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ON PRAYER

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PLAIN WORDS.

FOURTH SERIES.

ON PRAYER.

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THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

PLAIN WORDS.

FOURTH SERIES.

ON PRAYER.

FORTY READINGS

FOR SUCH AS DESIRE TO PRAY BETTER.

BY THE

RIGHT REV. W. WALSHAM HOW, D.D.

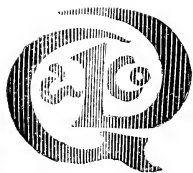
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CONTENTS.



NO.	PAGE
I. PRAYER : ITS NATURE,	1
II. THE SPIRITUAL ATTITUDE OF PRAYER,	6
III. PRAYER : TO WHOM ADDRESSED,	9
IV. PRAYER : ITS DIVISIONS,	12
V. EXAMPLES OF PRAYER,	17
VI. DEGREES OF PRAYER,	21
VII. PRIVATE PRAYER : THE SOUL AND GOD,	25
VIII. PUBLIC PRAYER,	30
IX. FAMILY PRAYER,	35
X. CEASELESS PRAYER,	39
XI. PRAYER : ITS FORM,	44
XII. DIFFICULTIES OF PRAYER,	49
XIII. LOVE OF GOD THE SECRET OF POWER IN PRAYER,	53
XIV. WANDERING THOUGHTS IN PRAYER,	57

NO.	PAGE
XV. DRYNESS IN PRAYER AS A TRIAL, AND HOW TO DEAL WITH IT,	60
XVI. CAUSES OF COLDNESS IN PRAYER,	64
XVII. HABITS OF LIFE WHICH HINDER PRAYER,	69
XVIII. PERSEVERANCE IN PRAYER,	74
XIX. THE ACCEPTANCE OF PRAYER FOR CHRIST'S SAKE,	79
XX. THE ONE PLEA, AS SET FORTH IN HOLY COM- MUNION,	83
XXI. HELPS TO PRAYER,	87
XXII. ORDINARY SUBJECTS OF PRAYER,	91
XXIII. INTERCESSION,	95
XXIV. INFLUENCE OF PRAYER ON THE DAILY LIFE,	99
XXV. MEDITATION AS A HELP TO PRAYER,	103
XXVI. A SCHEME OR PLAN OF DEVOTION,	108
XXVII. PRAYER OF THE UNSEEN WORLD,	112
XXVIII. PRAYER IN CONNECTION WITH SICKNESS,	116
XXIX. BODILY INFIRMITY AS A HINDRANCE TO PRAYER,	120
XXX. THE LORD'S PRAYER,	124
XXXI. FREQUENT USE OF THE LORD'S PRAYER,	129
XXXII. THE LORD'S PRAYER— <i>"Our Father, which art in Heaven,"</i>	133
XXXIII. <i>"Hallowed be Thy Name,"</i>	137

NO.

PAGE

THE LORD'S PRAYER, *continued*--

XXXIV.	" <i>Thy kingdom come,</i>"	. . . . .	141
XXXV.	" <i>Thy Will be done in earth as it is in Heaven,</i>"	. . . . .	145
XXXVI.	" <i>Give us this day our daily bread,</i>"	. . . . .	149
XXXVII.	" <i>Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them</i> <i>"that trespass against us,"</i>	. . . . .	153
XXXVIII.	" <i>Lead us not into temptation,</i>"	. . . . .	157
XXXIX.	" <i>Deliver us from evil,</i>"	. . . . .	161
XL.	" <i>For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the</i> <i>"glory, for ever and ever. Amen,"</i>	. . . . .	165

L

PRAYER: ITS NATURE.

GOD has created two great worlds—the world of matter, and the world of spirit. We often speak of these two great worlds as the things which are seen, and the things which are not seen—the visible, and the invisible; but, when we so speak, we put sight for all the senses, because it is the chief of the senses. In reality, by the world of matter we mean all things which our senses can make known to us,—the air which we breathe, the sounds which we hear, no less than the things which we see: while by the world of spirit we mean all those things which our bodily senses cannot make known to us, or tell us anything about.

Now, as our senses put us into connection with the world of matter, so does Faith with the world of spirit. Faith is to the spiritual world what sense is to the material. Thus Faith is often called the eye of the soul. But, in truth, Faith is not only the eye of the soul, which sees that which the bodily eye cannot see: it is also the ear of the soul, which hears that which the bodily ear cannot hear; the hand of the soul, which touches that which the bodily hand cannot touch. Our senses *realise* the world of matter—make it real, substantial, evident, to us. The work of Faith is to *realise* the world of spirit—to make *that* real,

substantial, evident to us. This work of Faith is plainly described in the words, "While we look, not "at the things which are seen, but at the things which "are not seen." Its task is to draw aside the curtain of the visible and material, and to place us in the presence of the invisible and spiritual.

The invisible world is infinitely greater and more momentous than the visible. Yet the visible, by its presence and closeness to our senses, is always shutting out from us the invisible; just as the little breadth of a man's hand, if held close enough to the eye, will shut out from his sight the mighty sun itself. Faith has to conquer this tremendous power of the visible. The world subdues, not alone by its attractions and allurements, but also by its simple, inevitable presence. It forces itself upon us all day long. The senses are ever active, and never cease to make its presence known to us. It *will* be seen, and heard, and felt. And so the world gets the victory. But "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even "our Faith." Faith overcometh the world by making the unseen as consciously present to us as our senses make the seen. He that lives in the abiding consciousness of the tremendous and eternal realities behind the veil is not dazzled and distracted by the poor gaudy figures painted upon it. Faith is the one true conqueror of Sense.

Among the realities of the unseen world the one great object which stands out in overwhelming majesty is GOD. FAITH BEHOLDS GOD. But God is in Three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Faith therefore contemplates in adoring love and awe this Divine Trinity. The Love, the Power, the Glory of the Father; the Merits, the Atonement, the Example,

the Intercession of the Son; the Life, the sanctifying Power of the Holy Spirit: these occupy and rivet the eye of Faith. But Faith has a voice. THE VOICE OF FAITH IS PRAYER.

Prayer is here used in its widest and fullest sense, as equivalent to worship, and as thus including every act by which the spirit of man goes forth consciously towards, and holds communion with, God, who is Spirit. *Prayer is spirit communing with Spirit.* It is the voice which goes forth from the soul of man into the world behind the veil. Faith beholds; Prayer speaks. Faith without Prayer is a wild and empty inflation of the human imagination, or the horrible vision of devils. Prayer without Faith is the clattering of a tinkling cymbal. If Faith is real, it must worship. If worship is real, it must behold. Neither is the eye anything without the voice, nor the voice without the eye. It follows that Prayer is the greatest reality of our lives. It is the truest spiritual act of our being—the one act which puts our spirits in direct intercourse with the spiritual world behind the veil.

PRAYER IS FAITH SPEAKING TO GOD.

Our subject to-day is not a very easy one, especially to such as are not accustomed to think of such things as we are dealing with. Let me try to put it as simply as I can in other words.

God is a Spirit, whom we cannot see, nor hear, nor feel. But things which we cannot see, nor hear, nor feel, may be quite as real and true as things which we can. And there is a world of such things all around us. But that might very well be true, and yet we might be quite unable to know anything about these things, or to have anything to do with them. It

might be that we were obliged to live our lives entirely among the things which we can see, and hear, and feel, and that the other world, even if true, were quite out of our reach—a world we had no way of approaching. But this is not so. We have in us a power, called Faith, which makes us feel the reality and the presence of the unseen world, so that we are sure God is with us, and that we ourselves have in us a spirit which belongs to that world of spirit, and not to this outer world which we see, and hear, and feel. Moreover, we have in us a power of speaking to God,—a power which takes us (so to speak) into that spirit-world, so that we converse with it. And that power is PRAYER. So we see again that PRAYER IS FAITH SPEAKING TO GOD.

Oh wondrous awful mystery and blessedness of Prayer!

It is hardly conceivable that a being so poor, so weak, so fallen, so sinful, so earthly, should be able, or should be allowed, to speak to God! Yet it is true. God is the God *that heareth Prayer*. He despiseth not the prayer of the poor. Is not this most wonderful kindness and condescension? Yes, but “God is Love”; and the Son of God has died for man; and through Him we have “access by one “Spirit unto the Father.”

II.

THE SPIRITUAL ATTITUDE OF PRAYER.

PRAYER, as we have seen, is the voice of Faith speaking to God. Now it is the work of Faith to set us, as it were, in the very presence of God, to make us realise and feel that presence. The attitude of Faith is that of looking away from self to God. Therefore this too is the *attitude of Prayer*. True worship is the homage of the creature to the Creator, the bowing down of the soul in lowly adoration before its God. This is not sufficiently remembered. There is often far too much of self in our prayers. When people speak of their prayers, how common is it to hear them say they do not find much benefit from them; their prayers do not seem to do them much good. Such persons are thinking only of self, and of the fruits of prayer in self, and this is a very narrow and shallow view to take of prayer. If they came before God with their offering of worship, as weak and sinful creatures paying their homage to Him, laying before Him the adoration of their being, might they not find more to satisfy them?

The true nature and the true blessedness of worship can never be realised so long as the attitude of the soul is that of looking within instead of looking without—self-contemplation instead of the contemplation

of God. It is the fixing the soul's gaze upon God—the clear, vivid contemplation of His infinite goodness and mercy and holiness—which must give to worship its rightful brightness and happiness. How many are cast down, and miserable, and desponding, just because they are always looking in upon self instead of looking out upon God! Now it is quite true that it is necessary to look in upon self at times. This attitude of the soul is required in self-examination and confession. But it is equally true that this inward look alone can never make a man happy in his devotions. As long as we keep looking within, we are not likely to see much to cheer and comfort us. The sight of our own hearts, however wholesome and necessary for us, is not a sight to bring us much satisfaction. And a great many fail in their prayers, simply because they will persist in poring over their own heart's miseries. They are like one who might go into some dark and unclean chamber, and there sit down, utterly wretched at the sight of its bare, dirty, comfortless aspect. What he wants is to rise up, and go to the window, and look out. There he will see God's sunshine bathing all the world in its beautiful light, and he will not then feel so forlorn and miserable. Well, what we often want in our prayers is to *go to the window, and look out*—to gaze with the eye of Faith upon the bright sunshine of God's love pouring all around us in its bountiful wealth of blessing. The counsel which many a poor trembling child of God needs to listen to is simply this: 'You *must* turn your eyes away from self. 'You *must* believe in, and look to, and realise, your heavenly Father's love, and the merits of your Saviour. 'You are looking too much within. You must look 'up and away from self to heaven. You are weighing

‘and measuring your own poor pitiful feelings. You must lean on the promises of God.’

It is clear from these thoughts that it is of the first importance that we hold fast by a belief in the *personal* nature of God. Religion, if it be anything at all, binds us to a God, who is a distinct, self-existing Being. Christianity, if it be any better than a fable, is the system which centres round a Person, even the ever-blessed Son of God. Its relations, its duties, its feelings, are all distinctly personal. Love is a personal affection. Trust is a personal affection. Obedience is a personal duty. And worship is a personal act. It is the going forth of the soul to a *Person* whom it contemplates and adores. Behold, then, how needful for true worship is the setting forth, and the holding in all its fulness, of the true Faith concerning the nature and attributes of God. The more we know and understand a person, the more vivid and definite and real will our feelings be towards him. A firm faith in the great outward truths which God has been pleased to make known to us concerning Himself is an essential condition of true worship. “We *know* “what we worship” is a truth lying at the very root of the matter. Worship must pine and fail where the ideas of the object to which it is addressed are confused and misty, or clouded over with doubts. Worship hangs upon definiteness of belief in its Divine Object.

Now definiteness of belief does not mean a controversial spirit. There is such a thing as extreme jealousy of what is supposed to be the truth, extreme fondness for an intellectual system of belief, which is injurious, instead of helpful, to the spirit of worship. A controversial spirit may imply belief in a *system*. It is a *reverential* spirit which implies belief in a *Person*.

It is not definite belief alone which is so essential to worship: it is definite belief in a *Person*.

We may trace out the connection between Faith and Worship in the history of the Church itself. Those ages in which the great truths concerning the nature of God were grasped with a firmness and vividness and joyousness, which in these days of dimness and doubting we can hardly understand, were also ages of the purest and noblest worship. See how the ancient hymns of the Church are full of worship—hymns of glorious praise, like the *Te Deum*. Now our hymns are full of self-communings, and of the feeble emotions and often unhealthy experiences of our own souls. Thank God, in these later years there has been a marvellous and most blessed growth in our land of the setting forth of the Person of our Divine Lord, so that I suppose modern times have never witnessed more earnest preaching of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. This could not be without a corresponding outgrowth of worship. We read of the great gathering of the disciples to meet the risen Lord on the mountain in Galilee, that “*when they saw Him, they worshipped Him.*” It is so now. Let men only *see* Jesus—let Him be only faithfully and clearly held up to their gaze, and they will learn new lessons of holy worship. As Faith beholds with more earnest intensity the Lamb that was slain, worshipped and glorified by the Angels and Archangels and all the host of heaven, it will bow the head in reverent adoration and worship. The fire will kindle, and Faith will speak. And the voice of Faith is worship. But if such is the worship of Faith, what will be the worship of sight?

III.

PRAYER: TO WHOM ADDRESSED.

It is scarcely necessary to say that there is no Prayer at all without a conscious speaking to God. The act of saying words of Prayer without this conscious speaking to God is simply the shell without the kernel. Who would not tremble to offer to God such a hollow mockery? God forgive us the many, many times we have thus dishonoured Him!

But while that is no Prayer at all which is not spoken to God, it is plainly of vast importance to our Prayers to have true and clear notions of that God to whom we speak. The character of our Prayers will be greatly affected by the way in which we think of God.

When we kneel down to pray, and try to put ourselves by an act of the mind in the presence of God, how shall we think of Him?

1. As a Spirit. "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." There must be no picturing of God to ourselves in any form or likeness. There must be no thinking of Him as in one particular place. It is true we look up to heaven, and often address our prayers to God as dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto. This is perfectly lawful and right, for there is a place where God displays His glorious

majesty, and to which our hopes and aims, as well as our prayers, are pointed. Yet we must never forget that God is not far from every one of us; that He is not such a God as the ignorant heathen pictured of old — a God far withdrawn from all earthly cares and interests into the serene heights of His unapproachable dwelling-place; but a God present, in all the intensity of His omnipotence and omniscience, in every spot and with every one of us — a God as profoundly interested in the state—the hopes and fears, the sins and successes, the joys and the sorrows—of each single soul as if there were no other in existence. Thus, when we are about to pray, we should try to bring before our minds the sense of God's presence, as well as of His listening ear. Perhaps this sense of God's presence is sometimes injured and weakened by the language so constantly used as to prayers ascending up to His throne in the highest heavens. For instance, how often have we heard such a sentence as this:—‘The prayer that starts from a lowly heart stops not till it reaches the ear of God.’ Is there not something misleading in this idea of a long journey which prayer has to make in passing from earth to heaven? Is it not more true to think of God as quite close to us when we pray—to try to realise and feel His presence as surrounding us, enclosing us? Nay, is even this enough? Or must we not rather believe this presence to be not only around us, but *within* us, so that God is closer to us than the very air we breathe, and that in speaking to Him we are holding commune with One who in His wonderful loving-kindness makes His very abode with us? If we sometimes think of God in His dwelling-place of heavenly glory, yet let us often try

to feel the awful closeness of His presence, and speak to Him as we might to a friend at our side.

2. Prayer may rightly be addressed to each Person of the Divine Trinity separately. No doubt most prayer should be addressed to God the Father, as the fountain and source of all things. And perhaps there is some need of a caution in these days lest this be lost sight of. There has been a great leaning on the part of some towards addressing prayer mainly to God the Son. Of the lawfulness and fitness of such prayer we may not doubt. It is God's will "that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father." And if we believe, with the Church universal, that Jesus Christ is "equal to the Father as touching His Godhead," plainly worship is His right. We dare worship none but God. But we worship Jesus, because we believe Him to be God. Yet it is no less true that to address our prayers mainly to Him may be a dishonouring of the Father, even as it is contrary to the spirit of the Bible and the usage of the Church. The number of prayers in our Prayer-book addressed directly to the Son is small by comparison, while of prayers addressed directly to the Holy Ghost we have but the third Invocation in the Litany, and the Hymn, "Come, Holy Ghost," in the Ordination Service. We doubtless *may* pray to each Person, but it is wise in doing so to follow the guidance of the Church, and to address most of our prayers to God the Father, through the merits and mediation of His Son Jesus Christ.

3. When we pray directly to Jesus Christ, the rule as to not conceiving of God under any form or likeness cannot hold good. For He has taken our nature,

and been "made in the likeness of men." So that there can be nothing wrong in imagining Him to ourselves in His human form, which we know He still wears in His glory. It is not that we worship His Manhood apart from His Godhead. But His Godhead and Manhood have been so joined together, "never to be divided," that in order to think of Him rightly, we must think of Him in His human nature no less than in His divine. And indeed it is that human nature of Jesus which so draws us to Him, for it is there that we find that true human heart which ever beats in tenderest sympathy with His people. We are sure of a welcome when we come to Him who lived and suffered and died for us. Nay, we are sure of a welcome when, poor trembling helpless sinners as we are, we come to the Father through Him.

IV.

PRAYER: ITS DIVISIONS.

PRAYER in its widest sense, as equivalent to worship, embraces various acts.

The voice of the soul does not always speak in the same tones. It is a grand chord made up of many notes, some higher and some lower.

Worship, whether private or public, should aim at completeness. It should embrace the several great leading acts of devotion. There should be Confession, Praise, Thanksgiving, and Petition.

In our public worship we begin with Confession. This surely seems right and natural. A child who has offended its father would naturally go and ask forgiveness before seeking new favours. Our Reformers, acting upon this view, and going back to the very earliest accounts we have of Christian worship,* added the penitential portion (that is, all preceding the Lord's Prayer) at the beginning of our Daily Morning and Evening Prayer ; and for this we owe

* St Basil, a Christian Father, who wrote about A.D. 370, speaks of the customs which then prevailed as similar in all the churches, and describes them thus : " The people, rising early " while it is yet night, come to the house of prayer, and there, " having with contrition and affliction and many tears confessed " their sins to God, they at length rise from their prayers, and " dispose themselves to psalmody, sometimes dividing themselves " into two parts, and singing alternately."

them a deep debt of gratitude. It seems well that our private prayer should follow the same order, and begin with Confession. This is especially needful at night, when we pass in review the day which is over, with all its sins and infirmities. Surely we should never be content to lie down at night without a humble and penitent confession of the sins of the day past. Let this be the first act of our evening devotion, and all the rest will be far more blessed. We shall feel we are speaking to a Father from whom we have sought and won pardon and acceptance.

Praise follows next in our public worship. Praise is the setting forth of God's glory. In other acts of worship we speak of *self*—of the sins we have committed, of the needs we desire to have supplied, of the mercies for which we would express our thankfulness. Thus our attitude in Confession, in Prayer, in Thanksgiving, is the humblest. We fall down on our knees, as utterly unworthy to bring ourselves into the presence of the All-holy One. But in Praise it is otherwise. Then no thought of self remains; our spirits soar up to God himself; we adore His Divine perfections; we set forth His glorious attributes. Thus in Praise we rise to our noblest attitude; we lift up head and heart and voice to heaven. We are caught away from all that is earthly and imperfect to the contemplation of the Divine. We join with Angels and Archangels in their noblest and most blessed work. Such is true Praise. It is plain from its very nature that Praise has a peculiar fitness for *public* worship. However individual sins and wants and mercies may differ, all can utter the same voice of Praise. Thus the most ancient forms of worship we possess, namely the Psalms, are in a great measure

the utterance of Praise. Still, surely Praise is not unsuitable for *private* worship. And may it not be that it is too much lost sight of there? In old times it was the custom of many habitually to read the Psalms of the day, thus supplying the element of Praise to their devotions. Might not many be the better for reviving this dying custom?

