acceptable to GOD, that He attributes greater value to it than to all the costly sacrifices of Israel, for that which pleases “the LORD better than a bullock that hath horns

¹ Ps. lvii. 8 ; xvi. 9 ; Acts ii. 26.

² 1 Cor. vi. 13.

³ Rom. xii. 1.

and hoofs,"¹ is the song of praise and the prayer of thanksgiving.

The advantages and purposes of vocal prayer, we have found to lie in the relief which utterance gives to our inmost thoughts and feelings, in the powerful and productive influence which language exerts over thought itself, in its stimulative and remindful effects upon devotion, and in the offering of a bodily act of worship. We should now proceed to notice some ways of using vocal prayer.

Though differing in degree, the advantages which are inherent in the act itself of vocal prayer will be the same, whether we regard it as a part of private devotion or public worship; and therefore much of what has been advanced will be found to be applicable, with equal or greater force, to the latter. But in examining the ways of using vocal prayer, our attention will for the present be exclusively directed to prayer in private; and we shall employ the term "vocal prayer" as inclusive of what is sometimes named "verbal prayer," that is, prayer in which words are used or repeated, but not necessarily aloud, that of which the prayer of Hannah is in one respect an example—it is said of her, "She spake in her heart, only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard."²

Vocal prayer in private may be either formal, spontaneous, or ejaculatory. In formal prayer, we use devotions which have been already prescribed, or arranged, or committed to

¹ Ps. lxi. 30, 31.

² 1 Sam. i. 13.

memory, which are of the utmost importance. CHRIST Himself, by giving us a form of prayer, sanctioned this mode of praying. It is a great delusion to imagine, that after we have attained a certain proficiency in prayer, these elementary devotions ought to be discarded. On the contrary, the higher the house is, the more dangerous it is to neglect the foundations; whatever our attainments may be in meditation, we should be careful to *say* morning and evening prayers, the preparation for and thanksgiving after Sacraments, according to some set form of devotion—and therefore we cannot be thankful enough to those who have spent their time, labour, and learning in compiling books of devotion, and so in providing for this necessity.

The habit of using forms of prayer has many advantages attached to it. Such prayers are in the first place, suggestive; they quicken the movements of our inner being, when the faculties are dull and inactive; they supply a stream of thought, when the mind itself has little or no creative power, and so needs to be fed from without; they are to some, as the stick which helps us when we cannot walk alone, or as the frame to which the weak tendrils of a plant cling for support. Moreover, these prayers are often hallowed by association; memories which never entirely lose their power, are often linked with the forms of prayer we use; they were syllabled, perhaps, first at a mother's knee, and now the portions which are still retained, remind us of those who

are within the veil, they seem to have a character of their own, and differ from all subsequent devotions—like a birth-place has associations of its own which are different from all others, because in it we received the first impressions of our natural life. So, again, there are spiritual associations; the words we use may have been the well-worn utterances of Saints, which have been preserved for the benefit of subsequent generations—prayers which were framed by those in whom the Spirit of GOD dwelt richly, which therefore are far better than any we can devise for ourselves—prayers which were composed by those who are now amongst the Blessed, and in using them, we seem to place ourselves, as it were, within the influence of their holiness. The prayers of a S. Augustine, of a S. Gregory, or a S. Bernard, seem, not only from the spiritual instinct in their composition but from the law of association, to come to us almost with a special grace.

Again, the use of written prayers obviates two opposite evils: on the one side, the scrupulous mind is always questioning itself as to the fulfilment of its obligations, is in doubt whether it has done this or that, and to such the simple direction to say certain stated prayers, will be necessary to hinder disquietude; on the other, the lax disposition will be ready to content itself with some dreamy effusion in which the soul wanders hither and thither without laying hold of anything, when the will should be really exerting itself in some definite petitions, and to such, set

prayers, will be necessary for the prevention of sloth and negligence.

In another and an opposite way, vocal prayer may be employed, that is, without any set form. It was mentioned as the first effect of vocal prayer, that it relieved the soul ; and there are times when this relief can only be obtained by the outpouring of the soul before GOD, that is, by an unpremeditated and spontaneous effusion ; times, for instance, of deep sorrow, great perplexity, aching remorse for sin, when no form of prayer exactly meets the need, and the only resource lies in telling all to GOD. The Psalmist refers to such a mode of praying, as a personal experience and by way of exhortation—"pour out your heart before Him, for GOD is our hope."¹ And when Hannah explained her gestures to Eli, she said, "I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit : I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD."² S. Ambrose explains this "effusion of heart" to consist in "an open and sincere confession whereby we acknowledge our sins and miseries, and from our inmost heart beseech GOD to have mercy upon us." There are prayers, in Holy Scripture, which were poured forth according to the movement of the Spirit at the time of utterance ; and such instances, though they were the result of a special inspiration, may lend a sanction to the spontaneous outpourings of love and sorrow, of those who are the recipients only of an

¹ Ps. lxxii. 8.

² 1 Sam. i. 15.

ordinary grace. This extemporaneous outflow of the heart, this speaking to GOD in our own words, is a legitimate portion of oral prayer, and when resorted to at a fitting time, or occasion, will hinder intercourse with GOD from becoming mechanical. The two different modes of approaching GOD, the formal and the spontaneous, which are both of great profit, will act on one another as a mutual check, and each should hold its due place in the life of Prayer.

Under vocal prayer, it is usual to include the prayer of ejaculation. It might seem that ejaculation, was rather a part of mental than of vocal prayer ; it may be either, but as words are often used or some other outward expression, such as a glance, posture, or pause, it is considered a species of vocal prayer. It is by the practice of ejaculatory prayer that the precept to “pray *always*,”¹ to “pray without ceasing,”² is fulfilled ; and by it, the “spirit of prayer” is sustained. The “spirit of prayer” is not any one of our exercises of devotion, “it is, if it may be so expressed, the part subtile and ethereal of each of our exercises, which again ascends into the high regions of the soul, and forms an habitual reservoir of holy thoughts and pious feelings, the perfume of which exhales itself when the soul is occupied with external duties.”³ Each communion, each prayer or meditation, each office or ejaculation, contributes something to that perfume—“that odoriferous vapour of pure

¹ S. Luke xxi. 36.