Thanksgiving is very frequently mingled with Praise, yet they are distinct acts, and should be kept distinct, or at least should be distinctly borne in mind, that, even if intermingled, neither should be omitted. Thanksgiving differs from Praise in that, while the latter contemplates God's glory and God's goodness *in themselves*, the former regards these as displayed in His mercies *to us*. Praise is the homage of the creature to the Creator; thanksgiving of the benefited to the Benefactor. Let there be then in our devotions a distinct act of grateful recollection of mercies received, both ordinary and special.

Prayer proper, in the narrow sense of petition, divides itself into petition for self and petition for others, the latter being generally known as Intercession. Plainly a large part of our worship must consist of these. The first and simplest idea of worship is asking God for what we need. Therefore it is unnecessary to dwell farther upon this. It is probable that all who pray at all do make request both for themselves and for others.

Our object to-day is to show that in worship, whether public or private, there is variety and order. It is found to be a great help to keep the several acts of worship as distinct as possible. It gives to them clearness and definiteness. At the same time, when the heart is very full of some one thing; or when some

one feeling, such as the sense of sin, or gratitude for some special mercy, predominates ; it is surely well to allow great freedom in following the impulse of the hour, and not to cramp the natural movements of the soul by the bonds of set rules and order. When the soul can pour itself out freely in any one channel, we may be very thankful that it can do so, and we need not fear that God will blame such unrestrained fervour. Would that it were commoner ! Yet for ordinary use it is none the less well to aim at the distinct acts of worship we have spoken of.

Let us, before we end, think of our worship as like some beautiful garden, in which are many varied flowers. Confession is like some lowly-creeping herb, lying close to the ground, and smelling sweetest when bruised and broken. Prayer is like some delicate but lovely flower, opening wide to the sunshine of heaven, and with a very sweet scent before God, for Prayer is like incense. Intercession (itself a branch of prayer) is like some fair climbing-plant, clinging to others, for it is full of love. Thanksgiving is a very pleasant and fragrant flower, holding in its centre a dewdrop of blessing from God himself. But stateliest and loveliest of all is Praise, like tall white lilies in their purity and grace ; for Praise has in it no earthly admixture, and lifts us nearest to heaven. Oh that we loved better to walk in this garden of sweet flowers !

V.

EXAMPLES OF PRAYER.

No one ever attained to real holiness without much Prayer. God's saints in old times prayed much. David says, "In the evening, and morning, and at noonday, will I pray, and that instantly, and He shall hear my voice"; while the author of the 119th Psalm, who has been supposed by some to be Daniel, says, "Seven times a day do I praise Thee, because of Thy righteous judgments." We are told of Daniel that at least he "kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God"; but this is said of the special times of prayer which he was in the habit of observing most strictly, and the observance of which he would not be induced by the fear of consequences to conceal from his enemies. There is nothing to show that Daniel prayed and gave praise to God *only* three times a day. Indeed, nothing is more remarkable in the history of all who have attained to more than common holiness, than the large space which Prayer has occupied in their daily lives. It would be very easy to give a long list of honoured names from the records of all ages, and of all branches of the Church, to prove the truth of this. I have before me at the present moment such a list; but the mere reciting of a number of names would scarcely be profitable, and it would be impossible to

give the many interesting particulars of their several cases. The general result of contemplating such evidence is the conviction that all very good men have been men of much prayer. It is almost perplexing to find that those who seem to have had time to effect most good, and whose names are known as those of men full of active labours and success in good works, are exactly those who have given *hours*—and in not a few cases the *best* hours—of the day to devotion. It is no uncommon thing to read of great and good men devoting two or three hours to private devotion daily ; while it is no less striking to find many gathering up strength and wisdom for a laborious life of public usefulness in the daily attendance of the Church's Morning and Evening Prayer. If any one is ever tempted to look upon such an observance as a waste of time which might be more profitably employed otherwise, it would be easy to show the falseness of such an objection from the lives of good men, who have been full of active and successful labours. It is quite untrue that only those who retire from active life can find time for much prayer. Of course there is the *spirit of prayer*, which we may take with us into our daily labours ; but, beyond that, we have abundant proof that even *much time* may be given to devotion in a very active life. Certain it is that saintliness is impossible without much prayer. Activity, usefulness, exemplary conduct,—these are possible, but not saintliness. This is a busy age, and much prayer is not the fashion. Perhaps the world scarcely believes in much prayer. Yet even in these busy, hurrying days there are those who pray much. In a journal kept by the late devoted Bishop Gray (of Cape Town), not intended for publication. there is the record of a long

weary stage during a visitation tour, for the whole of which, the Bishop records with thankfulness, he was able to hold uninterrupted communion with God. The writer of these words is well acquainted with one person, a widow, who for many years has spent five hours daily, two in the morning and three at night, in prayer. It is well to know of such instances, though the knowledge puts one to shame.

After all, whatever may be learned from the example of holy men as recorded in the Bible, or from the practice of holy men in later times, there is one example of Prayer which must ever stand out from all others in its power and influence. Jesus Christ prayed in the midst of the busiest, the most laborious life that ever was lived on earth. He sought retirement for prayer; He continued whole nights in prayer. This is very wonderful. We might have thought that He needed not prayer. Certainly He had no sins to confess, no infirmities or weaknesses to commit to His Father's mercy, no graces or virtues to ask for. Therefore He needed not prayer as we do. Yet He prayed, and prayed as none other ever prayed. His prayers were, we doubt not, in a great part intercession. He prayed for others—for us. This we can see from the marvellous prayer recorded for us in the 17th chapter of St John's Gospel. Even here He began the great work which, as our great High Priest, He ever liveth to do for us in heaven. Yet not this alone. Behold Him bowed down on His face on the ground in Gethsemane. For whom prays He now? This is no intercession for His beloved. It is for Himself He is pleading in such an agony of earnestness. It is the exceeding bitterness of the cup of suffering put to His lips that forces from Him the

cry for escape. Oh marvellous sight! The Son of God prays! He who could say of Himself that "what things soever the Father doth, these also doeth the Son likewise,"—He prays! Oh wonderful power and blessedness of Prayer! The weapon is wielded by the Son of God himself! And shall He, who needed it so little, pray so much; and shall we, who need it so much, pray so little? True, we have not the power to pray as He did. But if our power is less, how much greater is our need! If His Divine nature enabled Him to hold such blessed and intimate communion with His heavenly Father, while our fallen humanity makes our prayers poor, and weak, and faltering, shall we not seek that our necessities may do for us what His Divine freedom from all necessities did for Him—bring us more and more in deep, earnest, continuous prayer before the throne of our Father in heaven?

Another thought flows from the prayer of Christ. He is *the* Son. But we also are sons. Baptized into Him, we partake of His Sonship. If we realised this, should we not pray better? Our great Example prayed, holding blessed communion with His Father. Would not our prayers be far more blessed than they are if they were like His in this—if they were the communing of loving children with a loving Father?

VI.

DEGREES OF PRAYER.

WHAT is the worship of Angels like? We can faintly and dimly picture to ourselves its intense and glorious ecstasy. The whole spirit is filled with adoring love. There is no such thing as effort or constraint. It is the irresistible, spontaneous outpouring of a love which cannot and will not be denied expression. If we think, we shall easily see that love is the true source of power in prayer. Where love is perfected, there Prayer must be rapture. No doubt we fail, in our poverty-stricken hearts here below, to conceive or realise the bliss of angelic worship. We can talk about it in words ; we can see how gloriously happy and jubilant it must be ; but we cannot *feel* it yet. We hope to know what it means hereafter ; but now we only feebly trace a dim outline of its glory. What we chiefly feel is how very unlike our worship is to what we conceive the worship of Heaven to be.

Contrast with this the other extreme.

Think of the prayer of some poor ignorant labouring man, utterly unused, and therefore unable, to grasp spiritual truths, and to realise things which we cannot see. He knows he ought to say his prayers, and he kneels down and repeats his Lord's Prayer, with a most imperfect sense of the act he is performing, and

with a most imperfect idea of the meaning of the words he is saying. Yet he means to pray; he does it as well as he knows how to do it; and God forbid we should say that even such a prayer as his is no prayer in God's sight.

I have tried to describe the highest and the lowest degrees of prayer which I can imagine. Of course no one could count as Prayer at all a bare, thoughtless, meaningless saying over of a mere form of words, be it longer or shorter. But take the thrilling and glorious worship of an Angel on the one hand, and the lowest and most ignorant prayer that has in it a single spark of life on the other, and what a marvellous interval lies between! Within this interval are many degrees of Prayer, each more blessed as it approaches nearer the highest.

We may roughly sketch some of the rounds in this ladder of Prayer. Let the reader only remember that we are not now tracing the degrees of Prayer in the order in which they will of necessity be gained by the Christian as he learns to pray better, but only following them up in the order of their blessedness. It is very frequently the case that a high and very blessed stage of Prayer is arrived at almost at once; yes, and alas! how often lost again afterwards! Few can be ignorant of the fact that even young children can often pray with much fervency and happiness; while a new convert has frequently great power of prayer granted him to support him in his new trials.

Attentive Prayer is the first upward step in the ladder. This is simply the uttering of our prayers with a thoughtful attention to the meaning of what we say. We may have little fervour and joy in prayer, and yet we may pray attentively. So long as

we are consciously speaking to God, saying the words of prayer with a sense that we are God's creatures setting forth our needs before Him, trying to be real and true, and not going through a mere hollow outside form, so long we are really praying. Anything short of this cannot be counted prayer at all. And beyond this many a poor lowly soul finds itself unable to go. It has no wings to rise above this low level of prayer. Well; let it not be grieved overmuch. All prayer is blessed. And God asks not more than He gives power to do. Nor does He measure His gifts by the warmth of our entreaties.

—The next step is the *Prayer of desire*. By this we mean a prayer accompanied by a true and earnest longing for that which we pray for. It is said, "They 'that desire nothing pray for nothing.'" and it is certainly a poor sort of prayer which has in it no earnest wish for its own success. A beggar, who showed by his manner that he did not care to have his petition granted, would be little likely to gain it. This desire for that which we pray for is not to be won in a moment, or excited in the soul at will. It is a part of a much wider thing—a part of the very life of God in the soul. When the heart is given to God, and the affections are set on things above, then this desire will come simply and naturally, and our prayers will be not alone carefully uttered requests, but holy longings and heartfelt desires.

—We may next pass upwards to *Fervent Prayer*. This means not only attentive prayer accompanied by a true desire for the granting of the request, but prayer prayed with real warmth and eagerness—such a prayer, for instance, as a mother will pray for her dying child. This only comes when the emotions are

really stirred, and the heart is full. It would be foolish to expect our prayers to be always accompanied by this warmth and fervour. Let those thank God who can at least sometimes pray thus. It is a sign of God's grace, and of the presence of that Divine Comforter, who "helpeth our infirmities."

Beyond this we may rise to something even yet nearer to the Prayer of Angels. For there is a power of blissful rapt adoration granted to some here below, which is a true foretaste of the worship of heaven. Of this sort of prayer we would speak very humbly and distrustfully, as of a land all but unknown to most of us. And yet there have been travellers through the wilderness who have entered into this fair region, and have told us of its beauty and its blessedness.

These degrees of Prayer are named for two reasons—(1) In order to stir the Christian to earnest striving after higher stages of prayer than he has yet reached; but (2) still more in order to speak a word of comfort to those who feel too sadly how low down they still are on the ladder of prayer. All are not gifted with the same power of prayer. Many are by natural constitution colder and less easily moved; but all can attain to attentive prayer, and all, by practice, to prayer of desire. Fervent prayer; blissful adoration;—these are perhaps unattainable by some. Let each do what he can. Above all, let no one be content with the stage which he has already reached, but strive upward, hoping, however little he can worship here like Angels, hereafter to worship with the Angels, where all these sad infirmities of our poor fallen nature will have for ever passed away.

VII.

PRIVATE PRAYER: THE SOUL AND GOD.

THERE is something very full of awe in the thought of the soul alone face to face with God. It is this which gives to private prayer its peculiar character and blessedness. It is an intensely personal and individual act. There are none others to kindle the soul's fervour with the fire of sympathy: but there are also none others to withdraw its thoughts from the one awe-inspiring consciousness of being in the very presence of God.

Private Prayer has the seal of the special commendation of our Lord Jesus Christ. "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and, when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret." See how the secrecy of the act is enforced. See how every least possibility of the hypocrite's display is shut out. Even God Himself is spoken of as "in secret," as though in the privacy of the shut chamber God drew nigh to the praying soul. There can be nothing there done to be seen, or spoken to be heard, of men. So the private prayer has more than other prayers a character and sense of deep living reality. It may be formal. It may be dull and cold and lifeless. But it cannot well be hypocrisy. Think of the soul, and think of God. The soul!

—God hath made it, and hath endowed it with deathless life. It is as immortal as God. It must live for ever. It cannot perish and come to an end. Strangely, mysteriously linked with this perishable frame, it is nevertheless created for eternity. And it meets its God in the secret place of prayer. We do not, of course, mean that God is really more truly present there than He is everywhere. But we must speak as men speak ; as the Bible, for the sake of man's infirmity and ignorance, is pleased to speak. There God is pleased to listen to the soul that prays. There He will have His creature realise His presence and His listening ear. And God !—what can we, what dare we, say of God ? We can but say a few foolish ignorant words ; we can but bow before such glimpses of His majesty as He has been pleased to grant us. We feel that silence is better than words. Yet we know He is the Eternal, “from everlasting to “everlasting” ; the Almighty, in whose hands we are as nought ; the Omniscient, “who telleth the number of the stars, and calleth them all by their name,” and yet He “unto whom all hearts be open, all desires “known, and from whom no secrets are hid” ; the All-good, whose “mercy is over all His works.” Such is He whom we seek in the secret closet, before whom this soul He hath made lieth naked.

O God, who that knoweth what it is he doeth, can come lightly and carelessly into Thy presence, as I have so often done ? Can it really have been that I have gone apart to speak to Thee who seest in secret, and yet have been lacking in reverence and awe ? Yea, Lord, I confess it with shame. Yet pardon Thy poor sinful child, and teach me how solemn and how wonderful a thing it is to speak face to face in secret

with Thee. Let me never dare again to speak to Thee lightly or carelessly or irreverently.

Besides the sense of awe and reality which belongs to the thought of a soul alone with God, it is plain that the life of private prayer will be in its utterance of *individual* confessions, needs, petitions, intercessions. There are many things that we can speak to God only in private. When even two or three are gathered together in Christ's Name, their prayers must be such as to suit all, and cannot express the private needs and separate feelings of each. So that if private prayer ranks lower than public in jubilation and grandeur and power, it ranks higher in tenderness and emotion and spirituality. It is, I suppose, certain that those prayers which touch ourselves—our own needs and our own feelings—most closely ; which either enter into the depths of the soul's experience, and have to do with its secret struggles and trials, or else plead for those who are near and dear to us ; will have the greatest warmth and intensity. It may be that this arises from a sort of selfishness, which puts our own needs before those of others. But we are so constituted, or so changed by the fall, that we cannot help thus feeling for ourselves first. The most unselfish will pray more longingly for what they feel they want for themselves, than for things apart from themselves. Prayers for pardon, for mercy, for grace ; intercession for those we dearly love ; touch us all, I suppose, somewhat more closely than prayers for the Sovereign, or the Church, or the Land. But, whatever be the cause, the fact remains. Private prayer is more personal, and therefore generally more awakening to some of the deeper and tenderer feelings, than public. Only let us see that, when thus brought

face to face with our God, we miss not the blessing ; that the soul *has* its sins, and its weaknesses, and its wants, and its longings, to lay before Him ; that we know something of that simple and unaffected, yet at the same time sublime and reverential, communing with God, which is the reality of worship.

Closely connected with the thought of the personal and individual nature of private prayer is that of its *definiteness*. The things we speak of to God must not only be the wants and longings of our soul but they must be clear, distinct, definite things. It is easy to be hazy and vague and general in our prayers ; confessing ourselves miserable sinners, but confessing no miserable sins ; thanking God for His goodness, but remembering with gratitude no special mercies ; asking for grace and holiness, but bent upon no particular virtues ; praying for relations and friends, but making no earnest intercession for separate persons. I am sure we lose greatly in point and reality and force, by making our prayers so vague and general.

“ We use words often and often that would suit
 “ ten thousand others as well as ourselves ; whereas
 “ a crowd of suitors who stand with their petitions
 “ ready written, when the King comes forth on some
 “ festal day to grant favours and largesses, have each
 “ their own peculiar distresses set forth, and their
 “ own special pleas, couched in the best words, and
 “ backed with the strongest arguments they can
 “ find.” *

But in order to be thus clear and definite in our prayers, we need to *watch* unto prayer. “ Watching

* J. Hampden Gurney.

“unto prayer implies that we are *storing up matter* for our prayers ; so watching our steps and words and thoughts, so taking account of our hours as they pass, so marking the defects and failures of our common life, as to know what to pray *about*, and what to pray *for*, and what to pray *against*, when the time comes.” “Our confessions and our supplications, depend upon it, are all too vague. We do not draw enough on the day’s experience for the night’s devotions.”*

Oh ! may God’s Holy Spirit so help our infirmities, and so teach us to pray to our Father which is in secret, that our Father which seeth in secret may, of His infinite mercy, at last reward us openly, for Jesus Christ’s sake.

* J. Hampden Gurney.

VIII.

PUBLIC PRAYER.

PUBLIC Prayer to a very great extent follows, and depends upon, private. We *learn* to pray in the closet—seldom, perhaps, in church. And yet, when we have once learnt the lesson of prayer, no time of prayer is more blessed than the time of public prayer. We ought to be able to say, “I was glad when they said unto me, We will go into the house of the Lord.” If we cannot, it is probably either because we have never learnt the lesson of prayer at all, or because we have never learnt the true nature and special power of public prayer. The very life and power of public worship lie in its sense of union and fellowship. It is the united prayer of many hearts which makes it so blessed. Have we never felt the kindling of fervour, and the access of the spirit of devotion, stirred within us by the consciousness that others are praying earnestly by our side? Have we never felt the fire of sympathy, the lighting up of soul after soul in the glow of holy adoration, as we have worshipped the Lord in the beauty of holiness? I suppose that even Angels can praise God better in companies than one by one. It is this fellowship in worship that ought to give our Church services their true blessedness. In our common worship we may surely, if we will, teach and admonish one another, as we join in our prayers

and praises, our "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." It is a thought to be remembered when we enter God's House, that we can, if we will, not only pray fervently ourselves, but help others to pray also.

From this thought follows another, namely, that of the duty of setting an example of outward reverence. We must not shrink from being seen to pray. Hateful and contemptible as is the hypocrisy of pretending to pray when we are not praying at all, there is, be it remembered, a danger on the other side. Not a few, from the very dread of this hypocrisy, as well as from our English reserve and dislike of any outward show of feeling, do really pretend not to pray when they are praying. They dread lest an attitude of too great devoutness, lest the uttering of the words with their lips, lest any outward act of worship, should be construed into a display and a boast, should seem to say to others, 'See how I am praying.' It has its good side—this sensitiveness and dread of display. But the Christian man should never forget the influence he has over others in his conduct in God's House. He should recollect that, if he really does pray, or if he honestly tries to pray, the knowledge of this has a strange power over others. The sight of his attitude of prayer—of his reverence and devoutness of manner,—will many and many a time wake up the spirit of prayer in his neighbour also; and who can tell how far this influence may spread? It is certain that one truly devout worshipper may affect by his example a whole congregation, and be the means of stirring up in many souls a sense of the power and blessedness of united worship. We want more and more, when we go up into the House of the Lord, to realise our unity in Christ,

and brotherhood as children of God. We want to lose the memory of all narrower ties. We want to put away all distinctions, all separations, and rich and poor, old and young, one with another, to do all we can to realise and feel and show that we are one great family bowing down in reverent worship before our one common Father.

There is another feature in public worship which adds to its blessedness : it is marked by a larger proportion of Praise than are our private prayers. It may indeed be that we too often fall short in praise when alone with God ; but it is plain that the uttering of God's praises is an act of homage peculiarly fitted for public worship ; for there is in it no mention of our own private needs or feelings, in which each must have many things to speak which would not suit his neighbour's state of soul, but only the setting forth of the glory and greatness of God—an act in which all God's rational creatures may well unite, lifting up one heart and one voice to the everlasting throne. And not only so, but also we are so constituted that our praises are especially quickened and aided by the voice of song. What is the invitation of the Psalmist of old, with which our Church stirs up her children to the work of Praise ? “ O come, let us *sing* unto the Lord” ; and again, “ O sing praises, sing praises unto our God ; O “sing praises, sing praises unto our King.” The singing of God's praises has been ever the joy of His people. It is Angel's work. When we set forth God's praises, we join with “ Angels and Archangels, and “with all the company of heaven.” Nay more, we forget not that ere Jesus himself passed from the upper chamber to the scenes of His Passion, the little band lifted up their voices together, and sang a hymn.

It is not within my purpose to say much concerning the blessed Sacrament which is the crown and summit of our public worship—to which indeed all its other acts would lead us on. But it is impossible to speak of the special power and blessedness of public worship without reminding ourselves that here we find the truest deepest bond of Christian unity and fellowship, and that, if all public worship should teach us to realise our brotherhood in Christ, and make us feel that we are “members one of another,” much more should this most holy Feast of love knit us together, and fill our souls with the spirit of brotherly kindness and charity, as we recollect, kneeling to receive the Bread of life, that we are all “one bread and one “body.”

I am sure it would often help us to enter better into the public worship of our Church, if we tried to realise more clearly the different acts of worship we are called upon to take part in in their turn. Possibly we do not keep these separate acts sufficiently apart in our minds. They might be more real, if kept more distinct. We want to make our Confession, our Praise, our Thanksgiving, our Prayers, our Intercessions, our Creeds, our hearing of God's Word, each a distinct and separate act. This would help us to escape from the vagueness and mistiness which so often beset our prayers. I know how weak we are. I know how little will distract, and chill, and unhinge the mind. I know how hard it is to realise, even very imperfectly, the true spirit and meaning of our beautiful worship. Perhaps not once in twenty times do we enter with real earnestness into each act of our public service. We will thank God if even now and then we are able to make some portion true and real to

our souls; if one day we can confess humbly, and another day praise joyfully, and another day intercede fervently.

Let me tell a little story which may serve well to illustrate the way in which even very ignorant and imperfect worshippers may enter into the meaning of the different acts of public worship. A clergyman, coming to a parish, met with an old woman who was very deaf, and who told him she could not read. He, however, noticed the same woman apparently using a book in Church. So, calling again, he asked her if it were so. She told him, Yes, she had a book given her by a former clergyman, which she used, but she was not sure whether he could read it. When she brought it to him he found it was a book of only four leaves, of which the first was black, the second red, the third white, and the fourth golden. He confessed his ignorance of how to read it; so she explained that her former pastor had taught her thus: We begin our service, you know, with confession, so open your book then at the black page, and tell God of the blackness of your sins. Then we tell you of God's pardon through Jesus Christ, so turn next to the red page, and thank God for the Blood of Jesus Christ, which cleanseth from all sin. Then, as we go on with the service, we pray for many graces and virtues, so turn to the white page and pray God for purity and holiness and grace to keep from every stain of sin. And lastly, while we are praising God, you can turn to the golden page, and think of Jerusalem the golden, and the crown of glory which is in store for you in heaven.

IX.

FAMILY PRAYER.

THE blessedness of Public Worship is in its sense of union and fellowship, opening the soul to wider relations and sympathies than those of home and daily life.

The blessedness of Private Prayer is in its personal and individual character, in the sense of the soul alone, face to face, with God.

The blessedness of Family Prayer is in its consecration of the Christian household to the daily service of God. It is a continual repetition of the resolve, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Surely it is a good thing thus to link together in a spiritual act those whom God's Providence has most closely linked together in the relationships of daily life. These relationships have their duties, and among these may we not reckon that of a care for each other's souls? Surely the heads of households will have an account to give of the way in which they have shown their care for the souls of those dwelling under their roof. It is not much they can do perhaps. But they can do this. At least most can. Of course there is no rule to be laid down for all. There may be households where Family Prayer is really impossible. But where there are children, and still more where there are servants, it is not much to ask on their

behalf that they be gathered together twice if possible, but at least once, in the day, for family worship. I have often heard those who have lived in service speak with thankfulness of the privilege of daily family prayer, and I have heard others speak with sorrow and surprise of its neglect in houses in which they have lived. Surely the practice does wonderfully sanctify and hallow the daily family life. Where family prayer might be, but is not, there is truly nothing to mark the household as a Christian one at all. It might be heathen for all that appears.

Why is it not more universal? There is plenty to be said for it, and nothing against it—at least nothing that, I think, you would not be ashamed to say. Let me just touch once more on that reason (if we can call it reason) which, as we saw, sometimes prevails to hinder reverence of demeanour in Church, and which not unfrequently prevails to hinder the practice of family prayer,—I mean that love of honesty and truth, that hatred of the least approach to hypocrisy and unreality, which so marks the English character. This, together with natural reserve and shyness, really hinders many from adopting a practice which in their hearts they approve of. It would not be difficult to carry on the practice if it had once been established; but to *begin*—this is so like making a profession, so like saying, ‘I mean to be more religious.’ Now I do not want people to wear their hearts outside. I do not blame this natural reluctance to take such a step. But, oh! surely it is no great profession to make. The question is a very simple one. Is it right? Then, in God’s Name, do it. Let all consideration be given to modesty and humility—but none to cowardice. “Only fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth with

“all your heart.” Is it much to ask of those on whom this command is laid that they should just conquer their shyness for once, and begin a habit for which they will be very thankful as soon as it has become familiar to them?

In most households, family prayer is the only possible substitute for the Church's daily service. Of course, where the whole household can enjoy the great privilege of a daily Church service, this is a higher and better thing than family prayer. But even where some of the family can attend the Church's daily prayer, it is very rarely the case that many can do so, so that even this does not render family prayer needless.

But this thought of the Church's daily service naturally leads to the question of the form which family prayer should take.

Let us consider, in the first place, the case of ordinary households unable to avail themselves of the Church's daily service.

We venture to think in this case it is very desirable that there should be some approach to the Church's system.

For instance, it would be well to read a portion of the Psalms, or one of the Lessons of the day, or both, before kneeling down to pray.

Then the prayers may very fitly be selected from the Prayer-book, and should consist of Confession, Prayer for pardon, the Lord's Prayer, the Collect for the Day, any other Collects (especially, the 3rd for Morning or Evening, as the case may be), Intercession, Thanksgiving, and Concluding Collect with the Benedictory Prayer. In the morning it may suffice to say the “Lord, have mercy upon us. Christ, have

“mercy upon us. Lord, have mercy upon us,” instead of the Confession and Prayer for pardon. In one respect only it would seem that the Prayer-book will hardly supply all we need, namely in the matter of Intercession. The “Prayer for all conditions of men,” will require some clauses added, or a separate form of Intercession may be used, in order to lay before the throne of grace the relatives and friends of the family, the parish and its ministers, and such other persons as it may be desired specially to mention. The habitual use of the Prayer-book in the family will help to make it familiar in Church, and its pure and chastened language will become dearer the more it becomes familiar.

Many prefer forms of prayer not taken from the Prayer-book, and, where some members of the family attend Church daily, such will be best. But we believe that prayers divided into the several acts of worship, as in many books they are, will always be found more instructive and helpful than those which provide one long unbroken prayer for each occasion.

It is, we believe, a truth which cannot be denied that the healthiness and purity of a country depends upon the healthiness and purity of its domestic life. Oh! that the domestic life of our land were more hallowed and ennobled by the blessed influence of religion! Oh! that more of our people would honestly and manfully resolve, “As for me and my house, we will serve the
“Lord.”

X.

CEASELESS PRAYER.

‘THE command, “Pray without ceasing,” cannot be ‘taken literally,’ you will say : ‘it is so impossible, that ‘common sense will no doubt give it a very qualified ‘meaning.’ Well ; but it is not so very different from, or so very much more impossible than, some other sayings about Prayer. Think of these words : “ Continuing instant in prayer ” : “ Labouring fervently in “ prayer ” : “ Night and day praying exceedingly ” : “ Praying always with all prayer and supplication ” : “ Striving in prayer,” literally ‘*agonizing*’—a very strong word. Are all these expressions to be pared down to fit the supposed necessities of common sense ? Are we to say that “ without ceasing ” means ‘ very ‘ frequently,’ that “ praying always,” means ‘ praying ‘ at regular times,’ that “ night and day,” means at ‘ night and in the morning ’ ? It is dangerous work—this paring down. Is it not at least possible that St Paul meant what he said, and that, had he meant something else, he would have said something else ? And may we not, by thus looking out for an easier meaning to his words, miss their very point and lesson ?

Now we must not be so foolish as to deny that common sense may have something true to say about it. Only we want common sense to try to understand, and not to try to explain away, words that seem to

us hard. It is at any rate quite certain that St Paul did not mean that Christians were to spend their lives in formal acts of devotion—that they were to be all day long upon their knees. Our great Example Himself was not always praying, nay, He interrupted His prayers to attend to the wants of the poor who followed Him to His place of retirement. Again, it is quite as certain that the Apostle did not mean that Christians were to retire from active life, and withdraw into ‘religious houses,’ where they could enjoy very frequent services, and spend a great deal more time in prayer than other people, with their ordinary business and work, could do. St Paul was a thoroughly practical man, always enforcing the simple duties of common everyday life. He would have been the last man to give a command which could only be fulfilled by monks in a monastery. What then does he mean by this “Pray without ceasing”?

Perhaps the best way to understand the words is to think of some parallel expressions. Supposing a boy were placed under the care of some tutor, and were told to converse with him constantly and freely, we should have no difficulty in understanding the command, however hard the boy might find it to obey. And perhaps this example may give us a fair idea of what is meant by “Pray without ceasing.” It is surely to be *very* frequently addressing ourselves to God—to be continually turning to Him, as a child would be continually turning to some grown-up companion whom it loved and trusted.

Ceaseless Prayer, in this sense, depends for its whole meaning and existence on *faith*. It is simply unintelligible apart from the idea of faith. Unless faith

keeps us consciously in the presence of God, making us realise His presence, it is impossible that we should be constantly or frequently turning to Him. Unceasing Prayer is the natural communing of a vivid faith with God whose presence it ceaselessly realises. No doubt this is a state of very high grace—a state that very few attain to, yet it is the standard at which we must aim, if we desire to go on unto perfection; and it is the perfect state of that which many do imperfectly attain to. It is what one of the earliest Christian writers meant when he said life should be one “great continuous prayer.”

Now the name by which this constant turning to God in prayer is generally known is Ejaculatory Prayer. This means literally prayer darted forth quickly, as opposed to our regular and longer prayers. The habit of ejaculatory prayer is a most blessed one. If Prayer is the voice of faith, Ejaculatory Prayer is the voice of *steadfast, abiding* faith. Certainly the true Christian will not content himself with his stated prayers. They may be morning and evening and noon-day, or even oftener; and yet he will not be content to allow long prayerless spaces between. It is not so much that he will make an effort to break these spaces with brief prayers as that it will be *natural* to him to do so. The simple consciousness of God's presence will make such prayerless spaces impossible. I do not say that this will be the case with most of us. Would that it were! But as faith grows so will ejaculatory prayer grow.

“He every moment waits to give:

Watch thou unwearied to receive.”—*Kcble.*

I must here guard myself against being supposed to mean that there can be no prayer without the ex-

pression of the words of prayer. The essence of prayer is rather in the longing than in the words. There is truth in the well-known words of Montgomery's hymn :

“ Prayer is the breathing of a sigh,
The falling of a tear,
The upward glancing of an eye
When none but God is near.”

It has been well said that a soul, always turning to God as a flower to the sun, often prays when it does not know it prays. And we learn from the story of the poor woman who touched the hem of our Lord's garment that Prayer may be by act as well as by word. Nevertheless the voice of the soul will generally seek to express itself in words.

Let us now consider the actual utterance of this sort of prayer. Perhaps the first instances that should be named are the lifting up of the soul to God as the first act on awaking in the morning and the last before closing the eyes in sleep at night. We could hardly find better words for this purpose than those supplied in the Psalms: “I laid me down and slept
“and rose up again, for the Lord sustained me,” and
“I will lay me down in peace, and take my rest; for
“it is Thou, Lord, only that makest me dwell in
“safety.” One good man I have known always made it his practice to say aloud ‘Praise the Lord,’ on first awaking. Then during the day there will be many opportunities of offering a brief prayer in silence to God. Whether alone, or in company, we may equally do this. For example, when temptation assaults us, we may exclaim in our hearts, “Lord save me, I perish,” or ‘O Lord, deliver me from this temptation,’ or the like. Again, it will be a very useful ejaculation to

say frequently some such brief sentences as these:—
 ‘O Father, help me to live as in Thy presence,’ or
 ‘Thou God seest me.’ Then, when we are happy,
 rejoicing in the blessings God has given us, or moved
 to gladness by the beauty of God’s creation, how well
 to lift up our thankful hearts to Him whose love has
 so blessed us, and to cry ‘Thanks be to God for His
 ‘goodness,’ or “Praise the Lord, O my soul, and all
 “that is within me praise His holy Name.” These
 are but a few simple examples. Any one will easily
 multiply them for himself. Let the *Spirit of Prayer*
 only be with us all day long, so that we are, so to
 speak, never out of tune for it, and the voice of Prayer
 will never be long quite silent. “Out of the abundance
 “of the heart the mouth speaketh.”

We will end with the beautiful words of St Augustine on this subject:—“Longing desire prayeth always,
 “though the tongue be silent. If thou art ever long-
 “ing, thou art ever praying. When doth Prayer
 “sleep? When desire groweth cold.”*

* It is well to mention that a number of ejaculations will be found in Mr Jackson’s admirable little “Penny Pocket-book of
 “Prayers and Hymns” (Warne & Co.)—a little work which cannot be too highly recommended, from which also is taken the above quotation from St Augustine.

XI.

PRAYER: ITS FORM.

THE form in which Prayer should be offered is a very important consideration. Many, who wish to pray, complain that they do not know what words to use. They ask, Ought we to pray in our own words, or should we use books of devotion? The only general answer to such an inquiry is, Use both, use everything you can that helps you. Do not be too scrupulous and particular about the form, so long as it expresses what you want, but use whatever you find is most helpful to your devotion.

But beginners do not know what helps them most. They have made very few attempts to find out. They want teaching, and ask to be guided by the experience of others.

Let me try to write down the advice which I should give to any young Confirmation candidate who might desire help in this matter.

In the first place those prayers which are of daily recurrence should be offered in some simple well-chosen form. It would be very foolish to try to vary the form of words day by day in expressing the same thing. Our Lord Himself, in providing for us the Lord's Prayer, teaches us very plainly that our regular daily petitions should be offered in a regular daily form. I need not say that the Lord's Prayer

itself will always form a part of every Christian's daily prayers. That I take for granted. But, besides that, the daily morning thanksgiving for preservation, the daily prayer for grace, the daily intercession for relatives and friends, and indeed whatever parts of our worship have in them no element of change, will be best offered in such a form as you may easily find in any simple book of devotion, or as any clergyman would gladly provide for you. But then there are other parts of your prayers which do admit of, and even require, change of expression. Far the most important of these is your daily evening confession. You ought not to be content that this should be merely a general expression of sinfulness. You should be particular in confessing the actual sins of the day past. Here then it will be most desirable that you should not adhere to the same form of words day by day, but try to lay before the throne of grace your special sins, and failings, and difficulties, in your own words, as best you can, not varying the words for the sake of variety, but because your sins vary. The same, though in a less degree, applies to thanksgiving, since any special mercy should plainly call forth its own special thanksgiving. And, again, it is obvious that there will frequently be opportunity of variety in your intercessions, arising from the changing circumstances of those for whom you pray. Thus I should advise that ordinarily you should use set forms of prayer, varied only when the matters you lay before God themselves vary. But to this I must add farther that one who learns to pray thus far well, will often find his stated prayers insufficient; and will thankfully add to them, either by enlarging upon the petitions he already uses, or by introducing other

subjects of prayer, which rise to his mind at the time. In private, extempore prayer is of great value. That soul must be but in the infancy of prayer, that has no special failings and weaknesses and needs and perplexities and longings and hopes to utter from time to time in its intercourse with its God.

Books of devotion are of the greatest possible service to most persons in their prayers. Those who wish to prolong their prayers beyond the barest and briefest fulfilment of the duty, will constantly be thankful for the help of books. All have the Prayer-book in their hands, and no one who has, need be at a loss for devout and beautiful forms of prayer. But there are numberless Manuals of Devotion, for any desiring still farther help. Let us never forget that our blessed Lord Himself appears to have made the Book of Psalms His Handbook of Devotion, if we may venture so to speak, employing its holy words even in the agonies of the Crucifixion.

It is not well to seek for constant variety in the books you use. Those who flit about from book to book seldom learn true habits of devotion. One book thoroughly used until all its thoughts and emotions have been worked into our own soul, and have thus become our own, is worth a whole library. A certain holy man once wrote of a certain little book of devotion,* “I have sought rest everywhere, “and have found it nowhere, save in a little corner “with a little book.” St Francis de Sales used to discourage variety in prayer, and to say that a single aspiration or ejaculatory prayer, repeated a hundred times, was more valuable than a hundred different prayers each used once; and in witness to this

* Thomas a Kempis of the “Spiritual Combat.”

opinion he related that the ejaculation, "My God is my all," was the constant secret heart-prayer of one saint, and "All that is not God is naught" of another.

There is one point worth pausing upon for a few moments, in speaking of Books of Devotion. Those who make use of them often feel that the language of the prayers they find in them is beyond their own experience, and therefore to some extent unreal and untrue when used by themselves. There is no commoner instance of this than the Confession in the Communion Service, in which, speaking of our sins, we say, "The remembrance of them is grievous unto us, the burden of them is intolerable." Many a one has said, 'I cannot use this language ; it is not true ; the remembrance of my sins is not grievous to me, nor the burden of them intolerable.' But think how it would be if all the prayers we use were carefully adjusted to the low level of our own spiritual experience. Should we not at once lose a great help in rising to higher things? It is good for us surely to have a high standard in prayer as in other things, and the humbling sense of failure to reach the standard we aim at is a wholesome thing. We would not use untrue and unreal language in speaking to God, but the language, which seems to us so much above our own feelings and experience, need not be unreal and untrue, if we use it with a silent confession of our weakness and shortcoming, and as rather that which we long to be able to say than that which we *can* say. Thus, in the instance quoted, it is not hard, as we say the words, to give to them the sense of a deeper confession, as though they were: 'Oh, may the remembrance of them be more grievous to me ; the burden of them more intolerable!' In this way even

language we cannot yet reach may be used without presumption, and to our soul's good.

But do not let us forget that neither extempore prayer, nor prayers from books will avail anything without the spirit of prayer, and that with that spirit both, or either, will be blest.