² 1 Thess. v. 17.

³ Landriot, “La Prière Chrétienne,” p. 233.

souls." But ejaculatory prayer is the means of retaining the sweet odour, when we are engaged in work ; it may be internal only, or also accompanied by some outward action. CHRIST Himself has given us an example of this quick mode of praying ; when healing the deaf and dumb man, He gave an upward glance towards heaven ; again, at the grave of Lazarus, " He lifted up His eyes" to the FATHER ; the words from the Cross also were ejaculations. The prayer, whereby the publican was justified in GOD'S sight, was an ejaculation. Peter's cry amid the billows, " LORD, save me, I perish," was an ejaculation. These prayers were described by S. Augustine, as darts which the soul secretly sends up to heaven in the midst of outward employments. They are flames which are kindled by the HOLY SPIRIT, in him in whom the fire of love is a continuous possession ; whose life is " only one holy desire."

There are different kinds of ejaculatory prayer, and modes of acquiring the habit of using it. Converse with GOD through *His works* in nature, is one method : the soul accustoms itself to be reminded of certain Divine things, when it comes into contact with certain external objects—"in every object, you may see a thought Divine ;" S. Francis, we read, whenever he saw a lamb, was at once led to think of the meekness of CHRIST. Converse with GOD, through His works of grace is another method : the soul recalls some Mystery, or supernatural benefit which has been received, as e.g. the Holy Communion, and

makes an ejaculation of thanksgiving at certain intervals during the day. Or again, there is *interrogatory* ejaculation, the resort of the soul in perplexity and desolation, which the Psalmist used, when he exclaimed, "Why art thou so heavy, O my soul?"¹ "My GOD, my GOD, why hast Thou forsaken me?"² and this kind of prayer is of great advantage, when we are in honest doubt and quite unable to comprehend the Providence of GOD. And there is *pathetic* ejaculation, in which vent is given to tender feelings and emotions, e.g., "LORD, Thou knowest that I love Thee,"³—"JESUS, my love, is crucified," and that of the father who said, "with tears, LORD, I believe."⁴ The kind of ejaculation will depend either on the mood of the soul at the time, or on the outward occasion of its utterance; and the attainment of the habit will depend on the employment of certain events or objects as signals, on our perseverance, and on the general growth of a spiritual mind.

The practice is of importance in all stages of the spiritual life; in the hour of temptation, the remembrance of the Presence of GOD hinders a fall—"I have set GOD always before me, He is on my right hand, therefore I shall not fall;"⁵ in time of repentance, the thought of the Divine gaze heightens compunction—"hide Thy Face from my sins;"⁶ in the cultivation of virtues, the sense of the Divine Presence which ejaculatory prayer sustains, acts as a stimulant

¹ Ps. xlii. 11.² Ps. xxii. 1.³ S. John xxi. 17.⁴ S. Mark ix. 14.⁵ Ps. xvi. 8.⁶ Ps. li. 9.

—“I have kept Thy precepts and Thy testimonies : for all my ways are before Thee ;”¹ in the higher paths of holiness, love and union are perfected by this practice of the Divine Presence—“they always behold the face of” their “FATHER which is in heaven ;”² in the agony of death, it alone can quell alarm—“though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.”³

For the neglect of ejaculatory prayer, there can be no excuse. When we omit other kinds of prayer, there are grounds of excuse, which are not seldom alleged, viz., that we have not time, that our mind is not capable of meditating, that we are harassed by distractions, that prayer brings temptations, that we are afflicted with distaste and dryness of spirit, &c. Not one of these, however, can be urged as a plea for the neglect of ejaculatory prayer ; for ejaculations occupy no time, demand no sustained action of the mental powers, are too quick to admit of distraction, and are too short to produce weariness or trial. By diligence in these prayers, we turn to account the actual grace which passes as a current through the soul—those scintillations of Divine light which are so rapid, that they only admit of a momentary correspondence—those movements of the Spirit, which like waves, pass by unused, unless they bear us on their crest ; so that, ejaculations—beside the fact that their exercise is one of especial facility and sweetness—are of great moment, for by them a transient illumination or inspira-

¹ Ps. cxix. 168.

² S. Matt. xviii. 10.

³ Ps. xxiii. 4.

tion may be converted into the substance of a virtue, and be productive of a lasting reward.

In our survey of Vocal Prayer, we have examined the authority for it, its advantages, and lastly, three modes of exercising it, viz., by formal, spontaneous, and ejaculatory devotions. We pass now from the consideration of Vocal Prayer in reference to private devotions, to treat of Public Prayer. And first we will regard Public Worship as a duty ; secondly, we will enumerate some of its advantages ; and finally, consider a difficulty which stands especially in the way of its performance.

II. It has been noticed, that, when S. Paul exhorts Timothy “ first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men,” he had primarily in view the arrangements of public worship. It was important that the Bishop of Ephesus should impress on his flock, that they should pray to GOD not only as individuals, but as members of a society or corporation. Prayer as well as faith, is not satisfied with an inward conviction or private exercise, it must have a public profession, “ for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”¹ The mind of GOD is clearly revealed in Holy Scripture on this matter. The central object in the Old Testament is the Temple of GOD. We find GOD, not only directing Moses to construct a Tabernacle for the united worship of the people, but giving commands as to every feature of the

¹ Rom. x. 10.

Building, and every portion of the Ritual which was to be carried on within it. Again, GOD filled the Temple of Solomon, with a manifest glory when it was dedicated to His service,¹ and accepted the gorgeous worship with which in that magnificent structure He was approached. GOD has told us what was the main purpose of this building—I will “make them joyful in Mine house of prayer . . . for Mine house shall be called *an house of prayer* for all people.”² And for this Temple, the HOLY SPIRIT instilled into the soul of every true Israelite a special reverence and love. Again and again, does the Psalmist break out into fervent desire and affection for the House of GOD, e.g., “One thing have I desired of the LORD which I will seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life.”³ When for a while exiled from it, he exclaims, “O how amiable are Thy dwellings, O LORD of hosts ; my soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD.”⁴ Again, when returning to it, he gives utterance to his joy—“I was glad when they said unto me, We will go into the House of the LORD.”⁵ Daniel, when he prayed, had the window of his chamber “open toward Jerusalem.”⁶

CHRIST Himself, by His love for the Temple, and diligence in resorting thither at the Feasts, by His lingering in it, when His parents had left it, and teaching in its hallowed precincts, indicates the necessity of Public Prayer.