After all, is it not true that most people fail much in prayer, because they will not take the trouble to *prepare* for prayer? With a written list of the subjects we select for our prayers, a few collects or prayers from books of devotion carefully selected and marked, and a fixed time allotted to our prayers, we shall find we can do much better than we generally do now. Is it not worth the trouble? Or is there anything else so well worth it?

XII.

DIFFICULTIES OF PRAYER.

THERE are two great difficulties which stand in the way of Prayer—wandering thoughts, and coldness of heart.

I suppose scarcely any single person who has striven to learn the lesson of true prayer has been wholly free from these two difficulties. They beset us all. They are the universal subject of complaint and sorrow to all God's children. 'Oh! if I could only 'keep my mind from straying! Oh! if I could only 'feel less cold and dead and lifeless in my prayers!' So we cry. And so has every saint of God cried in his day. We think no one has so great difficulties as we have. It is a comfort to know that at least ours is no singular trouble, but that thousands upon thousands have felt, and are feeling, the same.

Observe, these two difficulties belong (mainly, though not entirely,) to the two great divisions of our spiritual nature—the intellectual and the moral, the mind and the heart. The former has to do with the regulation of the thoughts; the latter with the state of the affections.

Now, neither of these are what may be called *primary* difficulties. That is, they do not belong to the very root of the matter, but are rather signs and symptoms of something else amiss within us, off-

shoots of something deeper rooted in our souls. If we trace them out, we shall find perhaps that they have one common source and origin, that they are but two branches of one stem.

Take first wandering thoughts. Very likely our thoughts wander at other times besides during our prayers. Very likely we find it difficult to fix them steadily upon anything we want to study or think about attentively. We have suffered ourselves to fall into a bad intellectual habit of inattention, and so have lost in a great measure the power of fixing the mind upon any subject. We are not likely to be able to fix the mind upon our prayers, if our ordinary habit of mind is thoughtless, vague, indolent, indifferent. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might," is a rule which may be applied with equal force to the mind, and that which it "findeth to do." Those who can fix the mind upon that which they are doing at all times have a great advantage in their prayers.

But, besides this vague idle habit of mind, there is another habit even more destructive of the power to pray attentively—the habit of giving the reins to the imagination, and letting it carry us where it will. I do not now speak of the indulgence of positively sinful thoughts—such as those of unkindness or impurity. These of course are fatal to prayer. I am however writing now for those who would not willingly allow such thoughts even a moment's resting-place in their souls. But the habit of *idle dreaming* is one which (even if otherwise innocent) is sure to encourage wandering thoughts in prayer.

Yet, even though we may have fallen into these faults, and may see in them a way to account, in part

at least, for our sad wandering of thought in prayer, is it not true, after all, that we *can* fix our thoughts on some subjects? Are there none, who complain bitterly of wandering thoughts in prayer, who are wholly free from them when they are reading some amusing book? Why is this? Simply because the one subject *interests* them, and the other does not. Now we are getting nearer to the root of the matter. We can attend to what interests us—that is, to what we like and take pleasure in. Is not then the true secret of our wandering thoughts simply this—that we have little pleasure in prayer? We can go deeper yet, but, to do so, let us pass to the second difficulty.

Coldness of heart afflicts even those who can pray more attentively. There is nothing so miserable as this deadness and dryness of spirit when we try to pray. We want to rise on the wings of devotion to the Throne of God, and instead we are grovelling in the dust. We want to pour out a stream of blessed adoration, but we smite our stony hearts in vain; the waters will not flow. But it is not always so in other things. Our hearts are not always so dead and dry and unmoved. We are not naturally very hard-hearted, or very callous. We do not consider ourselves heartless and without feeling. What is the secret then of this wretched prayerless frame of soul? Nay, it is even nearer to seek than that of wandering thoughts. Is not the following a true account of it? We take delight in the company of those we love. An hour spent with some dear friend is no burden to us. We do not complain of dulness or coldness then. The time passes quickly enough. We are warm-hearted and animated enough. We enjoy the happy intercourse. But what is Prayer but intercourse with

God? Is God as a dear friend to us? Nay, if He were, the hour of prayer would not be dull and tedious. If we loved God, we should love to be with God. His presence would be a joy to us. Prayer would be a happy and welcome employment. So does it not come to this—that the reason why Prayer is so dull and weary and unwelcome is simply because we *do not love God?* Ah yes! want of love is truly at the bottom of it all. Want of love makes us so cold-hearted. Want of love makes us take so little interest in our prayers. If we really loved God, we should not long complain of either of our two great difficulties. But how to love God better—this is the great question. We must try to answer it another time—for in so doing we shall be dealing with the secret springs of all true devotion. We shall be digging down to the roots, and it is of no use to prune the branches, if the sickness is in the root. When once we can say with the Psalmist of old, “My soul is athirst for God, yea “even for the living God! When shall I come to “appear before the presence of God?” then we shall not be far from finding the way out of both the troubles we are considering to-day.

XIII.

LOVE OF GOD THE SECRET OF POWER IN PRAYER.

LOVE of God is the secret of power in Prayer. We have already seen that the two great difficulties most often complained of as hindrances to prayer may both be traced back to want of love. Want of love destroys our *interest* in prayer, so that our thoughts wander to other things. Want of love destroys our *delight* in prayer, so that it becomes a weariness to us, and our hearts find themselves cold and dry.

But how to love God better—ah! that is the question we all want to answer. We know very well we cannot, as it were, stand over our hearts and command them to love God better. We can no more do this than we can force ourselves to love some neighbour whom we do not love. Yet it must be possible to gain love to God. God could not command an impossibility, and He commands us to love Him—ay, and to love Him with all the heart. So *it can* be done. But how?

Certainly the first answer to this all-important question is, Only by the help of God's Holy Spirit. We must continually ask for that help that we may love God better, and so pray better. Let our daily cry be, 'Lord, I love Thee; help Thou my want of 'love.' It is the indwelling in our souls of God, who

is Love, which alone can fill us with love. The Holy Ghost must shed abroad in our hearts God's love to us that we may love Him in return.

But, though we cannot love God without this divine aid, yet certainly our affections are placed, in some degree and in some ways, in our own power; not, as has been said, to be ordered at our will, like slaves; but to be at least gradually changed and disciplined and trained and perfected. Now I do not wish to-day to dwell upon those means of winning the love of God which lie in the mere removal of hindrances, because I am sure no one can really aim at the love of God without knowing well that it cannot exist together with the love of anything which God loves not. Yet alas! it is true that in most people it is the *love of something else* which most often keeps out the love of God from the heart. The love of pleasure, the love of the world, the love of self, the love of any earthly object which draws the heart away from God,—these must, of course, be rooted out before the love of God can be implanted and grow. The heart that would be filled with the love of God must first be emptied of all that is not of God. I take this for granted, and to-day would rather speak of the *positive* means we may use in the training of the heart to love of God.

First then, I will not say that the affections will refuse *altogether* to submit to compulsion. I mean that, although I cannot order my heart to love God, or at least have no power to make my heart at once obey such an order, still the knowledge that I ought to love God, and the determination to do so, may in themselves help me to do so. In other words, the affections may to some extent yield to principle and

will. In the main, however, the instruments by which we mould and fashion and temper our affections are what are called *indirect*. They do not aim at moving the affections as their first end and object, but do so in the way of a gradual influence.

If any one is very lovable, it is plain that the more we know that person the more we shall love him. We believe God to be infinitely lovable. If He is so, then everything which helps us to know Him, also helps us to love Him. It follows that all methods of contemplation of God's goodness, such as study of His holy word, meditation, and devotional reading, must help to kindle within our souls the flame of love to Him. And it follows, farther, that all these are of the greatest power as helps to devotion. Indeed Prayer is almost sure to languish and grow feeble unless quickened by reading and meditation. Of this I hope to speak more fully another time.

Again, all acts of direct intercourse with God, such as Prayer and Praise and Thanksgiving, which make us familiar with Him in His character of a loving Father,—all these are instruments whereby to draw out and educate (so to speak) our hearts in the love of God. It is true we are speaking of love to God as the secret of power in prayer, and it seems strange to put it exactly the opposite way, and to speak of prayer as a source of love to God. Yet this is so. We must love in order to give life and fervour to our acts of devotion, and yet these very acts of devotion are themselves one means of increasing love. In truth love and worship react upon each other, so that the more we love the better we shall worship, and the more we worship the better we shall love. Love is engendered and increased by acts of love. All such

acts increase our knowledge of God ; and with knowledge comes love.

This same truth may be expressed more generally by saying that a life of faith is necessary to true love of God. "Faith worketh by love." That power which puts us in the presence of the unseen, opening to us visions of the love of God in Christ, must be the chief means of drawing our hearts to the love of God. Faith shows us One who is infinitely lovable. Faith reveals to us His infinite love to us. And thus, knowing God, we love Him. "We love Him because He first loved us."

I do not think that in most of us love to God rises, or is likely to rise, much above gratitude. This is far from the highest sort of love. To love God as the Angels do for His own infinite perfections, apart from any thought of self, this is a grander love. This lights up the fire of heavenly worship in the Seraphim. But, perhaps, very few in this world have grace to rise to this height of love. Let us be very thankful if we can only learn to love God a little for His goodness to us. This will inspire our prayers with much of the life and warmth we so sorely feel the lack of. Not that either wandering thoughts or coldness of heart will ever quite disappear here below. Probably they will be our great trial till the end comes. But, even if it be so, we will hope. If the spirit be willing, God will have mercy upon the weakness of the flesh. And we will hope for the day when all this miserable infirmity will be left behind, and our whole renewed being be filled to overflowing with love and worship.

XIV.

PRAYER: WANDERING THOUGHTS.

WE must think a little more about that scourge of devotion, which is to so many a terrible pain and grief, wandering of thoughts. We have seen that this may very often be traced back to an unrestrained habit of mind, a general listlessness and carelessness of thought, a want of the power of fixing the attention upon one thing at a time. We have seen also that very often the real root of the evil lies in a lack of interest in the matter.

If coldness and dryness of soul in prayer is like a barren desert, these wandering thoughts are like a crowd of troublesome visitors, coming and going through the passages of the mind, so that it resembles the inn where there was *no room for Jesus*.

Now it is right to aim at more fixedness of attention in all we do. We can probably do something to improve ourselves in this. But this is a long, and a hard, and a slow remedy. Can anything else be done meanwhile?

1. Would not a little pains in preparation help? What we are now aiming at is attentiveness, not fervour. But for attentiveness we need order and method, rules which shall act like the banks of a water-course, restraining the flow of the waters within

their appointed limits. Might we not then arrange our prayers beforehand? Might we not draw up an outline of the subjects we resolve to bring before God? Would not a written list of the sins, the difficulties, the needs, of our inner life; of the persons and causes for which we should make intercession; of the mercies and blessings for which we would render thanks; help to restrain our thoughts within the channels we have marked out for them, and to prevent their losing themselves in the profitless overflowings of a waste of idle imaginings? We take a great deal of trouble in preparing for many other things, but we think it is not worth while to make any preparation for Prayer. We expect it all to arrange itself in a moment. We are too idle to take pains to secure for it method and order, and then we are surprised because it is vague and distracted.

2. I am sure that *slowness* is a great help to attentiveness in prayer. Prayer should be deliberate that we may have time to attend. Oh! don't hurry, when you are speaking to God. Don't run on so fast that you can hardly bring before your mind the ideas to which you give utterance. No wonder the thoughts wander when the words by their very rapidity barely skim the surface of the mind, and wake up no deep thoughts or feelings. Prayer to be real, must be calm, solemn, reverent. The way in which we sometimes rush into God's presence, and begin our words of prayer, before the mind has time to collect itself and know what it is about, is simply shocking. Imagine any one thus rushing into the presence of the Sovereign with some petition for a mere earthly favour. We should feel the rudeness and indignity quickly enough then. But it really

seems as if we sometimes thought, 'Anything will do — for God.' Oh, be reverent in prayer!

3. When wandering thoughts come, and we wake up, as it were, and find ourselves far away, what shall we do? It is very sad, very humbling. We wished perhaps to pray, and then some little trivial thing (oh, so little, so trivial!) came in, and turned our thoughts into another channel, and in a few moments they have gone anywhere. We thought we were speaking to God, and we start and find we were busy with some absurd trifle, so foolish we are ashamed to think we could be drawn aside by it. Well, what shall we do? Offer up a short prayer for pardon, and go on with our prayers. And this again and again. It is of no use wasting time in regrets and wonders. It is very humbling, because it shows how weak we are. But it is no wilful sin. So we must confess it as an infirmity, and cast it off as often as it comes, and go on in spite of it. Anyhow we must not let Satan beat us by such a weapon as this. Nay, we may even turn it against himself. We may seize the wandering thought and make it do us good service, by making it itself the subject of new prayer. If it be occupied with some matter of business or anxiety, this is not hard, but anyhow it can be made a subject of confession and humiliation. To pray always and never faint, however discouraging our wretched infirmities may be, this must be our constant aim. It may be the battle of our whole life to fight against these wandering thoughts. Be it so. We will fight on. Our Captain bids us fight. We leave to Him the victory.

XV.

DRYNESS IN PRAYER AS A TRIAL, AND HOW TO DEAL WITH IT.

How many a poor struggling soul has cried in a sort of despair, 'I cannot pray: I shall never learn 'to pray: my heart is so cold, dull, dry, hard, un-loving, that the fountain of prayer seems quite 'frozen up, and I cannot thaw it.' No, you are quite right: you cannot thaw it. But God can. 'Yes,' you answer, 'I do not doubt that; I know very well He 'can give me the spirit of prayer; but *will* He?' To that I can only answer, I cannot tell. Well, is this state of things very disheartening? Does it seem as if you must give up trying? Is it more than you can bear to go on trying so hard, and yet never succeeding? Let us think about it.

First of all, are you quite sure you have done what you can? I do not mean made superhuman efforts, but done what you can. You complain of emptiness in your time of prayer. But are you sure you have not taken an empty heart there to begin with, and so have found just what you might expect to find? Some seem to think they may take nothing with them and find all. There is no preparation of the soul; no accurate knowledge of what they really want; no desire and longing; no settling beforehand of subjects

for prayer ; no meditation on holy things ; no attempt to realise the true nature, the blessedness, the awfulness of prayer. Sometimes it may be that with a little clearing away of the dust and rubbish, a little loosening of the soil beforehand, the stream might be found not quite dried up.

But possibly we have tried very earnestly. It has been from no indolence or lightness that we have failed. We can look back perhaps to times when prayer has been very blessed and beautiful. Children often experience wonderful happiness in prayer. But now, oh, how different it is ! We seem in a very desert, when we would pray. It is all a barren, sandy waste, no water springs in the dry ground. Nay, sometimes it is worse. Our desert is not only barren emptiness, but there are hard cruel rocks round about us. Dreadful temptations come—cruel bitter struggles ; temptations to doubt God ; to give up in despair ; ay, even to hate devotion. We are horrified at our condition. The only way to go on with our daily life is to forget our misery when we can. But, directly we are on our knees, there it is again in all its dreadfulness. We take up the Psalmist's exceeding bitter cry, "O my God, I cry in the daytime, and "Thou hearest not." Such times come, with more or less of suffering and fear, to very many. How shall we deal with them ?

The answer is clear :—bear them as a cross. Every writer upon devotion gives the same advice. This dryness is a heavy trial. But it is permitted by God for the training up of His children in the ways of holiness. Let me put a few thoughts before you to help you in this heavy trial.

1. Our prayers must centre, not in self, but in God.

When we look for sensations of fervour and peace and joy in prayer, we are seeking self, not God.

2. It is necessary that we should pray: it is not necessary that we should feel happy in praying.

3. God knows our wish to pray more fervently. "Lord Thou knowest all my desire: and my groaning "is not hid from Thee."

4. Our prayers are not heard for their fervour, but for Christ's sake.

5. It is God's lesson in humility.

"For Prayer that humbles, sets the soul
From all illusions free,
And teaches it how utterly
Dear Lord! it hangs on Thee."—*Faber*.

6. Efforts are always successes. It is a greater thing to try without succeeding than to succeed without trying. Suppose we were to experience such intense rapture in devotion as to exclaim, like St Francis de Sales, "Withdraw Thyself from me, O Lord, "for I cannot bear the greatness of Thy sweetness," are we sure that it would be better for us than this aching sense of dryness and dimness? Are we sure there would be no peril of pride and self-satisfaction and relaxing of effort?

7. Jesus Himself descended into the lowest depth of this sense of desolation, when He cried, "My God, "My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

8. It may be that we are not gifted with the power of strong emotion, that we are by constitution colder than many, and that we are straining after feelings which in us would be forced and unreal. God is not a hard man, who reaps where he has not sown.

9. Once more, it may even be that God sees in us a power to bear this cross—a resoluteness which He

knows will not fail under the trial, and that, seeing this, He is training us to higher stages of self-discipline and self-sacrifice.

Yes; it is a cross, sometimes a very heavy one. The only way is to bear it manfully—to go on praying as best we can, not too anxiously measuring the warmth of our prayers; looking not on self, but on God; trying to fix the attention not on our own act of praying, but on God's infinite love and mercy; bearing all in simple childlike humility and resignation to God's will; learning to say again and again, with a resoluteness which *will* not be overcome, "Nevertheless, though I am sometime afraid, YET PUT I
"MY TRUST IN THEE."

XVI

CAUSES OF COLDNESS IN PRAYER.

WE must not pass away from the sad subject of coldness and dryness in prayer—the sore affliction of so many who long to pray fervently—without trying in every way we can to trace back this great trial and discouragement to its possible causes. For very often it is only a symptom, and not the disease itself; only a natural consequence of something else that is amiss with us, and which has its seat deeper down in our souls. Indeed we have already seen, that want of love to God is often the true account of want of devotion. But many secret causes may be found to hinder the warmth of our prayers.

Shall we guess at some of these?

1. Are we sure that the sin of *Sloth* is not at the root of the matter? Sloth need not take the form of outward laziness and inactivity. It may be simply spiritual indolence, dislike of spiritual exertion. This sort of sloth is common enough in persons who outwardly lead very active industrious lives, and whom no one would dream of calling slothful. Activity of outward life is easy and pleasant to many. So it calls for no unwelcome exertion. Fervour of inward devotion is difficult and painful. So sloth rebels. Here is one who is always busy, a model of industry

and alacrity. We follow him to his secret chamber. Surely we may expect his prayers to be full of life and fervour. But lo ! here all his activity and zeal have vanished away ! His prayer is short and hurried, or drowsy and languid. Perhaps even his very posture tells its tale, and he tempts sleepiness by his easy attitude, leaning on his bed or chair, and making no effort after wakefulness. And then he complains of coldness in prayer ! It would be strange indeed if prayer thus marred and spoilt by sloth were anything but cold.

2. Is it *Indecision*?—the want of entire surrender to God ? Behold one of fair promise, seeing the beauty of religion, making some efforts after holiness, yet with the inner life dwarfed, stunted, feeble, fruitless. There is little love, joy, and peace ; little comfort in prayer. He is restless, dissatisfied, irresolute, unequal in spirits. There is no very positive sin, but he is disappointing and unsatisfactory. Why is this ? Ah ! the reason is often too plain. *He has kept back part of the price.* Only half his heart (is it always half ?) is given to God. This will not do. This half-heartedness is fatal to prayer. He will never pray heartily and happily till *all*—spirit, soul, and body ; will and affections ; time and talents ; little things and great ; the whole life and the whole man,—belong, and consciously belong, to God.

3. Sometimes the sin of *Uncharitableness* is at the root of a prayerless spirit. It is a great temptation to some to judge others hardly ; to look on the worst side of their character ; to resent little trivial and even unintentional offences ; to brood over and recall to mind unpleasant scenes with others, and even to aggravate such scenes by imagining worse and more bitter words than were really spoken. They are unsympathising

with the undeserving, contemptuous in speaking of those from whom they differ, especially in religious matters. All this makes the soul sadly unfit and unable to pray. It is all opposed to love, and the soul that loves coldly prays coldly. Perhaps one chief reason why uncharitableness is so injurious to the soul's life is because it is so contrary to the spirit of Christ. Oh! how gentle (save only to the spirit of pride and self-righteousness, which is near akin to that of uncharitableness)—how gentle was Jesus in word and deed! How sympathising with the worthless! How patient with opponents! It is perfectly wonderful how He bore with the ignorance, mistakes, hardness, unspirituality, of even His chosen disciples. It is full of instruction to see how He filled His time (and oh how priceless was every moment of that earthly life!) with tender care for the bodies of men. How graciously, how lovingly did He foster and encourage the faltering faith of the timid Nicodemus! How wisely, yet how mercifully, did He deal with the unhappy woman at Jacob's well! "He prayeth well "that loveth well." If we would have our prayers warm with devotion, we must have our hearts warm with love.

4. There is one very sad and very frequent cause of coldness in prayer, which must not be passed by without notice, though it can only be glanced at here, —I mean *Doubt*. Those who are vexed with doubts as to religion always suffer in their prayers. This is natural. It is then that they are dealing closely with those very things about which the doubts arise. Besides, Satan is very busy; and I have heard one man say that, were he tempted to doubt the existence of the tempter, the way in which evil thoughts are put

into his mind when he tries to pray, would of itself be enough to convince him of the reality of such suggestions from without. Now doubts must be carefully distinguished into two classes—1, those which are welcome, or wilfully encouraged; and, 2, those which come against the will, and are a trouble and grief to the soul. Of course the former are sinful in themselves, and too often the fruit of some deep moral evil. For the latter sort of doubt—that which is involuntary—there can be nothing but tender sympathy and compassion. It is a sore trial, to be met by prayer and active work. “If any man *will do* “His will” (or more exactly, ‘if any man *wills* ‘or *desires to do* God’s will’), “he shall know of the “doctrine, whether it be of God.” “Love,” says St Bernard, “is the proper cure for doubt.” But doubt, in any shape, must destroy that bright vividness of faith which is so essential to real fervour in prayer.

5. Once more, is it possible—(I know that it is possible, but is it true)—that there is lying buried in some secret corner of the soul some fragment of that “root of bitterness”—*Impurity*? The least little bit of some roots will live and grow if left in the soil. This is one of such sort. And oh! there is no such fatal hindrance to prayer as the presence of this evil in the soul. It is like a subtle poison, which numbs and paralyses all the vital powers. The pure in heart alone can see God. From the impure in heart His face is hidden. Their prayers are at best like the movements of one groping in the dark. There is a film over the eye of the soul. The window by which the light of heaven would enter in is darkened.

“Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my “heart: prove me, and examine my thoughts.

“Look well if there be any way of wickedness in me : and lead me in the way everlasting.”

I cannot conclude these very imperfect papers upon the great hindrances to prayer without calling attention to three singularly beautiful and helpful hymns by Faber upon “Dis-
“tractions,” “Dryness,” and “Sweetness in Prayer.” They will be found in Mr Pearsall Smith’s “Hymns selected from Faber” (Isbister & Co. Price 1s. 6d.)

XVII.

HABITS OF LIFE WHICH HINDER PRAYER.

IN seeking to lead a life of Prayer we want not only to find out all the helps we can, that we may use them, but also to find out all the hindrances we can, that we may avoid them.

Of these hindrances of course the most completely fatal are all habits which are distinctly sinful. No one can dream that Prayer, in any true and worthy sense, is possible, so long as uncharitable, unforgiving tempers, impure thoughts and imaginations, or self-indulgent ways of living, are cherished or allowed. The soul that is filled with these things has no room for God. It shuts out from itself God's presence. It blocks up the window by which the light of that presence might shine in upon it with the foulness of sin; and so it is in darkness. If it tries to pray, the prayer is but a wretched form. The light of God's presence is necessary to true Prayer.

But this is so plain that we need not say more about it. I desire rather to point out certain habits of life, which do not seem so directly sinful, and yet which are certainly great hindrances to true and fervent prayer. Ah! but stay, shall we take it quite for granted that none of these directly sinful things find a place in our souls? Well; we will hope not

with the consent of our will. But we are very weak, and sin is very subtle. We must watch. It may be that some one of these fatal hindrances has found entrance in some form or other. If so, God help us first to cast that out.

Now we will think of some less plain hindrances.

1. *Indolence*, the habit of wasting time, vacancy of mind, doing nothing heartily and energetically. When other things are done lazily, it is not likely Prayer will be an exception. When we take little trouble about other duties, we are not likely to take much about this.

2. *Unpunctuality*. This habit mars and spoils many things. We are not ready at the moment for what we have to do, and so it has to be done hurriedly and imperfectly. Who knows not how Prayer suffers through this fault? We rise a little after our set time. We loiter a little when once risen. And so the time for our prayers comes, and we are not ready. And then they are said hastily, with no quiet pondering of the words we utter, possibly with things left out which ought to have been said, and a sense of hurry and shallowness over all which quite robs them of their strength and comfort. "It is as much your "duty," writes a good man, "to rise to pray, as to "pray when you are risen. And if you are late at "your prayers, you offer to God the prayers of an "idle, slothful worshipper, that rises to prayer as idle "servants rise to their labour" (*Law's Serious Call*). So again this same bad habit makes it most difficult to obtain with any regularity a few quiet moments for a mid-day prayer. And even if there be not the same pressure for time at night, yet the unpunctual habit of mind is very unfavourable to the quiet order

and method which should always mark our devotions.

3. *Distraction of mind.* The constant filling of the mind with a multitude of varied things,—the rapid passing from one thing to another,—the excitement of continual change and variety of thought and occupation—all this makes Prayer a hard task. If there are some who are too idle, there are some who are too busy. Their life is one of rapid action and quick succession of feeling. It has in it little calm and quiet. But Prayer needs calm and quiet. Their life is like the stream dashing among the stones and rippling over the shallows. But Prayer is like the stillness of the deep smooth pool. For such characters as I am now speaking of, times of rest for thought and self-communing and prayer are most necessary. For such, even more than others, such a help as is provided by a day's retirement from the world now and then for special devotion is most valuable. Surely, too, such might well set apart some definite time every Sunday for quiet stillness in the presence of God.

4. *Novel-reading.* There is a dreaminess, as well as a frivolity of mind, produced by much reading of novels which is sadly injurious to the spirit of simple earnest Prayer. Undoubtedly many works of fiction are most pure and elevating in their influence, but a devotion even to such is not wholesome. The interest is aroused and the sympathies are enlisted by purely imaginary characters, and in the midst of this excitement the soul does not readily escape to the calm practical contemplation of its own state and responsibility in the sight of God. To put into words the simplest form of this hindrance, have none of us ever found the thread of the story we have been reading

weaving itself into our thoughts even when upon our knees?

5. *An engrossing affection or interest.* This is often found a very serious hindrance to Prayer. Take such a case as a young mother with her little child. Her intense absorbing love for it fills her soul. She kneels down to pray. She can pray for her little one. She can thank God for it. But when she tries to pray for other things, straightway her thoughts fly back to it. She cannot banish the remembrance of it even for a few minutes. She is frightened at the discovery. 'Is not this idolatry?' she asks in terror. Surely she loves her child far better than she loves God. Yes; in one way. She does love her child with the wonderful power and intensity of a mother's love. She would die for it. But she cannot love God with that wonderful mother's love. God did not give it her for Himself, but for her child. So let her not be frightened at it. But oh! let her none the less pray that she may not make her child her God. Let her seek very earnestly from God the power to turn her soul from her child to Him in simple, lowly devotion, or there may be peril in her beautiful mother's love. Look again at one who has some scheme which fills his thoughts and interests. A man is building a new house, and planning his garden. He can think of little else. It is natural enough he should be greatly interested in his plans. But then they *will* come into his mind when he is at his prayers. This is a great snare, and needs much resolution and many struggles. It matters not what the care or the interest is, it must not be allowed to get between the soul and God. It must be made a subject of special prayer that it may not do so.

O Father, teach us not only so to pray that we may live unto Thee, but also so to live that we may pray to Thee better than we do; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

XVIII.

PERSEVERANCE IN PRAYER.

“THOUGH HE BEAR LONG WITH THEM.” Yes ; this must be our stay. We pray ; and we long for answers to our prayers. We read the wonderful promises made to prayer in the gospels, and we ask for their fulfilment. They *are* very wonderful. For instance, “Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My Name, He will give it you.” This is only one of many like promises. And yet we “ask and have not,”—not always because we “ask amiss.” We pray, we pray earnestly, we pray humbly, we pray for what we know to be good and right, we pray in Christ’s Name,—yet the answer comes not. Is it because God hath forgotten to be gracious, and His promise is come utterly to an end for evermore ? Nay, faithless heart, thou knowest that it is not so. Think if there be not abundant reason why thou shouldst “pray always, and not faint.”

Now we must not forget one thing—namely, that *all* prayer does not seek an answer. Perhaps it is needful to be reminded of this. Asking for those things which we desire, whether for our souls or for our bodies, is but a part of prayer, and not the highest part. Praise, adoration, thanksgiving, acts of confession, of faith, of humility,—these and the like, in their very nature, look for no answer. They are the

homage of poor sinful creatures paid to their all-holy and all-glorious Creator. But I am speaking to-day of that part of prayer which consists of petition, of asking for that which we desire. It is in this that the answer is so often seemingly sought in vain.

First, then, as to the prayer itself. It is to the prayer of *faith* that the promise is made. "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, *believing*, ye shall receive." Even where this is not expressed, it is of necessity implied. But "*believing*" what? That our prayer will of necessity be granted? Nay, surely "*believing*" rather that God will do what is best. The prayer that says not "*as Thou wilt*" is not a prayer of faith. All true prayer limits its hope of being granted by this necessary condition. *If* it be God's will;—*if* it be for our good;—then it will be granted. But we are so ignorant that we cannot judge of these conditions. We must leave them with God. It has been well said that we are never ready to have our prayers answered till we are quite willing they should not be. This is one reason why prayer often seems unanswered. It is not the true prayer of faith. It is not prayed in simple reliance on God's wisdom and goodness. But, so far as we have forgotten this condition of prayer, our failure to receive what we ask for is, in part at least, because we "ask *amiss*."

But surely it is often for other reasons. For instance, we may ask for a blessing we *know* to be in accordance with God's will,—some spiritual blessing, perhaps the conquest of a besetting sin, perhaps the gift of some grace which we lack. We can understand that in the case of earthly blessings God's wisdom and goodness may best answer our petition by refusing

what we ask. But with such a spiritual blessing it seems as if this could hardly be. Yet God has His *time* for all things. We may be certain the thing we ask is good, yet we cannot be certain it is good for us to have it *now*. If some besetting sin were suddenly subdued, and the deadly struggle ended; or if some grace we lack were suddenly bestowed at our request; how can we tell that we should not incur new perils, that we should not become self-righteous, over-confident, careless, unwatchful, despisers of others, slack in using the means of grace? It is easy, when one evil spirit is cast out, to become the slave of another. God would not drive out the wicked races of Canaan all at once before the Israelites, lest the beasts of the field should increase, and become a new peril to them. It may be the very best thing for us to have to fight the same hard battle, or to struggle after the same Christian grace, year after year, till the end. So let us never think God hears not when He grants not our request.

Again, may it not be that sometimes, when it seems as though God heard not, He may be really preparing us for the answer? He may see that we are not yet fit to receive it profitably,—that we need a lesson in curbing our impatience, in submissiveness and humility, before it would be well for us to have what we ask. It may surely be that in His infinite loving-kindness the Father is training His child into fitness for the very blessing He seems to deny.

Yet, on the other side, it is a very blessed thing to know that God *does* vouchsafe continual answers to prayer. Nay, we should expect such answers. Only, when they come not, as we had hoped, let us humbly say, ‘God has not willed it for me, or not yet.’

Often God answers our prayers by raising our will to His. It really matters very little whether God condescends to our will, or lifts our will up to His own,—whether He is pleased to will the thing we wish, or to make us wish the thing He wills. See how it was in Gethsemane. There was the agony of supplication, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me!” What was the answer? Surely we see it in those words, spoken so soon afterwards, “The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?” See too how it was with St Paul. Like his Master, he prayed thrice that the “thorn in the flesh”—the affliction, whatsoever it was, which God had sent to humble him—might depart from him. Again, what was the answer? “He said unto me, “My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” And then he gloried in his infirmities. So true is it that it matters not whether the burden is lifted off the back, or the back strengthened for the burden. The one is as true an answer to prayer for deliverance as the other.

And oh! what rich blessings has God given constantly in answer to prayer! What peace, and joy, and strength, and patience, and hope! What outpourings of His blessed Spirit! What revelations of His love!

But art thou cast down because thou hast not these answers to show as yet? Perchance then thy Father is teaching His child to pray. Perchance thou hast to learn, like the Canaanitish woman, not to be daunted and downcast because at first He seems to turn away. Perchance thou hast yet to be taught that “men ought *always* to pray and not to faint.” Dost thou fear lest thy asking exceed the bounds of patience and submission? Dost thou say, ‘My

‘Master prayed thrice for deliverance; His servant
‘St Paul prayed thrice: dare I go on asking again
‘and again?’ Oh yes! Doubt it not. When thy
trouble is heavy upon thee, cry aloud: when thou art
vexed, complain to thy Father. Trust His pitiful
loving-kindness. Thou needst not fear that He will
give thee thy wish to thy hurt; that He will grant
thee thy heart’s desire, and send leanness withal into
thy soul. Thy prayer is no wilful wanton rebellion
against God’s will. Is it not *thy Father* to whom
thou flyest? Oh! pray on, more eagerly, more ardently,
more untiringly. He loves the gracious violence of
importunity. He *does* hear: He *will* answer; perhaps
not in the way thou lookest for, but in the best way,
the way of truest love and wisdom. Oh, give thy
heart to God; make thy will one with His will; desire
only what He desires for thee; and then “trust in
“the Lord, and He *will give thee thy heart’s desire.*”

XIX.

THE ACCEPTANCE OF PRAYER FOR CHRIST'S SAKE.

It is a wonderful thing that prayer so weak and poor and cold and dry as ours should ever find acceptance with God. One would naturally imagine that an all-holy all-seeing God, "unto whom all hearts "be open, and from whom no secrets are hid," would scorn and despise, or at best ignore and neglect, such feeble half-hearted cries as go up to Him from our earth-bound souls. It is natural to exclaim with David, "When I consider Thy heavens, the moon and "the stars which Thou hast ordained ; what is man "that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man "that Thou visitest him?" Yet He is described as the God *that heareth prayer*. This is a wonderful mercy. Though God is great—inconceivably great and glorious—"yet hath He respect unto the lowly."

We have a very striking and a very blessed instance of God's acceptance of prayer in the case of Cornelius. He was a Roman soldier, but a proselyte—that is, a convert to the Jewish religion. He had learnt to worship the one true God. And he was a man of much prayer. It was after fasting and praying that he received the visit of an Angel, who said, "Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms "are had in remembrance in the sight of God."

Thus did God freely receive the worship of one who as yet knew not his Saviour Jesus Christ. Cornelius did all he could according to his light, and God accepted it, and vouchsafed him fuller light.

But we are told in the New Testament that it is through Christ alone that we have access to the Father. And here is the real secret of our boldness and confidence in prayer. However merciful God is, we should still hardly dare to offer to Him such a meagre offering as that of our worship, if it were not that we know we are "accepted in the Beloved,"—that we come before the throne of grace believing that, inasmuch as the everlasting Son of God has made Himself one with us, and redeemed us by His Blood, and made us members of His spiritual body, we may stand boldly before God, claiming our oneness with the Son as our plea for acceptance with the Father. This is why we end every prayer with a memorial of our blessed Redeemer, offering it "through Jesus Christ our Lord." It is through the merits of His atoning Sacrifice that we dare to present our lowly petitions at the throne of grace. If God accepted the prayer of the Roman soldier, who, not knowing Christ, could not offer his prayer in Christ's Name, how much more may we trust Him to accept our prayers, when we have Christ as our great High Priest, through whom we may come boldly to the throne of grace !

But we have another ground of confidence, besides the finished work of the Saviour in His Sacrifice on the Cross. "It is Christ that died ; *yea rather that is risen again* ; who is even at the right hand of God, "who also maketh intercession for us." If we may have confidence because Christ *died* for us, much

more may we have confidence when He also *liveth* for us. "He is able also to save them to the uttermost "that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth "to make intercession for them." It seems probable that it is this intercession that is spoken of under the figure of incense in the 8th chapter of the Revelation, where we read that an Angel (may it not be the "Angel of the Covenant"—the Lord Jesus Christ Himself?) "came and stood at the altar, having a "golden censer; and there was given unto him much "incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of "all saints upon the golden altar which was before "the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which "came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up "before God out of the Angel's hand." Oh! wonderful love of Jesus for His Church! He came and lived on earth, and died for her. But that is not enough. No; in heaven He forgets her not. There He is ever pleading for her. There He mingles His all-prevailing intercessions with her feeble helpless cries, and these are through Him accepted.

"Thy years, O God, can never fail,
Nor Thy blest work within the veil."

But there is a strange saying of our Lord when on earth, which seems to require some explanation. "At "that day," He says, speaking of the time of the outpouring of the Spirit, "ye shall ask in My Name, "and I say not unto you that I will pray the Father "for you: for the Father Himself loveth you." Does then Jesus imply here that His intercessions are not needed for His people? Surely not. Surely the true meaning of this passage is simply that He would not *then* speak of His intercessions, because He would

have them believe in the freedom of their access to the Father. It is as though He said, 'Ye shall pray 'in My name: and I make no mention *now* of My 'praying for you, as though you could not of yourselves 'approach God, or as though God did not love you: 'for in My atonement you shall have free access to 'the Father, and need not shrink from Him, as though 'He were angry with you.'

Blessed be God for this glad assurance! God loves us for His dear Son's sake. That is enough. O my soul, dost thou still tremble in thy poverty and guiltiness? Does it yet seem hard to think thy prayers can be accepted? Then look up. There, on the right hand of God, is thy Advocate, pleading for thee. Is it yet too little? Then must thou doubt the prevailing power of the Son of God.

XX.

THE ONE PLEA, AS SET FORTH IN HOLY COMMUNION.

OUR last meditation dwelt on the acceptance of prayer for Christ's sake, and through the prevailing power of His intercession for us. We come with our petitions, guilty sinners before the throne of God. What plea dare we urge for being heard? What offering dare we bring in our hands wherewith to propitiate an offended God? Our broken and contrite hearts? But they are not half broken and contrite. Ourselves, body, soul, and spirit? But we are sin-stained, worldly, wilful. Oh no! The old familiar words will rise up, and we could scarcely find better—

“Nothing in my hand I bring ;
Simply to Thy Cross I cling.”

Truly that Cross, and He who hangs upon it dying for me—His sacrifice—His merits—His Blood—truly this is my only plea. I have no other. I make no other. I humbly offer every prayer “through Jesus “Christ our Lord.”

But is there not one time when we make this plea ours as we do at no other time? O my soul, when thou drawest nigh to the blessed altar of thy Lord, what doest thou? Thou doest in very truth many things. Thou worshippest ; thou offerest thyself as a

living sacrifice ; thou celebratest the Sacrifice of the Cross in blessed memorial ; thou feedest ; thou givest thanks. Yea, all this, and more. But is it not then that thou most of all pleadest for thine acceptance the one eternal and all-prevailing plea ? Is not thy whole service one intense prolonged cry of "through Jesus "Christ our Lord" ?