¹ 2 Chron. vii. 2.

² Isa. lvi. 7.

³ Ps. xxvii. 4.

⁴ Ps. lxxxiv. 1, 2.

⁵ Ps. cxxii. 1.

⁶ Dan. vi. 10.

The Apostles follow the example of their Master, they are to be found in the FATHER'S House too, not only when He was with them, but afterward ; when they waited for the Coming of the HOLY GHOST, we are told, they "were continually in the Temple, praising and blessing GOD ;"¹ when the Comforter had come, they still continued "with one accord in the Temple ;"² we find again, Peter and John going up "together into the Temple at the hour of prayer."³ And this duty of Public Service was not to become obsolete, and to pass away with the Jewish Covenant ; rather the worship of Israel was a type of a future Reality. CHRIST gave a promise of a special presence, "where two or three should be gathered together in His Name ;"⁴ S. Paul, in writing to the Hebrews, warns them against "the forsaking the assembling of" themselves "together ;"⁵ at Philippi, "on the Sabbath," they "went out where prayer was wont to be made ;"⁶ in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, there is evident allusion to a place which was designed for public worship ;⁷ and the prophet foretold the extension of public worship in the New Covenant—no longer to be confined to the walls of one Building—"for from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same My Name shall be great among the Gentiles ; and in every place incense shall be offered unto My Name, and a pure offering."⁸

¹ S. Luke xxiv. 53.

² Acts ii. 46.

³ Acts iii. 1.

⁴ S. Matt. xviii. 20.

⁵ Heb. x. 25.

⁶ Acts xvi. 13.

⁷ I Cor. xi. 22.

⁸ Mal. i. 11.

Further, the duty of Public Prayer, may be gathered from the careful provisions which the Church has made for its performance. The "Divine Liturgy" and the "Divine Office" are the two forms of Vocal Prayer, which the Church has employed from the earliest times in her worship. Some Liturgies are so ancient, that they have been thought to be older than some of the books of the New Testament; so that, it has been a question whether the Liturgy quotes the New Testament, or the New Testament the Liturgy. The Divine Office, too, was provided at a very early date, and gradually assumed its sevenfold form, in commemoration of different stages of CHRIST'S Passion. It has been said that the Divine Office, or Canonical Hours, became sevenfold, in accordance with the Psalmist's resolution—"Seven times a day will I praise Thee."¹ Some of these Hours of Prayer are mentioned in Holy Scripture—thus David says, "Evening, morning, and at noon will I pray,"² "at midnight I will rise to give thanks to Thee;"³ and the Apostles prayed at the third,⁴ sixth,⁵ and ninth⁶ hours—consequently we find their recitation was soon enjoined upon the clergy.⁷

And such provisions were a necessity, for there could be no "common prayer" without forms of prayer, which from their repetition would become familiar. GOD Himself put

¹ Ps. cxix. 164.

² Ps. lv. 17.

³ Ps. cxix. 62.

⁴ Acts ii. 15.

⁵ Acts x. 9.

⁶ Acts iii. 1.

⁷ An obligation which still survives in the order, that "all priests and deacons are to say daily Matins and Evensong"—services which are a compendium of the ancient Hours.

into the mouths of His priests of old, the words with which they were to bless the people—"On this wise ye shall bless the people The LORD bless thee, &c."¹ Thus GOD authorized the use of forms of prayer, and the principle of repetition; the song of Moses also "grew afterwards to be a part of the ordinary Jewish Liturgy." Hooker ridicules the notion that prayers to be accepted by GOD, must be "always new;" it is according to him "to imagine that GOD doth loathe to have the self-same supplications often iterated, even as we do to be every day fed without alteration or change of diet."² Authorised forms of prayer are requisite for many reasons; the worshippers are thereby protected from the danger of anything which is contrary to faith, entering into their devotions through the error or negligence of the minister; they are preserved from the crude and wandering effusions of those, who, without any blame to themselves, are incapable of conducting the devotions of the people; they are provided too, with prayers in which they can join because they know them, whereas it is impossible to pray vocally when the utterances are not according to a prescribed form; they are preserved also from that confusion and disorder in Divine Worship, which the Apostle describes, when he says, "When ye come together every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation."³

¹ Num. vi. 22—26.

² Hooker, Bk. v. ch. xxvi. 2.

³ I Cor. xiv. 26.

Therefore S. Paul, when he exhorts Timothy, that "first of all supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men," was really bidding him "provide by his authority that there should be set forms of prayer . . . to be used in those Churches" which were "under his inspection and jurisdiction."¹

The advantages of Public Prayer may be viewed, in respect of the place which is set apart for the worship of GOD; in reference to the congregation; in relation to GOD, and to man. A glance in these different directions will suffice to show, how manifold are the benefits of prayer when it is offered in the House of GOD. And first, the place itself acts upon us by virtue of its sacredness. Though a building is incapable of formal sanctity, yet when it is consecrated, it is not only separated from common uses, and made in a peculiar way GOD's property, but GOD is also said to dwell therein. But how is the Most High, whom Solomon at the dedication of the Temple, declared "the heaven of heavens" could "not contain,"² said to dwell in holy places? By revealing Himself in an especial manner, and by bestowing a special grace in places which are dedicated to Him. When Jacob awaked out of sleep, and had seen the vision of angels ascending and descending on the mystic ladder, he exclaimed, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I knew it not;"³ he was not ignorant of the

¹ Bull, vol. ii. 547.

² 1 Kings viii. 27.

³ Gen. xxviii. 16.

truth of GOD'S Omnipresence, but he felt that in that spot there was a special Presence of GOD to himself, that there he tasted the Divine Presence in a peculiar manner, and therefore his soul was filled with holy fear. And so in the Temple of old, it was the manifestation by visible tokens of a Divine Presence, which affected the worshipper, and seemed to bring him near to the gates of Heaven. GOD is Omnipresent, yet He bestows a sense of His Presence in His Temple, and prayer offered there has not only a special promise of acceptance, but the act of praying is helped by a special grace. As we are invigorated by change of air, especially when we live in a climate which has a tendency to weaken and relax the physical frame; so, the soul by passing into the Courts of the LORD is braced by the pure and heavenly atmosphere of the place, is quickened by the currents of actual grace which are therein, and by its removal from all infectious and unholy influences.

Beside this supernatural assistance to which we have alluded, we are helped in praying by the sacredness and beauty of the objects which are around us in the House of GOD. "Temples are erected not for GOD, but on account of us." That which meets the eye and the ear, acts upon us instinctively by a law of our nature. The "surroundings" of our life contribute to the formation of character and to the development of powers, as much as the soil and climate affect the growth of a plant. Thus, the Greeks,

we are told, desired their children to be brought up amid things which were beautiful, in order that they might have generous dispositions and pure tastes. And in the Temples of GOD, architecture, music, painting, sacred symbols, ritual, in short all that is lovely, elevates the soul and touches it with the love of Heaven.

We have this twofold help to prayer in the House of GOD—a special grace within the soul, and the external influence of the place; and in addition to these, though GOD promises to hear prayer, wherever it may be addressed to Him, for “wherever you pray . . . you are a temple,” says S. Chrysostom; yet we have His *special* promise to prayer, when it is offered in His sanctuary. It is “the house of prayer,” towards which the “eyes” of GOD are ever “open,” and where He will hear “the supplication of” His “servants;”¹ into which Pharisee and Publican alike “went up to pray;”² where, what we “ask shall be done for” us of our “FATHER Which is in Heaven.”³

Further, in prayer we are assisted by the presence of others who are likewise praying. We are stirred by their devotions; as a silent harp begins to vibrate, when another which is near it is played upon. Soul kindles soul in the great congregation—“I will give Thee thanks,” says the Psalmist, “in the great congregation, I will praise Thee amongst much people.”⁴ A divine fluid seems to circulate

¹ 1 Kings viii.

³ S. Matt. xviii. 19, 20.

² S. Luke xviii. 10.

⁴ Ps. xxxv. 18.

through the crowd of worshippers, inspiring, elevating, enkindling, and thrilling, even the soul which in the beginning of the service was perhaps lukewarm and depressed. Worshipper acts, and reacts upon worshipper, in the assembly of the Saints, and thus the latent spark of devotion is fanned into a flame. Who has not experienced this inspiration, when entering the Temple of GOD, he has joined with a multitude in some solemn act of Worship, when the Sacred Mysteries of Religion were being enacted! We gained by sympathy and contact with others, a power of prayer, to which we should have been strangers, had we been left to our own aspirations. We gain, too, something from the feeling that we are not only praying with the assembled congregation, but that we are also *en rapport* with the whole Mystic Body of CHRIST, when we are engaged in public worship.

And this thought leads us to regard the advantage of public prayer, when viewed in reference to GOD. "Union is strength" is a proverb which is true of prayer. GOD has promised that when two or three agree together to pray for anything, they shall be heard; that is, their prayer when they so agree, would have greater potency than their isolated supplications. One great purpose of Religion, is evidently that of binding men together with a common interest and sympathy. Thus, it has been said, "God cannot resist an army of souls praying, whose hearts are founded in a common affection." The power of united

prayer does not result simply from the contributions of each soul, but from something which is super-added, a sort of interest on the principal, a living energy which could not have accrued from their separated devotions. "If," says S. Ignatius, "the prayer of one and of another has such power, what of that of the Bishop and the whole Church?" Then, too, in the great assembly, we are not only by the force of numbers able to urge upon GOD our petitions—like the violent of whom we read that they "take" the kingdom of heaven "by force;"¹ but are also encouraged to make strong and heroic resolutions against temptations, as soldiers are inspired with courage and enthusiasm, when drawn up in battle-array.

Public Prayer has also its use, with regard to man himself; it is the symbol of brotherhood. There are, and rightly too, various distinctions in this lower life of ours; differences of birth, education, powers, vocation, wealth, and success; but in the public worship of GOD—though even in the House of GOD, human selfishness has sometimes raised barriers—earthly distinctions are for awhile obliterated, and man as man falls down before his GOD. There is equality there, whatever may be the social differences beyond its sacred precincts; transient distinctions must not find a place in the courts of the Eternal; all meet there on common grounds, as creatures of the same Heavenly FATHER, as bought by the same Precious Blood, as temples

¹ S. Matt. xi. 12.

of the same Blessed Spirit. Each one, as he gazes on the Crucified Form can say, "He loved me and gave Himself for me;" and thus, we are reminded of our equality in all that is lasting, as the tribute of prayer or of praise ascends up to the common FATHER of all, when high and low, rich and poor, young and old, meet together in these earthly Courts to worship Him.

We pass now, from a brief survey of some of the advantages of Public Prayer, to consider a special difficulty which belongs in some measure to all kinds of prayer; yet one more commonly felt when we are engaged in Public Prayer than at any other time, both because of its length, our familiarity with its forms, and the distractions which may arise from a wrong use of the presence of others. I refer to the difficulty of preserving attention. We will look at the necessity for, and the nature of attention, the causes of distractions, and their remedies.

Without attention, in mental prayer, the whole act ceases; but in vocal prayer, there may be no attention, and still the mechanical recitation of a prayer be continued. Attention is of the essence of prayer, and is not merely its accompaniment or adornment. The simple repetition of a form of words is not prayer, unless the soul is performing the act with the intention of praying, and with, at least, a desire to keep the attention upon what it is doing. Thus, a form of devotion may be read, for the sake of knowing what is in it, or for a literary purpose, or in a spirit of hypocrisy, and of

course would be no prayer. To approach GOD with the lips, and not with the heart, He has told us, is very offensive in His sight.—“This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me.”¹ Mental Prayer is that which is mental only, vocal prayer that which is vocal *also*; mental prayer is, it has been said, the soul of vocal, and—seeing that mental prayer is the ascent of the mind to GOD, therefore the mental act of attending is a necessity, and without it vocal prayer is but the body without the soul.