We would not forget that the holy Sacrament was instituted for the express purpose of Communion. We cannot but believe that a communicant, who is present at Holy Communion without communicating does lose the chief blessing intended for him, and which he has no right to forego.* But in all the service in which we "show the Lord's death till He come," † surely we are right in saying that we are also pleading

* Certain exceptions to this statement may be freely allowed. For instance, when any one has communicated at an earlier hour, there can be no reason why he should not remain during a second Celebration without communicating, for the purpose of prayer. Again, persons who are preparing for a first Communion may very well be encouraged to be present once or twice, that they may become familiar with the service, and understand better the holy act in which they are about to take part. Moreover, we would not blame any one who, as an act of self-discipline, and through a sense of temporary unfitness, on any particular occasion denied himself the privilege of Communion, remaining in Church in a spirit of penitence and contrition.

† It should be observed that the word "show" in this verse (1 Cor. xi. 26) signifies 'proclaim' or 'declare,' and therefore appears to refer to a memorial made *before man*, and not to a memorial *before God*. This being St Paul's comment upon our Lord's words "in remembrance of Me," we cannot but think it wrong to insist, as many do, that our Lord intends by them a remembrance before God. Though it is quite true that we do plead, and make remembrance of, our Lord's death before God, yet the first and simplest sense of the words certainly concerns the remembrance made before man.

and presenting before God the one eternal all-sufficient Sacrifice, upon which rests our only hope of acceptance, and which is the only thing we dare offer as our plea. In and through this one great priceless offering must every other offering be made, or it can find no acceptance before God. We offer our broken and contrite hearts, and, as I have said, they are not half broken and contrite, yet we try to make them so : we come with our most moving and humbling confession : we *say* with our lips (I hope we partly *feel*), that “we do earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for our misdoings” ; we declare (and oh, that it were oftener true indeed !) that “the remembrance of them is grievous unto us ; the burden of them is intolerable.” It is good to bring this burden of lowliest confession, and to lay it down at the foot of the Cross. But dare we leave it there, as though it were an offering fit in itself to be offered to God ? Nay, it is only in and through the one great eternal offering, which we are then and there celebrating in its appointed memorial, that we dare lay before God’s altar our sinful hearts, in their shallow penitence and feeble sorrow, and hope God will not despise them. We come with our prayers and praises,—half-hearted prayers, poor stammering praises,—and we lay these too on God’s altar as a sacrifice. It is well ; but oh ! vain folly that would dream these worthy of the acceptance of that Holy One who is surrounded with the adoring worship of Angels and Archangels, and of all the company of heaven, except in so far as they may be presented there under cover (if we may so speak) of that stupendous Sacrifice, which hallows and dignifies and exalts all others which are offered in its power and merit. We make another sacrifice. We

offer "ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and lively sacrifice" unto God. And again it is well. What less, what else could we bring? But once more we must ask the same question. What are the soul and body of the holiest, the purest, amongst us all as an offering to be offered to that God in whose eyes the moon shineth not, and the stars are not pure? We dare not hope for any acceptance even of this—the most we can bring—save only as hallowed by, and offered with, the one offering of the true "Lamb without blemish and without spot," whose Blood "cleanseth from all sin." Thus indeed we may say that in the blessed Sacrament of the Lord's Death we learn most truly and most fully what it is to offer our worship "through Jesus Christ our Lord." It is there that we most intently plead the all-prevailing Sacrifice of the Cross as the only plea with which we, guilty sinners as we are, dare draw nigh to the throne of grace, and hope for mercy and salvation.

XXI.

HELPS TO PRAYER.

IN speaking of the difficulties of prayer, it was necessary to speak also of those helps to prayer which were principally concerned with the special difficulties discussed. Those helps were chiefly of an inward character, dealing with the secret actings of the soul, belonging to the very elements of our spiritual life.

There are other helps of a far more external and superficial character—but helps nevertheless, and therefore not to be despised in a matter in which every least help is so precious. To-day we will consider briefly two or three of these minor helps to prayer.

1. It will be found very helpful to begin our prayers with an *act of recollection*. That is, when we kneel down to say our prayers, it is a useful habit to spend a few moments in recollecting what we are about to do, and gathering up our attention for it. It is not well to rush hurriedly and unprepared into the presence of God. It is no great wonder if, when we do so, we forget what we were about to say, and become distracted, and unable to concentrate our thoughts. It is best, when we first kneel down, to put ourselves consciously into the presence of God before we begin to speak to Him. We may say to

ourselves some such words as these—‘I am now ‘about to speak to God. I am kneeling in His very ‘presence. Let me be very careful and very reverent. ‘Lord, teach me to pray. Give me the spirit of prayer ‘and supplication.’ This will often help greatly to fix the attention, and prevent wandering thoughts.

2. It is found by many a very useful rule that the reading of Holy Scripture, or an act of meditation upon some part of Holy Scripture, should precede prayer. The mind is thus prepared, and brought into a fitting tone for prayer. Moreover, the words which have been read will often suggest matter for prayer, and should, as far as possible, be turned into prayer. In this way, as has been well said, we learn to substitute in our prayers God’s thoughts for our own. St Francis de Sales called spiritual reading the “oil of the lamp of prayer.”

3. I will next name a point which to some may seem very unimportant, but which is not so in reality—namely, the *posture* of prayer. The outward attitude is a very great help to the inward spirit of devotion. No one who has tried to preserve a devotional spirit in prayer can have failed to observe that a reverent devotional posture is of great importance as a help to this. It is marvellous how self-indulgent we all are in little things. Nothing is commoner than for people who really wish to pray devoutly to allow themselves to adopt such a posture in prayer as is almost sure to produce inattention and sleepiness. Those who have any experience in the matter will not accuse me of making much out of little things if I urge that the attitude of prayer should be one of reverence and devotion without ease and comfort. It is well, for instance, to kneel, if we can, without support—certainly without

such support as may induce sleepy inattention. No doubt some suffer more than others from the temptation to ease and luxury of posture in prayer. But for all it is needful to guard against this. True prayer requires perfect wakefulness. We must watch as well as pray.

4. Closely connected with this is another little point which may be worth mentioning. It has been found a useful thing to set apart a particular spot in our chamber, where, if we like, we can have a small desk or table for books, so that, as we kneel there, we may feel the very spot consecrated, as it were, to the act of worship, and may be helped by its associations to pray the more devoutly.

5. Akin to this is the question as to the time of prayer. In the morning this should of course be as soon as possible after our first rising. It need not be the first act perhaps, though certainly the first thought should be given to God, but it should be before we leave our chamber. And I will venture boldly to plead for the habit of early rising, if only for the sake of prayer. "What conquest," it has been well said, "has he got over himself, what right hand has he cut off, what sacrifice is he ready to offer unto God, who cannot be so cruel to himself as to rise to pray at such time as the drudging part of the world are content to rise to their labour?" (*Law's Serious Call.*) In the evening a greater diversity of practice is allowable. Some are far more troubled with sleepiness than others; and for those who are so, it is well that the evening prayer should not necessarily be the last act before retiring to rest. There can be no due reason why the evening prayer should not be offered at an earlier hour, to avoid the snare I have spoken

of, reserving a few brief ejaculatory prayers for the last thing before closing the eyes in sleep.

6. I will mention one more help in conclusion. There should be a *fixed length* for our prayers. This must plainly be regulated by our power and opportunity. It is with our time as with our money: "If thou hast much, give plenteously: if thou hast little, do thy diligence gladly to give of that little." But this much is surely true. Our prayers ought to be of such length that we can at least gain some sense of quiet intercourse with God. If they are too hurried, we can hardly find time to realise their nature, and to weigh the solemnity and awfulness of that in which we are engaged. I would venture to suggest, that for those who have some amount of leisure a quarter of an hour is no great amount of time to give to God morning and evening. This should, of course, be spent in actual prayer, and is not meant to include meditation or devotional reading. Many may give more. Some may be permitted less. But let every one judge for himself, and make his own rule, and live up to it. It is not so important what the rule is, as that it should be an honest conscientious rule, honestly and conscientiously obeyed.

XXII.

ORDINARY SUBJECTS OF PRAYER.

It has been shown how worship divides itself into several separate acts, such as Confession, Praise, Thanksgiving, Petition, and Intercession; and it has been said that these several acts of worship should each have its place in our prayers. But many desire more particular help. They ask, What should be the ordinary and regular subjects of our prayers? Plainly, no list of the particular subjects of prayer will suffice for all alike. Circumstances differ so much that what will be suitable for one will require to be much altered to suit another. Still we may perhaps give such an outline as may help beginners, and at any rate secure that none of the main features of prayer are omitted. But let us take care that this bare skeleton be not only filled up with its due form and proportions, but also quickened into life and warmth by the "Spirit of prayer and supplication."

First, then, of our Morning Prayer. Let us always try to awake with a thought of Praise in our hearts, if not on our lips. Then when we kneel down to pray, it surely seems fitting that we should begin with an act of Thanksgiving for protection during the night past, and Praise to God for His goodness in the renewal of the blessings of the day. We should next offer up a brief Confession of sinfulness, with a prayer

for grace to withstand the special temptations of the coming day. We may then proceed to Intercessions. These should of course embrace first those nearest and dearest to us. But surely none but little children can be content their Intercessions should be thus narrowed to the home circle. It is very obvious that they should at least embrace the Church at large ("Oh pray for the peace of Jerusalem"), and the parish in which we live. Most will have special cases—such as those of friends in sickness or trouble, of any who have asked for their prayers, of any good works in which they take an interest, and the like,—which they will desire daily to plead before God. It is hoped that many pray regularly for their ministers; and the full width of Intercession is not reached until a place is found in it for the spread of Christ's kingdom in distant lands, and the success of missionary labour. Then again, sponsors should never omit to give a place in their prayers to their god-children. The conversion of those living in sin will not be forgotten, and probably special cases will be commended to the mercy of God. Lastly, if we have unhappily enemies, they, according to our Lord's own command, have a right to a place in our Intercessions. If we add to the above a prayer for the special graces of which we stand most in need, we shall have an outline of Morning Prayer, which will be generally suitable, although of course with such variations as varying circumstances require.

In the evening, as has been stated on a former occasion, it is plain that our first act of worship should be Confession. We have just ended the day with all its trials and temptations, its "sins, negligences, and "ignorances," and to any thoughtful mind it would

seem strange and unsuitable to begin the evening devotions with Praise or Petition, and not first to confess, and seek pardon for, all the sins of the day. After this, an act of Praise or Thanksgiving is most fitting. Intercessions will follow, as in the morning; and the Evening Prayer will end with a commendation of the soul and body into God's hands for protection during the night.

Of course it is assumed that the Lord's Prayer will sum up and crown our prayers, both morning and evening.

It is well to add that the faithful Christian will not omit to introduce into his prayers the thoughts suggested by the Church's special seasons and days as they come round. It is probably a very common practice to add a special prayer on Sundays, commemorating the Resurrection of the Lord, and asking for a blessing upon the day. It is not so common (yet surely it is a very blessed practice) to make also a weekly memorial of the Death of the Lord on Friday, praying that the memory of His Cross may help us to die to sin, and to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts. There is no more truly evangelical observance ordered by our Church than that which marks Friday as a weekly fast, calling to mind the precious Sacrifice of the Cross, which is the sinner's only stay.

Such as can use a Mid-day Prayer will probably require no direction as to its nature, but it may be briefly suggested that the cares and business of the day, the presence of God, and the dying love of the Saviour, are obvious subjects of prayers at such an hour; besides which, some persons have found it a good thing to make this an hour for special Inter-

cession. When persons agree to pray for each other, or for some common object, it is a help to fix on a certain hour for such petitions, the knowledge that others are praying at the same time giving strength and comfort to the prayer. For such a purpose the hour of noon may very well serve.

Well is it for those whose resolve is that of the Psalmist, "In the morning, and in the evening, and "at noon-day will I pray, and that instantly."

XXIII.

INTERCESSION.

OH, how wonderful it is that God should let one poor unworthy servant pray for another ! Yes, but all prayer is wonderful, and this is only one more instance of God's infinite love and mercy. There is abundance of proof in Holy Scripture of God's acceptance of Intercession. See how graciously God permitted Abraham to plead for the guilty cities of the Plain. See how He heard and accepted the intercession of Moses for the people who had sinned so grievously. See how many of our blessed Lord's miracles were the gracious answers to Intercession, as when the centurion pleaded for his servant, the woman of Canaan for her daughter, the father for his lunatic son. See how St Paul in his epistles tells his disciples of his loving intercessions for them. See what blessings are promised to Intercession, when St James assures us that the prayer of faith offered by the elders of the Church for the sick shall save him, and the Lord shall raise him up, and if he have committed sins (for the forgiveness of which prayer has been offered), they shall be forgiven him ; adding, of such Intercession, "the effectual fervent prayer of *"a righteous man availeth much."* Well, we are *not* righteous men, but (thank God) even the faltering imperfect prayer of a sinner will avail much through

the all-prevailing power of Him who is "our Righteousness," and who "ever liveth to make intercession for us."

Now a large part of our prayers will always consist of Intercession. Some persons have many friends and many causes, which they either themselves desire, or have been asked, to plead for. Let me suggest a few very simple rules, which may help to make our intercessions more helpful.

1. A written list of the persons and causes for which we resolve to intercede is a help to the memory, and prevents careless omissions, besides giving order and system to our prayers.

2. If we have many such objects of Intercession, it is well to place a mark against those which we wish never to omit, and to reserve the fuller list for special days or seasons.

3. It is recommended by some to divide the objects, when many, into classes, to be given to different days. Thus the sick and suffering might be prayed for on Friday, the day of our Lord's Passion; while other classes, such as friends having special spiritual needs, societies for the spread of Christ's kingdom, and the like, might be assigned to other days.

4. It is found useful by some, as giving a reality and definiteness to the prayer, to speak the actual names of the persons for whom they intercede. This may sound strange just at first, but will be found helpful, as calling up more forcibly the actual person prayed for.

Intercession is perhaps the easiest branch of Prayer. It is no uncommon complaint among religious people that they can pray far more earnestly for others than for themselves. Many a one has been able to pour

out the whole heart in an agony of intercession for some beloved one in an hour of danger—a parent, or a child, or a brother or sister,—who has been staggered and dismayed at the coldness and deadness of his heart in his ordinary prayers for himself. This is, however, not really a matter of surprise. The fervour and intensity of the Intercession is the fruit of the human love which prompts it. The feelings are stirred in a degree which is perhaps impossible in the more purely spiritual act of the communing of the soul with God as to its own needs and condition. No doubt it is a witness to the infirmity of our fallen nature that our own spiritual wants stir our feelings so languidly. But we must not be cast down because we find the element of human love can give a life and fervour to our prayers which nothing else can. It is probably a necessity of our present state that it should be so. And if such is our own experience, we would simply bow our heads, and confess with shame how little our own soul's needs affect us, thanking God that He has shown us what true fervent prayer may be, and asking Him to pardon the lack of warmth we mourn over in our devotions, and to accept them for Jesus Christ's sake. After all, love is a grace which is of God, who "is Love," and He that has planted this fair plant of love in our hearts will not scorn the prayer to which it lends its fragrance.

Nay, may we not go farther, and as we gaze with awe upon the Son of God Himself pouring out His intercessions for His disciples ere He passed to Gethsemane and to Calvary, see a new glory and strength and blessedness in intercessory prayer? May it be that strength for self is sometimes best sought in prayer for others? Anyhow it has been

well said that there will certainly come to you “times
“when you will find personal prayer difficult. Then
“betake yourself to intercessory prayer for others,
“and think of the Saviour preparing Himself for the
“mighty conflict by engaging in prayer for us.”*

* From the Rev. F. V. Mather’s “Short Sermons for the
“Year.”

XXIV.

INFLUENCE OF PRAYER ON THE DAILY LIFE.

It is quite impossible that there should be much Prayer in a life, without that life being marked or altered by it. In the nature of things it must be so, quite apart from the supernatural effects of prayer in the answers to petitions for grace and strength and holiness. Frequent intercourse even with an earthly friend, if he be of a strong and marked character, quickly makes itself seen in its influence upon us. We grow more and more like those with whom we associate, and especially, if we admire and look up to them, we unconsciously imitate them. It is so no less in our intercourse with God. The more time we spend in His presence, seeking His face, and communing with Him in prayer, the more surely will godly graces and tempers spring up within us, and bear fruit in our lives. The more we love to meditate upon our perfect Example, and to hold converse with Him, the more assuredly will men be able to take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus. Do you know any one peculiarly Christ-like in character—meek and lowly in heart, pure, patient, loving, unselfish, calm, truthful, happy? Depend upon it, such an one has become what he is mainly by prayer.

Now one of the chief fruits of Prayer in the daily life is *Peace*. “In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ.” A life of prayer is a life of peace. There may be plenty of outward trials and troubles in such a life, but there will be inward peace—peace of heart and mind. Not alike perhaps and equally in all, for calmer natures realise peace more easily than others, and at times even natural quietude of disposition may be mistaken for true peace. But in all who truly pray, some degree of peace will be found. Even restless, eager, unquiet, passion-tossed souls are not without their visions of peace, if they truly pray. Their natural restlessness may mar and interrupt it continually; yet at the bottom of their hearts there will be a blessed sense of peacefulness which they can realise in their calmer moments, and especially in the hour of prayer.

It is a common complaint among Christian people that they do not feel happy in their religion. And many who do not complain are nevertheless very plainly not at ease. They are dissatisfied, gloomy, impatient; or else unreal, putting on a false cheerfulness, merry but not happy. May not the secret of much of this dissatisfaction and want of peace really lie in the absence of true prayer? There is little of the spirit of devotion; therefore there is little of the fruit of devotion. Perhaps, when we meet with such a case of restless disquiet, the clue to it may be a very simple one. *He has not prayed.* He may have gone through the form of prayer—‘said his prayers,’ as

we say,—but *he has not prayed*. Is it strange, then, that he has not that peace which is the result of prayer?

But how is peace the result of prayer? Partly, no doubt, in the way of a direct answer to prayer,—as a gift of God's Holy Spirit to the soul that prayed. But probably even more in the way of a natural consequence upon the habit of prayer. The very act of prayer of necessity implies such a childlike dependence upon God, that it is impossible it should not produce a sense of peace and security at other times. It assumes and acts upon the belief that God is a merciful and loving Father, and this belief is not a thing that can be taken up for the brief time of prayer, and then laid aside for the rest of the day. It is in its nature an abiding principle, which must more or less enter into other things besides prayer. If there be none of this quiet childlike trust in God in other things, we may be nearly sure that there was very little of it in the hour of prayer. And if so, what then must have been the nature of the prayers themselves? Is there, in short, any true prayer without some degree of trust and confidence in Him to whom we make known our wants? I will not say there may not be a true cry of grief, an agonised entreaty for mercy and repentance and peace, or the like, even where there is little trust and confidence as yet. What I mean is, that, when prayer has once become the Christian's habit, then there must be confidence. It would be foolish to ask of one in whose power and will to grant our requests we had no reliance; foolish to open our hearts to one in whose sympathy and aid we had no trust. The truth is, prayer is a casting of our care upon God; and if the care is really cast upon God, it will not trouble

us much afterwards. Thus peace is a natural consequence upon the habit of prayer. Prayer will make the life calm and happy.

It is clear also that habitual prayer will beget habitual watchfulness, and thoughtfulness, and tenderness of conscience, and purity. And these, too, both as direct answers to, and as natural consequences of, prayer. This is even plainer than in the former case; for it is most plainly impossible to be real in prayer, and yet at other times wilfully careless and sinful. The heart is very deceitful, and plenty of instances may be found (apart from mere hypocrisy) of strict observance of religious forms coupled with astonishing neglect of the simplest moral duties. But we can hardly suppose that there is what we mean by *real prayer* in such cases. It is difficult to imagine any one so self-deceived and blind as to be able to pray truly, and at the same time sin wilfully and habitually. Daily life *will* act out the spirit of true prayer; true prayer *will* shed its blessed influence on daily life. Yet is there need still to be evermore asking God to

“——help us, this and every day,
To live more nearly as we pray.”