But when it is said, that attention is requisite for prayer, it must also be added, that there are different kinds or degrees of attention. The lowest or ‘external’ attention, consists in the care with which the words themselves are recited; the second kind of attention, lies in the continuous application of the understanding to the meaning of that which is read or uttered; the third, or ‘spiritual’ attention, is that in which the soul, without following the sense of each sentence, is uplifted to GOD, bearing aloft some intention, gazing with sustained power upon some Perfection of the Divine Life, or filled with the thought of some Mystery of CHRIST. Which of these kinds of intention is chiefly requisite or practicable, will depend either on the nature of the devotion in which we are engaged, or on our physical state. There may be times of weakness, when it is as much as we can do, to keep the eye and the mind upon the

¹ S. Matt. xv. 8.

words we are using in the prayer ; and again, there are devotions in Offices, such as the Psalms, where it is oftentimes difficult to grasp the meaning, and the quick recitation of which, will render a present penetration of the sense impossible—in such, a spiritual intention is the one which is required, and the psalm so recited, is by our intention or by some antiphon, pervaded with a holy thought or desire, which is directed towards GOD as an act of worship and praise. Some authors have regarded these different kinds of attention, in their bearing on the effects of prayer : they have considered the second kind of attention, that, to the *sense* of the words, necessary in order to gain an answer to our petitions ; the third kind, spiritual attention, as requisite for gaining spiritual refection from contact with GOD. However, for all prayer, attention in this respect is necessary, viz. that all *other* thoughts must be put away, when we are drawing near to GOD ; the differences between kinds of attention are on the positive side, all kinds require the rejection of foreign and irrelevant thoughts.

Distractions may arise from many causes, a common cause is an unmortified passion. Attachment to the creature, hinders communion with the Creator ; it may bring, as of old, the buyers and sellers into the courts of the Temple, and in the mind mingle an unholy traffic with the Service of GOD. Distractions of passion, are easily detected ; they are to be known by the fact that the mind, when it wanders always gravitates in one direc-

tion : the avaricious, on money ; the ambitious, on power ; the vain, on praise ; the lustful, on gratifications, could fix their thoughts without danger of distraction, for where "the treasure is, there will" the "heart be also." Again, distraction may be purely mental, the result of a mind which is ever wandering and unsettled ; these may be known by their variety, and also by the fact that the mind wanders not only in prayer but in doing everything else ; this mental dissipation may arise from original weakness, or from the indulgence of the vice of sloth. Distractions may be also spiritual, and sent by GOD to humble the soul, and hide those formations of grace which are going on within it. Sometimes, they may be temptations which He permits, by the resistance of which the soul is purified, and its contrition deepened when it is haunted by pictures of its old sins : these will molest the soul, without really disturbing it at its summit ; unless indeed, they are not promptly expelled, or are resisted in a spirit of impatience.

To overcome distractions of passion, it is evident that the particular passion which agitates us, must be mortified. The only cure lies in the eradication of the source of the difficulty ; the proper remedies, therefore, will be those which are required for healing the vicious tendency of the soul, and the cultivation of the opposite virtue. It is sometimes recommended also, to meditate (when it is not likely to become a temptation) upon the thought which distracts us, see its worthlessness when compared with

eternal interests, &c. Mental distraction will need to be dealt with in a different manner; it must be met by efforts of the will, and by quickening the vision of faith. We are brought to attend to an object which is before us, in two ways: by the exercise of the will, by which all other impressions are for the time suspended or reduced; and, by the attraction of the object itself which absorbs us. The power of concentrating the thoughts is possessed by different persons in various degrees, and by the same persons in different degrees at different periods of their life. Thus, children have little power of fixing their thoughts, their minds being under the control of their senses, which are fascinated by the novelty and freshness of every external object; whilst in manhood, when the mind has been trained, it is no longer so easily caught away by outward things. It is by bringing the mind under the dominion of the will, that the habit of attention is formed. But the matter may be taken out of our hands by the presentation of an object, which is so beautiful or wonderful as at once to enthrall us; the fixed gaze of the eye, the eager look, the faces which are all turned in one direction, show that every one *is* attending to something, and that without effort. Now attention in prayer is to be acquired in the same manner, by efforts of will, and by the attraction of an object: by the first, opposite impressions will be removed and kept away; and the second, the Presence of GOD, of "the King in His Beauty,"—faith

must supply. Both these means must be employed in the cure of mental dissipation, and from their nature it is manifest, that the cure can only be gradual. Every effort of will to put away a distraction, will strengthen the inward powers; and every act of faith earnestly made, will increase a sense of that Divine Presence and Divine Beauty which will gather upon Itself by a sweet attraction the faculties of the soul, when they are doing their best on their side to turn away from all creatures. With regard to spiritual distractions, these require no remedy, for they are themselves remedies; but they must be endured with great patience and conformity to the Will of God, lest His work and the purposes which He has in sending or permitting them, be hindered in us.

In general, in dealing with distractions in prayer, we must bear in mind the great importance of lifting up the mind and heart, and of putting away that about which we have been engaged, *before* beginning to pray; we must prepare ourselves beforehand, lest we should be like unto those who tempt the LORD. The entrance into the holier parts of the Temple was gradual, as if to warn us of the need of a prepared spirit when we draw nigh to God. Also, if we discover the mind to have wandered away from the subject of our prayer, we should bring it back promptly but *calmly*, and without impatience with ourselves. We may be comforted by the knowledge that *involuntary* distractions are no sin in themselves, when they are checked

as soon as they are discovered ; and when distractions molest the soul, and are again and again faithfully dismissed, they may add value to our prayers, for they are the occasion of acts of the will in correspondence with Divine grace. If we only treat distractions as Abraham dealt with “the fowls,” which came down to prey upon the sacrifices, for we read, “he drove them away,”¹—our prayers will be acceptable to GOD, who regards the intention and desire, apart from the infirmity of its fulfilment. Further, in this difficulty we should seek the assistance of the HOLY GHOST ; we should ask GOD, if it be His good pleasure, to bestow upon us the power of fixity of thought in prayer ; and be very careful to guard our senses, lest they become the avenues through which distractions enter the soul ; and preserve, if possible, the posture of adoration.