XXV.

MEDITATION AS A HELP TO PRAYER.

THE practice of Meditation has been too much neglected amongst us. Yet it is a very helpful and blessed practice, and many are learning to value it. Let me try to explain it very simply, for the sake of those who are not familiar with it. Thank God, there are many hearts at the present time stirred to long for, and to strive after, deeper devotional habits, and a higher spiritual life. Such will be thankful for every help, and especially for every help which may make their prayers more earnest and devout.

By Meditation is meant the devotional use of some chosen subject or passage of Holy Scripture. We will suppose the subject to be chosen. It may be, for example, some event in the life or sufferings of our Saviour. It will make it plainer if we illustrate what we say by an example. Suppose we take the miracle of the healing of the poor woman who touched the hem of our Lord's garment. How shall we use this for the purpose of Meditation?

1. We must begin by seeking help from God. Kneeling down, or standing quietly, as we prefer, (though kneeling is probably best for those who can bear it,) we must try to banish all other thoughts, and resolve to centre the mind on what we are about to

do, offering some such short prayer as this : ‘O God, ‘send Thy Holy Spirit to teach me Thy will, and to ‘help my infirmities, for Jesus Christ’s sake.’

2. Then try to picture to yourself the scene. Realise it. Imagine to yourself the dense crowd moving along, all trying to get a sight of the one central Figure that walks on calm and solemn in the midst. Close to Him are His Apostles, and all the crowd thronging and pressing. You can imagine even their dresses as you have seen them in pictures, and you may think how sadly Jesus would look upon the poor ignorant people whom He longed to save, but who only came to see Him do some wonder. And then you see that poor shrinking woman in the thick of the crowd. She looks very ill and very anxious, yet with a light of hope in her eye, as she steals on among the multitude, getting nearer and nearer to the great Healer. And then she is close behind Him ; she seizes a chance, and suddenly touches just the border of His garment. That is all she wants. She drops behind ; she lets the crowd go by ; she feels she has got what she wants ; she is healed of her plague. We need not go farther with the story to-day.

3. Ask yourself, What lesson can this teach me? You must now use your reason, as before you used your imagination. You may draw out the lessons of the story (I wish only to speak of the plainest and simplest lessons) in something of this way :—I see, first, the blessedness of Faith. The touch of faith brought healing to the poor woman, when the touch of the crowd who had no faith and sought no blessing brought them nothing. O Lord, increase my faith. “Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief.” Give me grace, O Jesus, to touch Thee by faith, that my soul

may be healed of its sickness. Then I see, next, the wonderful freedom and generosity of Christ's gifts. He does not give the poor woman what she asks "because "of her importunity"; she does not run and fall at His Feet, and beseech Him with tears; she does not even clasp His sacred Hand. She only touches the hem of His garment. A little trembling secret touch wins the gift. Is not this an encouragement to my prayers? Yes! He is kinder than we think. O Lord, my prayers are so poor and weak and unworthy, I often wonder how they can be heard. Teach me to lean more on Thy marvellous goodness, and even if I seem but to come in the press behind, and scarcely to touch even the border of Thy garment with my finger, oh, let me not doubt Thy mercy. "Praise the Lord, O "my soul, and forget not all His benefits; who for- "giveth all thy sins, and healeth all thine infirmities." But, once again, I see in this picture the wonderful sacredness and power of our Lord's human Body. Through it what healing virtue flows forth for those that will be healed! Even His very raiment conveys the Divine gift. Nay, it flows even in a yet more bountiful stream, so that many were healed by the very shadow of an Apostle passing by. Shall I not see in this a pledge of the blessings that I may win through the Son of God taking a human nature and becoming man? Is it not through His Manhood that there comes to me pardon and grace and strength and holiness? Is it not through this—the mystery of His holy Incarnation—that I find in His own blessed Sacraments the "virtue" needed by my poor sin-sick soul? O Lord Jesus, God and Man, I come to Thee, the one Mediator between God and man, through whom alone I would draw nigh to the Father, through whom alone I

would seek all I need. Thou knowest my infirmities; Thou sharest my nature; Thou wearest even now a human Body, where Thou sittest at the right hand of God. Thou art the Head, and we Thine earthly members. Oh, keep us Thine, fill us with Thy Spirit, and make us to grow up into Thee, our Head, in all things.

You will notice that I have mingled prayers with the above lessons; and it is important that you should turn your meditation as much as possible into prayer, addressing in turn your own soul and God.

4. But you may now try to stir your feelings into deeper devotion by the thoughts you have drawn out. Thus you may speak to yourself in this fashion: O my soul, how dull and unmoved thou art at the sight of so much love and mercy! It is written, "We love Him because He first loved us." Yet how faint and feeble is thy love! Did not the poor woman who was healed go away full of loving gratitude? But where is thine? Hast thou received less than she? O God, stir my sluggish soul to love Thee better for Thy great goodness. Touch my stony heart with the rod of Thy power, that streams of love may flow out. I sometimes doubt whether I love Thee at all. Yet I want to love Thee. And, "Lord, Thou knowest all my desire." Yea, "Thou knowest all things: Thou knowest that I love Thee." Tell me then, Lord, what I shall do to show my love.

5. In conclusion, gather up one or two of the thoughts which seem to you of most value in your meditation, and take them with you as a nosegay, the scent of which may refresh you during the day. Say, for instance, I will to-day recollect sometimes how

little a touch won the healing, and how free are the gifts of Jesus, and this shall help me to feel the freedom and brightness of a child's love. I can surely touch the hem of His garment now and then with a little silent heart-prayer. This thought shall go with me to-day.

I have now tried to give a specimen of a Meditation. You see it is almost like a little sermon made for yourself, only with a good deal of prayer mixed with it. It ought to take you about a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, and I do not think it could be done at all, with any profit, in less than ten minutes.

Now I daresay you are saying to yourself, 'This is rather a hard task. I do not think I could do all this.' Very likely not. It is not very easy, and it requires some practice. But you could try. For a great many Christians *devotional reading* will be the only form of meditation attainable. If you can take your Bible, (or sometimes some other good book of devotion,) and read carefully and thoughtfully, and with prayer to God, some little portion daily, you may be content. But if you desire to learn the practice of Meditation, I would recommend you to fix upon one or two mornings in the week for the purpose. (For instance, on Friday the different parts of our Lord's Passion might provide you with subjects for many months.) But what I wish chiefly to urge is that your meditation or devotional reading, whichever it be, always precede your prayers. It is wonderful how much life and fervour and blessedness a quarter of an hour spent beforehand in meditation will often give to the prayer which follows. Meditation is a very blessed practice for its own sake; it is yet more blessed as a help to prayer.

XXVI.

A SCHEME OR PLAN OF DEVOTION.

I SUPPOSE no one ever found a book of devotion perfectly suited to his every need, with nothing in it which seemed to him unreal, or faulty, or ill-expressed, and with nothing left out which he would have liked to have put in. There is sure to be something, either in doctrine, or in style, or in matter, or in defect, which does not quite satisfy. Well, then, why not make a book of devotion for yourself? It would well repay the trouble, and would probably be more helpful than any book prepared by another.

Let us see how it should be done.

Probably it would be best that it should consist of two parts; the first an outline of subjects of prayer, and the second selected prayers.

We will take a small blank book. Let three or four pages at the beginning be allotted to Self-examination and Confession. It will be well to write down such questions for self-examination as you have found it useful to ask yourself. I should advise that the first two or three questions should be those which you resolve to ask yourself *every night* when you kneel down to say your prayers, and these should of course have to do with your chief besetting sins. Then draw a line, and beneath it add such farther questions

as you have found helpful in bringing you to a knowledge of your own heart, this fuller list of questions to be used in preparing for Holy Communion, and at other stated times. You would follow this with any form of Confession you have felt useful. You need not write out everything in full. For instance, here you might simply refer to the General Confession, the Confession in the Communion Service, and the 51st Psalm, only writing out in full any other form you may wish to have at hand for use.

The next few pages may be allotted to your own personal needs. Here you would write down those particular graces for which you feel you ought to pray. For example, you might write down 'Patience,' 'Submission,' 'Meekness and Gentleness'; or 'F forbearance,' 'Charitableness,' 'A forgiving temper'; or 'Industry,' 'A right use of time,' 'A will to do the best I can.' It is not at all necessary or desirable to try to fill up the pages you give to any class of subjects at once. Never put down one word beyond what you feel. If you just enter one thing, and at the moment feel that to be your one pressing need, leave it there. As you learn to feel new needs, and to long for new graces, you will gradually fill up more of the space you have left.

You will next leave several pages for subjects of Intercession, which themselves may be divided into classes. Thus on the first of these pages you would enter the names, or initials, of those who, by family ties or other circumstances, have a claim on your prayers; and it may be you would find it well sometimes to add to some such name a little word, or a little mark, to remind you of some special petition you wish frequently to make for that one. A second

page would contain the names or initials of any friends or other persons who have asked for a place in your prayers, or for whom special reasons lead you to pray, amongst whom you would include your God-children, if you have any. Another page, again, would contain such subjects of intercession as your Church, your Parish, your Ministers, Schools, Societies, Foreign Missions, and the like. This is a section of your book which is so likely to grow, that it is well to leave several pages blank; and it may be a useful practical hint to suggest that the names of sick persons, or of such as are likely only to have a temporary place in your intercessions, should be written on a loose paper kept in this part of your book.

You would next proceed to subjects of Praise and Thanksgiving, recounting the special mercies you have received, and noting the date of any great blessing, or merciful escape from danger.

These four heads would form the first part of your book, and would be an outline of prayer which you would find most valuable in keeping your mind from straying, and in giving order and method to your devotion.

I need hardly say that it would not be necessary to go through your outline always in the same order. For instance, in the Morning you would probably make Praise your first act, as in the Evening Confession. Nor, again, need the whole of any section be taken at one time, and it is easy to mark different subjects, as you please, for Morning, Evening, or Mid-day use.

The second part of your book is to consist of extracts from, or references to, other books. It would be a very good beginning to this part to give two or three

pages to the Book of Psalms, noting in them such Psalms as you find help you most, giving the number, the first few words, and perhaps a word expressing the character, such as Praise, Penitence, Thanksgiving, &c. Never forget that our dear Lord Himself used the Psalms as His expression of devotion even on the Cross.

You might next devote a little space to referring to such collects or other prayers in the Prayerbook as you might wish to remind yourself of frequently.

But the main use of this second part would be to copy into it any prayers you have met with which seem to suit you thoroughly. Do not write out any till you have used them, I mean *prayed* them, and found them such as you need. You would naturally keep one portion of your book for devotions connected with Holy Communion. For these you might leave a space at the end.

No doubt some might enlarge this plan yet farther, leaving a section for Hymns, another for Heads of Meditation, another for little extracts from books on the subject of devotion, and the like.

I am sure, however, that no one will regret the trouble it may take to begin such a plan as I have very briefly sketched out. It will grow under your hands as you use it, and you will learn to love it better and better as it grows. Indeed your use of such a book will be one of the very best tests you could possibly have of your growth in the practice of prayer.

I should like to persuade you to try, and I should not be surprised if some day you were to say, 'See how full my book has become. I could not do without it now.'

XXVII.

PRAYER OF THE UNSEEN WORLD.

WHAT a thick veil it is which hangs between us and the unseen world ! How we long to pierce through for a moment, and see what the spirits of the Saints at rest are doing ! It is almost dreadful to know so little about them. At least those who have seen loved ones pass behind that veil long—they cannot help longing—to know something more. One day with us, sharers in our hopes, our joys, our sorrows, our prayers ; the next gone, and all so dim and mysterious and hard to understand ! Well, God has willed it to be so. If it were good for us to know more, we should know. There are some plain reasons, which any of us can see, why it might be very bad for us. God wills that the affections and desires and utterances of the soul, which go forth into the world unseen, should centre in Him. I do not mean that He would bid us forget our earthly love, or put away our hope to meet again. But if we knew more, might not this knowledge become the absorbing passion of our souls, and the love and worship of God be dimmed or hidden by it ?

Yet it cannot be wrong to ask reverently of Holy Scripture what may be gathered concerning the souls that have fallen asleep in the Lord. Do they pray

in Paradise? Oh! surely yes. Can we doubt it? Is not reason sufficient, had we no proof beyond? The soul has prayed while here in the flesh. Prayer was its strength, its joy, its life. It will pray when once more united to the body in the new life of the glorified. Is it only to be shut out from prayer during this season while it is separated from the body, between Death and Resurrection? If the soul lives, it surely prays. Aye, and as surely it prays with a freedom and a joy and a love unknown to us in our weary battlings with the infirmities of this "corruptible body," which so sadly "presseth down the soul." But we are not left to reason alone. St John in the Revelation was permitted to see the souls of the martyrs, who were to "rest yet for a little season," and to hear their cry, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" They prayed. Yes; as we look on the thick veil, and think with longing hearts upon the loved ones—the lowly, patient, beautiful, devout souls—which it hides so sternly from our eyes, we know one thing most surely;—we know they pray; we know they worship with a worship infinitely purer, brighter, more glorious, than any earthly worship; we know that, when we offer up our poor stammering praises, we do so, not alone "with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven," but also with all the "spirits of just men made perfect," with all the blessed saints, who still wait for their final bliss and glory in the fair glades of Paradise. Here then (thanks be to God!) is one employment in which we may realise our bond of union with the holy happy dead; one link of that blessed "Communion of Saints," which we believe in, but often find it

so hard to realise. The saints on earth and those at rest have one common privilege; they are sharers in the one grand offering of holy worship which is ever going up as sweet-smelling incense before the Throne.

And do they pray for us? We are not told; but why not? Are they to stop praying for us because they can now pray better than before? May intercession for those we love go up so long as we are in the flesh, and must it cease the moment we quit our earthly tabernacle? We cannot be wrong (it is so simple and so reasonable) to hope, to believe, that our dear ones in the unseen world intercede for us still. Does it ever cheer and strengthen us to know that friends at a distance here on earth are praying for us, and must we refuse to be cheered and strengthened by the thought that friends are praying for us in Paradise?

And may we then ask them now to pray for us? Ah, no: there we stay our steps. We dare not. This would be prayer, and prayer is the sole right of God. It may be offered to no creature. Even if we could tell that the spirits of the departed could hear us (and we have no right to invest them with a divine omniscience), we may not ask them for their prayers.

But may we pray for them? Again, we are not told. We certainly have no scriptural warrant for doing so.* But neither have we any prohibition. It

* The words spoken by St Paul concerning Onesiphorus, "The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord" "in that day" (2 Tim. i. 18), have been sometimes brought forward as an argument for Prayer for the dead, it being assumed that Onesiphorus was dead, because his household, and not himself, is mentioned, both in this passage (verse 16), and

appears to be one of those questions upon which it is wrong to speak very positively ; one of those subjects in pursuing which we must walk very warily, not having Scripture for our guide. Can we certainly say that we know what things we may safely ask for the dead ; in what things we may, without presumption, believe that God will increase their happiness ? Assuredly God *may* in His mercy vouchsafe many divine gifts to the souls in Paradise. But we leave the hidden things in His hands ; and would neither condemn those who, imitating the constant practice of the Early Church, make mention of the departed in their prayers, asking for them rest, and peace, and a blessed resurrection ; nor, on the other hand, recommend a practice which has been in later times linked with so much false doctrine, and which our own Church does not encourage.

also in the Salutations at the end of the Epistle. But, granting that it is probable that Onesiphorus was dead, a pious wish, like that of the Apostle, is surely a most precarious foundation on which to build a practice so different as that of Prayer for the dead. It is indeed the building of a pyramid on its point.

XXVIII.

PRAYER IN CONNECTION WITH SICKNESS.

It is surely not difficult to find the link which binds together the thoughts of sickness and of prayer. There are those among us, not a few, who scarcely need to be told by St James how blessed a thing prayer is in the time of sickness and affliction. "Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray." "Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the Church: and let them pray over him." The prayer of the sufferer for himself—the prayer of the Parish Priest by the bed of sickness—experience (I dare not call it *sad* experience, for is it not blessed?) has taught many a one among us how good these are.

We have been learning of late years the value of setting apart days or short seasons for retirement and prayer. These are called "Retreats," and are often full of blessedness and help to those striving to live to God. Now sickness is a sort of God-appointed "Retreat." God takes His child into the wilderness to plead with him face to face. The loneliness of sickness—is it one of its greatest trials or one of its greatest blessings? To have *plenty of time* to pray—may not this be to many a good gift of God? Oh! when we feel what are the things which mostly hinder prayer;

when we mourn over all these outward distractions of life, this busy, hurrying, absorbing existence which so many have to lead, this persistent presence of the things of sense, this life so "careful and troubled "about many things," this round of daily cares and occupations which makes such demands on the strong and healthy ; and when we feel how these things push themselves into our very prayers, causing hurry and distraction where all should be calm and solemn ; we may, indeed, well believe that it is often in great love and mercy that God calls us aside, for some longer or shorter season, that we may be able the better to commune with our own hearts in our chamber, and to *be still*. It is not indeed pleasant to be taken into the wilderness, away from all the distractions of daily life. This wilderness of a sick-chamber does not seem to us joyous, but grievous. God did not mean it to be a very pleasant and attractive place. But He *did* mean it to be a very calm and peaceful and blessed place. In health the brightness of the world dazzles the eye too often, so that it cannot see the brightness of God. In sickness a cloud is drawn like a veil over the world's delights, and then we see how pure and beautiful is the true Light. Then Faith shines out with new clearness and keenness of vision. And Prayer is the voice of Faith. The soul then speaks face to face with God. Perhaps no truer, purer, more blessed prayers ascend up to the Throne, than those which come from chambers of sickness. We often cry in our feebleness, "Lord, teach us to pray." Is not this oftentimes God's best answer ?

But even more. Not for themselves alone may the sick perchance be taught the lesson of prayer. May

it not be God's will that many a worker in his day of toil and strife may be strengthened and supported by the prayers of the sick and feeble? May it not be that they are called to lift up holy hands in their solitude on the mountain of prayer, that the armies of the Lord may prevail against His enemies? Then there are the intercessions of others. Listen to St James' words :—"Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the Church ; and let them pray over him." And to this prayer is promised a special gift, both of healing and of pardon. Oh, blessed and wonderful power of prayer ! "Pray one for another that ye may be healed." All prayer for one another is blessed. It is a blessed and holy thing when any kind friend will kneel down and pray with the sick and suffering. But to this special intercession of the priest, who comes in Christ's name and with Christ's authority, a special blessing is attached. Let it not then be despised.

There is another form of intercession for the sick, which has in it a great power of comfort and strength. Surely any sick person, who has once learnt to love and value the united prayer of the congregation, will be very thankful to be remembered in the intercessions of the Church in her public worship. Do not let us look on this custom as an idle form. Nay, rather, is it not one of the lesser links, which bind Christian people together in the Communion of Saints? It is good for the whole to remember the absent members, whom God's wisdom has withdrawn from among them for a season, and it is good for the sick to know that there are at least some hearts among the people with whom they have loved to

worship, which do not forget them in their intercessions before the Throne of Grace.

If from the shores of eternity we cast back our gaze over the path we have travelled in this world, which regions will shine most brightly and beautifully in the view? Not, I think, those that have seemed to be most joyous in the passing,—not the years of youth, and health, and strength, and earthly happiness,—but much rather the spaces that here have seemed the darkest and dreariest; for these have drawn us nearest to God; these have been fullest of prayer; on these have fallen the purest, brightest rays from the Father of lights, and from Him who is the Brightness of that Father's glory, and the Light of the World.