The duty of Public Prayer, its advantages, and the difficulty which is commonly felt in the performance of it—as indeed it is, more or less, in all kinds of prayer, viz., of attending, have been investigated. There are two remarks which this branch of our subject suggests. First, as Public Prayer is a duty of primary importance, so that kind of prayer which leads up to it, and stands between the private supplications of the individual and the voice of the great congregation, must not be overlooked ; for it is of consequence, whether viewed as an act of devotion in itself, or as a preparation for the service of the Temple—I refer to Family Prayer. Family worship sanctifies family

¹ Gen. xv. 11.

ties; it is the offering to GOD of those who are bound together by the natural life, as the Worship in the Sanctuary is the offering of those who are united by the supernatural life, and the less prepares the way for and is an image of the greater, as in point of time it preceded it; it is of especial value too, in training the young and fitting them for the higher worship, and blending the supernatural with the natural in the memories of early life, so that the words of one of old might be applied to this subject and become the maxim of every parent—"as for me, and my house, we will serve the LORD."¹

And further, it will be manifest, from what has been said on Vocal and Public Prayer, how closely the outward is connected with the inward in our approaches to GOD; though the outward form or ceremony may be in itself of little value, yet as the expression of inward belief and truth, it is of the utmost consequence. The loss of the outward, of that which brings forcibly before the ear or the eye, the doctrines and mysteries of our religion, would soon be followed by forgetfulness of the inward. The story of the king, who—sensible that nothing so kept alive the ideas of valour and of ancient glory as the traditional poetry of the people, which through the power of music made deep impressions on the minds of the youth—gathered all the Welsh bards, and ordered them to be put to death, is a case in point; he, it has been

¹ Josh. xxiv. 15.

said by the historian, pursued "a barbarous but not absurd policy."¹ The Church, conscious of this close relation of the outward to the inward, has ordained a system of Ritual, which, if it admits of national peculiarity, is still everywhere in its main features alike; and though it may be in the power of a local Church "to decree rites and ceremonies," it is not in its power to do away with those unalterable lines of Ritual, which were not "ordained only by man's authority," but which, like fundamental doctrines, are the expressions of the mind of the Universal Church, and therefore the heritage of all. The defence, therefore, of the outward form or symbol, becomes in its issues, the defence of the doctrine it enshrines.

III. We pass by an easy transition from the consideration of Public Prayer, to that of Intercessory; the former is the extension of one term of prayer, the latter of another; the one is praying with others, the other, praying for others. It is not only of Public but also of Intercessory Prayer S. Paul speaks, when he exhorts "that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made *for all men*." We will look briefly at the authority for Intercessory Prayer, the extent of its obligation and action, and the manner of using it.

In the Old Testament, we have a striking instance of it in the conduct of Moses, when Israel was fighting against Amalek. We read that Moses, instead of entering into

¹ Hume, p. 463.

the battle and inspiring the people with courage and enthusiasm by his presence, went up to the top of a hill and there lifted up his hands to heaven in supplication. "And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed . . . and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other, and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun, and Joshua discomfited Amalek."¹ Again, Samuel said, "Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the LORD."² And Elijah and Elisha wrought their miracles through intercessory prayer. GOD requested Jeremiah to cease from praying for the people, showing the power of the prophet's intercession—"therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up a cry or prayer for them."³

CHRIST has taught us to pray not only for ourselves, but also for one another; the "LORD'S PRAYER" is intercessory as well as personal, for it is in the plural, "*Our* FATHER, which art in Heaven," "Give *us* this day our daily bread." His own prayers were either directly or indirectly intercessional; when He prayed for Himself, "FATHER, glorify Thy SON,"⁴ it was with the view that that glorification should extend in its effects to others, as when He said, "for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth;"⁵ and He

¹ Exod. xvii. 11—13.

² 1 Sam. vii. 5.

³ Jer. xi. 14.

⁴ S. John xvii. 1.

⁵ S. John xvii. 19.

prayed directly for others—"I pray for them, I pray not for the world;"¹ and then a wider circle of intercession follows—"neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word."² Again, CHRIST restored the sick and raised the dead, in answer to intercessory prayer. The first word from the Cross was also a far-reaching intercession—"FATHER, forgive them, for they know not what they do."³ The Apostles, in their inspired Epistles, sought the prayers of those to whom they wrote, spake of their own for them, and bade them pray one for another—e.g. "Brethren, pray for us;"⁴ "We . . . do not cease to pray for you;"⁵ "And this I pray that your love may abound;"⁶ "Pray one for another."⁷ S. Chrysostom says, "We ought to pray, rather than persecute one another," and the ancient Liturgies seem to have followed very exactly the Apostle's order—"when he bade supplication, prayer, intercession, giving of thanks, to be made for all men, for kings and for all who are in authority."

Further, it is the duty of all to pray for others, and not only of those who have a special vocation, or are in a high state of grace; but whilst it is the duty of all, it especially appertains to those whose business is the salvation of others—

¹ S. John xvii. 9.

³ S. Luke xxiii. 34.

⁵ Col. i. 9.

⁷ S. James v. 16.

² S. John xvii. 20.

⁴ 1 Thess. v. 25.

⁶ Phil. i. 9.

we are told, that Aaron bore upon the breastplate the names of the children of Israel "before the LORD,"¹ for the Ministers of GOD are officially intercessors. The reasons why this easy duty is oftentimes neglected, are to be found in human selfishness and distrust, both of which are often mingled with, if they do not take their rise in, erroneous notions respecting Intercession itself. Devout people as well as others, are liable to become selfish, and consequently to pray only or mostly for themselves, imagining that they have no grace which they can spare, and that all that they can obtain they have abundant need of. There are two mistakes in this concentration of all prayer upon oneself. First, it leaves a certain grace which GOD has given us unemployed, a grace, which like every other talent, we shall have to give an account of. There are two kinds of grace offered to all—the grace of personal sanctification; and the grace which is to be used upon others, and cannot be absorbed into the first, that "manifestation of the Spirit" which "is given to every man"² for the profit of others, which finds its counterpart in the preter-natural gifts of the Apostles, and is turned to account in one way by intercessory prayer. Secondly, it forgets that intercessory prayer has also subjective effects, and a lasting reward. We hinder anger or envy, and foster or restore a spirit of love, when we pray for those for whom we have an aversion or with whom we are at variance. Such prayers have an

¹ Exod. xxviii.

² 1 Cor. xii. 7.

illuminating power, and produce a serene state of mind, shedding peace and joy, quelling or preventing the rise of evil passion; such prayers produce a feeling of sincerity in social intercourse, when we meet those whose names we have brought before GOD; and, when they do not benefit their objects, return into the bosom of those who offered them, and may bring an everlasting reward. If the merit of an action depends on the amount of charity which prompted it, then the prayer which is especially marked by unselfishness and love for others, will be richly recompensed at that Tribunal, where even acts of charity which have been done to the body, will not be forgotten.¹

Another cause of the neglect of intercession is to be discovered in a certain distrust of its efficacy, that is, not its efficacy in general but in particular. The soul, conscious of its manifold sins and imperfections, imagines that *its* prayers are too weak to be profitable to others, and that therefore intercessions must be made by those who are in a higher and more robust spiritual condition. This excuse or plea for not making intercession, is also based on a fallacy. By it, it is assumed, that our prayers have value only in themselves, whereas the first ground of their potency is union with CHRIST. Our intercessions avail, notwithstanding our feebleness and sinfulness, because they are accepted in union with those supplications which He offered whilst on earth,

¹ S. Matt. xxv. 31—46.

and have *present* union with those intercessions which He is ever making on our behalf in Heaven, and with the Eucharistic Oblation. Moses' Intercession had power, when his hands were uplifted in the form of the Cross, and ours have power also when they are offered in union with the Redeemer's Passion. Moreover, our intercessions are accepted, because they are not only ours, but are also offered in the power of the HOLY GHOST ; when they reach the FATHER'S Throne, they are, if it may be said, partly human and partly Divine, for "the Spirit itself maketh intercessions for us, with groanings which cannot be uttered."¹ All, then, are bound to pray for others, whatever may be their spiritual state ; they are bound to do so, not only because intercession is a matter of duty, but also in order that they may not "receive the grace of GOD"—which is given them for others as well as for themselves—"in vain ;" and their prayers for others may be offered confidently, if they are presented to the FATHER in union with the all-prevailing Intercession of His SON, and through the power of the indwelling Spirit.

Again, intercessory prayer should be made not only by all, but also for all—"I exhort, therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for *all* men ;" this is the extent of its action. Some have ventured to limit the mercies of GOD, and have confined the action of prayer, not only to those who are on

¹ Rom. viii. 26.

earth, but also to only a few amongst them, who are said to be saved by an eternal decree; but "GOD our SAVIOUR,"—S. Paul tells us in a verse which follows his exhortation to universal intercession—"wills all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth;" and therefore "GOD our SAVIOUR"—after bringing salvation to earth—"went and preached unto the spirits" which "were in prison"—to "the prisoners of hope." Intercession, then, should embrace all; there are no limits to its action on those who are still in a state of probation, save such as they themselves, by resisting the grace which it sends them, assign it.

Neither does Holy Scripture withhold from us the hope that prayer may benefit the departed. The Jews, we know, were in the habit of praying for the dead, and our LORD did not forbid the practice. Some have thought a trace of this devotion is to be discovered in S. Paul's prayer for Onesiphorus—"the LORD grant unto him that he may find mercy of the LORD in that day."¹ A belief which appealed so strongly to human hopes and sorrows was not likely, unless forbidden, to lose its hold, when the eternal world was brought nearer and more clearly revealed, in the Christian Covenant; whilst the command of our LORD to pray for the coming of His Kingdom—"Thy Kingdom

¹ 2 Tim. i. 16—18. "From the use of the form 'household of Onesiphorus' and ch. iv. 19, but still more the terms of the prayer itself in ver. 18, it has been concluded not without some show of probability that Onesiphorus was *now dead*."—Bp. Ellicott, Past. Ep., p. 120.

come," and the Apostle's way of looking beyond death and directing the aims and aspirations of the soul to "the day of JESUS CHRIST," and the mysterious references to CHRIST'S application of the Merits of His Passion in the realms of the dead, and the union between the seen and the unseen in the doctrine of the Communion of Saints, were all calculated to increase rather than lessen the conviction, that there is no gulf fixed between this world and the next, which hinders prayers and grace from passing from the one to the other. That the Jewish practice of praying for the dead, did find a home in the Church at an early date, is evident. Tertullian describes one who had lost her husband as praying for his soul—"she prays for his soul and seeks refreshment for him in the middle place and fellowship with him in the first resurrection."¹ The Liturgy of the Dead was in use in the days of Constantine the Great ; and the teaching of the Church, whether we look at her Formularies or at the writings of the Saints, has been uniform and continuous on this point. But whilst we acknowledge our belief in the potency of prayer beyond the grave, it must be remembered, that all that is involved in this doctrine as to the state of the departed, is, that they are imperfect, have not yet attained their final Bliss, and are waiting for re-union with the body ; and that, in their state of waiting and of preparation, the supplications of the Church Militant may aid the Church within the Veil.

¹ De Monogamiâ, 10.

It has even been thought that the reach of intercessory prayer is so boundless, that it can penetrate not only the realms of the dead, but also the heights of heaven. Therefore in Liturgies we find intercessions for the Saints themselves, even for those who are in Glory. The Saints are, it has been held, capable of an increase of accidental joy—a joy which is over and above their substantial blessedness, a joy, similar to that of the angels, who, though their life is one of unchequered bliss, yet can rejoice over one sinner that repenteth. And such intercessions are offered not only from love for the Saints themselves, but for the greater honour of GOD who is glorified in them. Intercessory Prayer then includes all in the extent of its action, as well as in the duty of practising it.

We will conclude with a few hints as to the manner of interceding. And first, it is well to have a plan, whereby different days of the week or month are assigned to different objects; and to have a rule, as to the length of time to be employed each day in intercession. Secondly, after praying for all in general, the order of charity should guide us in making a selection of those objects, which have an especial claim upon us, e.g. prayers for those connected with us by ties of kindred or religion, for friends and benefactors, for those who are living in sin, for penitents, for those who are persevering, for the dying, for those against whom we have sinned, &c. And here a caution is necessary, lest we forget great interests and confine ourselves to those which

press upon us in our personal life, e.g. there are those who pray for a single grace or blessing on an individual, and neglect to pray for the Church, or the State, or the Clergy, and those who are in authority ; of these interests, the great and the small, it may be said, "these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."¹ Thirdly, intercessions need not be always offered by means of prayers framed for the purpose which have the name of the person or object inserted in them, but any prayer or collect may be offered with the intention of interceding for this or that person or object ; thus "the LORD'S Prayer," or any other, may be repeated for the benefit of others, if we so desire and intend ; and in these and many other ways, the process of intercession may be varied, and so performed without weariness, or strain upon the mental powers, such as would be necessitated by the continual creation of suitable petitions. Fourthly, definiteness is very necessary, if we would make our intercessions effectual ; by concentration of them on a definite object, we heighten their power, as by extension, that power becomes less. As in natural things so in supernatural, concentration is a secret of success. Fifthly, "union is strength," especially in intercessory prayer, for therein a twofold charity is put to account, and we have the promise that "if two agree"² in asking anything, it shall be granted them. Hence, the power of the intercessions

¹ S. Matt. xxiii. 23.

² S. Matt. xviii. 19.

of the Church, and of those unions for prayer which are formed within the circle of the Divinely-constituted Union.

Lastly, intercessory prayer must be perseveringly offered, with the hope that it will be at last effectual. If perseverance is required in praying for oneself, it will be much more necessary in praying for others, for their wills are not under our control ; but when we pray for ourselves we are at least desirous of corresponding with GOD'S grace, when it comes to us. And this hope of final success must be cherished for *all*, however far from GOD they may seem to be. The Church, whilst teaching that those who live and die in deadly sin, are eternally separated from GOD, and forfeit all claims to a supernatural Beatitude,—passes judgment on none, save perhaps on one who “by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place ;”¹ and, although “there is a sin unto death”² for which prayer may be unavailing, it would be presumptuous and uncharitable to exclude any from our prayers on the supposition that they had been guilty of it, and were already in an irreclaimable state. The most unlikely persons according to human estimation, have been won to GOD by the power of intercession ; “had not a Stephen prayed, the Church would not have had a Paul ;” had not Monica persevered in intercession for her wayward but gifted child, the Church would not have had Augustine ; through Prayer, not only have souls which were sunk in sin, been saved,

¹ Acts i. 25.

² 1 S. John v. 16.

but have become saints; so that, those who were "afar off" have not only been "made nigh by the Blood of CHRIST,"¹ but have "come and built in the Temple of the LORD,"² illustrating the power of grace and the greatness of Divine mercy, and edifying others by their lives and transformation. Intercessory Prayer, must be made then with confidence and perseveringly; in this, as in other acts of charity, we must be content to "cast" our "bread upon the waters," and only to "find it after many days."³

These reflections, on the authority for intercessory prayer, the extent of its obligation and action, and the manner of employing it, should lead us to a more diligent fulfilment of this duty, and put us on our guard against the sloth, selfishness, and distrust which often lie at the root of its neglect. If "prayer is," as S. Augustine says, "the measure of love," it will measure it, not only in its exercise towards GOD, but also, towards our neighbour; and consequently the fervour and frequency of our intercessions in behalf of others, will be the index of our love for them; and as the practice of intercessional prayer is prompted by the love of our neighbour, so will it in return heighten that love, and by an increase of the primary virtue of religion, minister to our sanctification.

Thus, under Vocal Prayer, we have considered Private Prayer, Public Prayer, and Intercessory Prayer—the last-named, being either a part of public or private devotion.

¹ Eph. ii. 13.

² Zech. vi. 15.

³ Eccles. xi. 1.

It must not be forgotten, while treating of the contribution which the body makes to our acts of worship, that it is not only by the voice, but also by other exterior signs, that the spirit of adoration is expressed and sustained; and amongst these, more especially by kneeling. JESUS Himself, we are told by S. Luke, "kneeled down and prayed,"¹ and S. Paul bowed his "knees unto the FATHER of our LORD JESUS CHRIST."² The bodily posture, it is true, is in no wise *essential* to prayer, for "though you do not bend the knee, nor smite the breast, nor raise the hands to heaven, if your soul is fervent, you may make an excellent prayer,"³ and yet it is important, seeing that "we prostrate ourselves, as professing that we are nothing of ourselves;" we feel also, that we are truer when "the outward accords with the inward," and the body by its posture manifests the invisible act of the soul. Everything, therefore, which concerns the attitude of the body at the time of praying, though of subordinate importance, has a rightful claim on our attention, and, I may add, on our obedience; for, whilst in private prayer, we may be free to adopt the posture and place which we have found most helpful, in Public Worship, we ought to conform to the ceremonies and customs of the Church.

We have now traversed the ground which was marked out, at the commencement of these Lectures; we have considered the Nature of Prayer, its Necessity, the Objec-

¹ S. Luke xxii. 41.

² Eph. iii. 14.

³ S. Chrysostom.

tions which have been from time to time raised against its efficacy, the Conditions of acceptable Prayer, and the different kinds of Prayer which are included under the main division of "Mental" and "Vocal." We feel in leaving our subject, how much precious ore remains unworked, and how much of that which has been drawn from those mines of Truth and devotion, the Holy Scriptures and the writings of the Saints—may have been ill-assorted, or mixed with alloy through feebleness or fault in handling it; yet, what has been written will not fail in its object, if it leads those to a more systematic "Life of Prayer," who muse upon these pages.

There is one thought with which we will close our great theme; it is this—the momentous bearing which prayer has on the gift of final perseverance. The gift is that which ensures the safe landing of the soul, when it is passing beyond "the waves of this troublesome world"—laden it may be with a rich burden of graces and virtues, the whole of which may be endangered by those billows of temptation which rise up between it and the Eternal Shore; and as this gift can only be obtained in answer to prayer, and cannot be acquired by any merit or goodness of our own, we should constantly ask GOD to grant it. We should seek it, too, in the days of health and strength; for when it will be needed, perhaps the tongue will be fettered, and the mental faculties unable to grasp a thought, and so prayer impossible. The Psalmist has set us an example in this

respect, when he—looking forward to the end, cries, “Cast me not away in the time of age, forsake me not when my strength faileth me ;”¹ and CHRIST Himself, has solemnly bidden us “pray always, that” we “may be accounted worthy to stand before the Son of Man.”²

¹ Ps. lxxi. 8.

² S. Luke xxi. 36.

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