XXIX.

BODILY INFIRMITY AS A HINDRANCE TO PRAYER.

THERE are states of bodily health in which Prayer becomes exceedingly difficult. “The corruptible body “presseth down the soul.” Yet often the true cause of the difficulty is not known, and great trouble and misery is felt at a want of power to pray, which is supposed to be a spiritual malady, when it really springs from bodily causes.

Now I would not have any one who reads these words say, “This is most likely my case. I find my “heart cold and dead, and I cannot account for it. It “seems of no use to try to pray. I must set it down “to the state of my health, and be content.” *Suppose* there is some other cause. Suppose there is some secret sin—pride, or envy, or uncharitableness, or impurity, or sloth, or worldliness,—which is the real malady, it would be a fearful thing to deceive one’s self, and to cloak the true evil under a false excuse. Oh ! do not grasp at a way of accounting for your want of the spirit of devotion, because it is easy, and soothes your conscience ; but be very strict and searching with yourself, first of all, so as to make sure that the root of the evil is not elsewhere. When you cannot account for it in any other way, when you have striven in all lowly anxiousness and earnestness

to discover the hindrance in your soul, then you may ask yourself, "May it be traced to bodily weakness?" This is the true cause more often perhaps than is thought, and many a poor weary desponding soul needs the comfort of knowing this. Yet the humble Christian will accept this reason very unwillingly, with much fear and trembling, and with many a sigh if so it must be.

There are states of bodily infirmity which betray themselves chiefly in their effect on the mind and feelings. There is no pain, only a sort of general lassitude and want of vigour and brightness. It is hardly enough to be called disease. Yet it is just this state which renders devotion so very difficult. Mental effort and strict attention are needed for prayer; and these seem beyond the power of one in this state. There is the attempt made, but even the body is wearied by the attitude of kneeling, and the mind seems utterly powerless to overcome the wandering thoughts, and sense of deadness and vacancy, and miserable reluctance to pray, which beset it. It is wretched enough to feel thus. God seems, oh! so far off. We are sinking in the cold waves, and there is no Jesus with His kind pity to stretch out His hand and lift us up. Probably in such a state no words will be found more helpful than those of the 77th Psalm. They draw a life-like picture of a soul suffering under this sense of desolation and banishment from God. Who has not known moments when he could make these sad questionings his own: "Will the Lord absent Himself for ever? And will He be no more entreated? Is His mercy clean gone for ever? And is His promise come utterly to an end for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be

“gracious ? And will He shut up His loving-kindness in displeasure ?” The true answer is in the next words, “And I said, It is mine own infirmity.” Yes, thou poor suffering one, it is thine own infirmity—thine own weakness—which brings to thee such sad desponding thoughts. God hath not changed ; He is not absent from thee : He hath not forgotten to be gracious : He will not shut up His loving-kindness in displeasure. No ; the cloud which so hides away the sunshine of His love, hangs very close to thine own soul. It may be dark and thick, as thou lookest up. Yet if thou couldst only for one moment gaze through its folds, thou wouldst see that blessed sunshine as bright and beautiful as ever beyond. Oh ! “remember the years of the right hand of the “most High.” “Call to mind” His “wonders of “old time.” He is “the Father of lights, with whom “is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” He that loved thee in time past loveth thee still. Why wilt thou thus doubt His love because thou seest not thine own ?

And now you ask, What shall I do ?

You must do what you can. You have been trying to do more than you can. God only asks from you what He gives you the power to do.

1. Be content with a shorter prayer. You may probably be able to make up for its shortness by greater attentiveness.

2. Be content if you can attain to attentiveness even without warmth of devotion.

3. Offer to God what you thus do as a most unworthy and imperfect offering, to be accepted only for the sake of Jesus Christ who offered Himself for you.

4. Try to say a brief ejaculatory prayer to God sometimes during the day, such as, "O Father, have mercy on Thy poor helpless child, and save me for Jesus Christ's sake."

5. Bear your want of power to pray as a cross to be taken up humbly and carried after Christ.

6. Hope that it will not always be so.

Oh, how happy and beautiful it will be to worship God when all mists and clouds and darkness are burnt up in the brightness of His manifested presence! "Now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face." Meanwhile, we must not behave as if God were that "austere man" of the parable, taking up where He has not laid down, and reaping where He has not sown. Oh, no! He is our loving, generous, most merciful Father, and we His little children, looking up to Him in the spirit of adoption, and not in the spirit of bondage and of fear. O Father, Thy child cannot always see Thee. Thou hidest Thyself sometimes in clouds and thick darkness. Yet will I believe Thy love. Heaviness may endure for the night, but joy cometh in the morning. And when that morning breaks, there will be no more night, but the lifting up of the light of Thy countenance upon us, for "in Thy presence is fulness of joy, and at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

XXX.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

OH, wonderful privilege, to possess a Prayer made for us by the ever-blessed Son of God Himself! Think, my soul, what this treasure is that thou possessest. Thy God hath made it : therefore He knoweth perfectly what it is His own will to grant thee. Thy Brother-Man hath made it : therefore He knoweth with like certainty what thy needs are. “The only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father,” and who therefore knoweth absolutely that Father’s mind,—He who Himself said when on earth, “The Father loveth the Son, and sheweth Him all things that Himself doeth,”—He, again, who was in all things “made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest, in things pertaining to God,”—He it is who hath Himself taught us how to pray. If some unhappy subjects of a great monarch desired to lay their grievances before him, and to seek redress, would they not think themselves wondrously fortunate if they could learn from one familiar with the king’s views and intentions, exactly what it were well for them to ask, and what the king were disposed to grant? Yes : this were good. But what if the king himself, most earnestly desiring the good of his subjects, most truly anxious to grant all their lawful desires, were to send them a confi-

dential messenger with the very form of petition it were best for them to present,—a form of petition embracing all their real needs, and stating their true wants far better than they could have themselves stated them! What happy people we should account them! But this, and more than this, is ours. For may we not say that the King has Himself come among us, making Himself one with His subjects, and sharing their hardest lot, that so He may have compassion on them, and be touched with the feeling of their infirmities? And lo! He hath taught us how to pray! Praised be His Name!

Now let us look at this Prayer which the Lord has given us. It is very short. Perhaps its shortness is one of the first things that strike us in regarding it. And it is the model of all prayer. Nevertheless, this shortness cannot be pressed into an argument for very short prayers, when the Divine Author of it, by His own example, teaches us the blessedness of spending much time in prayer. But it may surely comfort and encourage such as have little time for prayer, and show that even a short prayer, if offered with heart-felt earnestness, will be accepted by God. A prayer meant for all, to be used by little children and dying saints, by the ignorant as well as the learned, by the poor peasant no less than the wealthy and great, by the sick as by the whole, must of necessity be short.

The shortness of the Lord's Prayer is, however, a most real and practical argument against "vain repetitions," and against thinking we shall be heard for our "much speaking." It teaches us that prayer should be very simple, natural, unaffected. It seems to condemn all craving after ornament of language,

all attempt at mere eloquence in prayer. Few things are so offensive to all pure and true feeling as high-flown expressions, and words used more for sound than for sense, in speaking to God. Yet we must not mistake. There is at times a fulness and richness of language employed in prayer, which brings no feeling of unfitness or unreality with it. But then the very condition of the use of such language is, that it be the real and true expression of real and true thoughts. For instance, sometimes it is found helpful to dwell upon some brief petition, and to unfold it, as it were, before God, drawing out its manifold meanings, even to a seeming risk of repetition, so as to impress the mind with the sense of prayer, prolonging and deepening the desire, and preventing the petition being unduly hurried over through its very shortness: but this is a very different thing from aiming at fine language, and thinking more of the clothing than of the substance of our prayer.* We may also notice that even in the simple and chastened prayers of our Prayer-book, a certain grandeur and richness is sometimes seen, especially in those prayers which are drawn from an Eastern source †: but, again, this is never at the expense of truth and reality. Even though we admit these seeming exceptions, it remains true that the shortness of the Lord's Prayer is a plea for much *simplicity* in our prayers.

* Perhaps one of the best instances of a perfectly natural and unaffected fulness and almost redundancy of language in prayer, is found in Bishop Armstrong's exquisite little book, "The Pastor in his Closet."

† The Prayer for the Queen's Majesty, following the Third Collect in Morning and Evening Prayer, is an excellent instance of this.

Then again, is not the form in which our Lord has taught us to pray a protest against all undue excitement in prayer? There are some who hardly count that for prayer which has not in it much warmth and vehemence of manner and of voice. Yet the Lord's Prayer in its simple brevity, is surely an argument for calm and quiet forms of prayer, such as are the beautiful, yet most simple, Collects of our Church. And this, not alone because it is itself such a set form, but also, and even more, because its calm, brief, sternly simple petitions are as opposite as can be conceived to the unchastened, artificial, inflated, and excited style, which at least sometimes characterises public extempore prayer. We would not condemn the use of public extempore prayer on fit occasions, but we are sure it requires to be used with great humility and reverence and simplicity.

Consider next the comprehensiveness of this Prayer. All Divine sayings are manifold. Prophecies have manifold fulfilments. Histories have manifold teachings. Parables have manifold interpretations. Should we not expect a prayer so brief, given by such a Teacher, to possess a fulness corresponding with its brevity? This we hope to trace out farther as we go on. But we will pause for a moment even now, as we stand on the threshold of this Divine structure, and wonder at the treasures of wisdom which are stored in its narrow compass. Who that truly prays has never had glimpses of this manifoldness of meaning in the Lord's Prayer? We have prayed it in sickness. Has not every clause borrowed a new power and richness of sense from the atmosphere which encompassed it? It seemed as though it were made for the bed of pain. We have prayed it as we have knelt

in penitence on some day of fasting and mourning. Have we not found in it then a penitential tone, which has made it the truest expression of our heart's sorrow? We have prayed it immediately after we have knelt in solemn devotion at our Saviour's holy Feast. Has it not then been, as it were, transfigured, and clothed with new light and joy and thanksgiving? Surely this Prayer, like God Himself, and His Wisdom, is "one only, manifold."

FREQUENT USE OF THE LORD'S PRAYER.

THE frequent use of the Lord's Prayer in our Church Services is by no means an uncommon subject of complaint. It is certainly said as often as five times when we use the Morning Prayer, Litany, and Communion Service all together. But then these are separate services, and it was not supposed they would be all used together, and of course no service would be complete without the Lord's Prayer. But nevertheless the Lord's Prayer is used twice in the Daily Morning and Evening Prayer, as well as in the Communion Service, and even this is by some held to be excessive, at least in the former case.*

But is this repetition really an evil or no? First of all, take a very simple and practical view of the matter. Do you ever let the first Lord's Prayer slip

* It is this feeling which undoubtedly led to the second Lord's Prayer being placed among the portions allowed to be omitted in the shortened form of Daily Prayer sanctioned by Act of Parliament in 1872; but it should be noted that this omission was *not* sanctioned by the Church in her Convocations, although the Act of Parliament professed simply to embody the resolutions of Convocation. So far as the Church is concerned, there is no authority at all for the omission of the second Lord's Prayer at any service.

by without really praying it? Do you ever begin the service quite meaning to enter into its several parts earnestly and devoutly, and then, after a few minutes, find your thoughts gone astray, anywhere, and the solemn words of Confession, and the blessed message of Absolution, and the Lord's own perfect summary and pattern of all Prayer, gone by, and the chance of taking your own full part in them gone too for this time? And, if so, have you never been very thankful, when the Lord's Prayer has come the second time, for the opportunity of at least praying it then? I am sure this has happened to you at times. It has often happened to me. And then again, if the inattention has not been so entire, has it never been the case that in the second Lord's Prayer you have been glad to give a force and reality to some petition or petitions which you neglected to pray from your heart the first time? This, too, must be a very common experience.

But there is another view of the repetition worth reflecting upon. We will suppose you *did* pray the Lord's Prayer the first time attentively, uttering its petitions in their first simple natural sense, as you first learnt to understand them when a little child. Must you then merely try to do the same thing again when you come to the Prayer a second time? Surely, in using a Prayer which, from its very shortness, must be so full of rich and varied meaning, it is both easy and lawful to turn it, as it were, in a different direction, and read it in a different light. It will thus lend itself, without any unnatural straining of the sense, to various purposes and intentions.

For example, how easily and beautifully does the Lord's Prayer become a Missionary Prayer. I have

long tried to make it so on its second occurrence in our Morning and Evening Prayer, whenever it has been prayed the first time in its more general sense attentively; and I commend this use of it to others. Plainly there is no difficulty in doing this with the first three petitions. Perhaps the petition "Give us "this day our daily bread" lends itself to this purpose less readily than the rest; yet may we not ask in these words that God would feed us and all mankind with the true Bread of Life? Then we can easily go on, asking pardon for our trespasses in past neglects and grudging gifts, and deliverance from the temptation to covetousness and selfishness, and from the evil of worldliness and unbelief, the great hindrances to the spread of Christ's kingdom.

At the beginning of the Communion Service the Lord's Prayer would naturally take an Eucharistic character, having in view the Holy Sacrament towards which it is here the first step. In this place the petition "Give us this day our daily bread" would stand out from the rest with peculiar significance, though indeed it needs no great skill or practice to make every petition turn upon the blessed Feast which is to follow.

In like manner it is not difficult with a very little pains to adapt the petitions in the Lord's Prayer to the more joyful frame of mind which suits a service of thanksgiving, or the more penitential feelings of a day of fasting and humiliation. Again, it is quite easy to pray all the petitions in the spirit of Intercession for the sick and suffering; or as bearing upon the union of Christian Churches and people.

Let any one try to familiarise himself with some one or more of these special uses of the Lord's Prayer, and

he will not grumble at its repetition. It may surely be prayed profitably with many different *intentions*, as the phrase is. And by this is meant, with many different shades of meaning, in accordance with some leading idea or purpose in the mind.

It is well to guard against the misuse of the word '*intention*.' We not unfrequently hear of celebrating the Holy Sacrament, or saying the Lord's Prayer, with a special *intention*, as if it was meant that the Sacrament or the Prayer was to count (so to speak) for the special object, or to be put down to it, apart from the actual meaning of the words used. This is surely a very serious error. To make some special object the subject of our intercessions during the celebration of the Holy Communion, and to embody it in those parts of the prayers which will naturally embrace in it their meaning,—this is surely a good and lawful thing, just as are the special uses of the Lord's Prayer which we have been considering. But to think that our Prayers or our Sacraments may be applied to this or that object, apart from the intercessions for such objects which we may embody in them, is surely a vain superstition, and lowering to the very acts of worship we would thus deal with. In the true and lawful sense of the word, the more *intentions* we can give to the Lord's Prayer, the more shall we learn the depth and fulness of its meaning. It is indeed like a well-cut diamond, which, though a small gem, yet reflects from its many faces all the colours of the rainbow, and turn it as you will, still glitters with new light and beauty. May the Divine Author teach us to understand and to use His own wonderful words !

XXXII.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

“OUR FATHER, WHICH ART IN HEAVEN.”

WHEN the Sinless One prayed, He prayed to His Father. When the prodigal son came, with the load of all his sins upon him, seeking mercy, he came to his father. Oh ! thrice-blessed name of all-embracing love ! “God is love.” What is this but to say, ‘God is our Father’ ? For a father cannot but love.

Faithful Christians, you who have long known and loved and worshipped your heavenly Father, you need not to be taught now the blessedness of having a Father in Heaven. It is this very knowledge which gives such peace and brightness and happiness to your prayers and to your life. You have the Spirit of adoption. The Spirit of God beareth witness with your spirit that you are the children of God. You pray as children ; you love as children. It is very blessed, not alone to be, but to be conscious that you are, children of God. Your heart feels often a thrill of joy as you cry in the Spirit of adoption, “Our Father.” The very words have a sweet, happy, homelike sound to you. Whether you pray in sorrow, or whether you pray in joy, still your strength and confidence, your comfort and your rejoicing, lie in

those blessed words—"Our Father." It is true, indeed, that the ending of your prayers has its prevailing might, as well as the beginning; but it were little to pray "through Jesus Christ our Lord," except you might pray to "Our Father." Then think how you are indeed one in your very prayers with your Saviour Himself. He prayed as the Son; you pray as sons. And your sonship is His. You are *in Him*—the Son. Therefore God also regards you as sons. "God hath predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself." Yes; the very Saviour Himself is speaking in your "Our Father." He leads the strain, and all His Church on earth—yea, and all His Church in the peace and rest of Paradise—takes up the voice of worship, and in one vast chorus echoes evermore the mighty "Our Father."

Sinners, yet lying in bondage, yet in the far country, unmindful of your true home, hiring yourselves to do all manner of evil, (and for what wages!) know you not that you too have a Father? If you were to come to yourselves, and to seek once more the home from which you have wandered so far, whom do you fancy you would meet there? A stern, wrathful Judge? A hard and cruel Taskmaster? A God, who will only frown on so rebellious sinners as you have been, and drive you from His all-holy presence? Nay, you have forgotten. You too have a Father, to whom you may go. A Father, do I say? Nay, the tenderest, the gentlest, the most loving Father you can dream of—a Father who will run to meet His returning child while yet a great way off, and who will surprise you with His wonderful forbearance and loving-kindness. It is worth making trial of that

Father's love. He has not struck out your name yet from the roll of His children. He has still your place left ready for you. You have been called, adopted, loved, by your Father,—not for your own sake, for you have never deserved anything from Him, but for the sake of His dear Son, who bought you with a price. So even you sinners have your interest in the “Our Father.” It is a cry for penitents as well as for saints. If they can say, ‘Father, I love Thee,’ you can at least cry, “Father, I have sinned.”

Oh! blessed are they, be they saints or be they sinners, or be they (like many of us) still hovering on the border-line, not very decided Christians, and not very wilful sinners,—blessed are they who can say from the heart, “Our Father.” Humbly we would say it, as we kneel in our chamber, looking forward to the temptations and trials of the day, which often make us so unlike God's true children. Confidingly we would say it, when, in our Morning and Evening Prayer in Church, we have just listened to the blessed message of God's pardon for the sins we have penitently confessed. Beseechingly we would say it, when it falls in the Litany or other portion of supplication. Thankfully and joyously we would say it, when we have returned to our places after kneeling at the blessed Feast of our Lord. Peacefully we would say it, when once more we kneel in our chamber, and, having unburdened our souls of the day's sins and weaknesses, commit ourselves in perfect trust into the sure and loving protection of “Our Father.”

And then we must not forget the little children. Are they to be shut out from the “Our Father,” when Jesus said, “Of such is the kingdom of God,” and

when He tells us that their Angels always behold the face of God? Nay, even though they know not the deep mysteries of the words they utter, though scarcely yet they form any true notion of their heavenly Father, I think that few prayers go up to Him with a sweeter fragrance than when some little child folds its hands in simple faith and holy awe, and, looking up to the sky, whispers, "Our Father." Perhaps it is in this, as much as in anything, that we all need more truly to become as little children.

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XXXIII.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

“HALLOWED BE THY NAME.”

WE come,—children indeed, yet poor weak sinful trembling children,—before our Father who is in heaven,—our Father so loving and good, yet so great and glorious,—and what is our first cry? ‘Feed and support us, for Thou art all-good’? ‘Forgive us, for Thou art all-merciful’? ‘Deliver us, for Thou art almighty’? No. It speaks not of ourselves at all. It centres in Him to whom we utter our cry. Nay, the first three petitions have all of them God for their object, and not ourselves. For what is the first aim and motive and end of man? Not self, surely. No, it is none other than God,—His glory, His kingdom, His will. ‘Glory to Thy Name!’—this is our first cry.

But mark the words—‘Hallowed, sanctified, glorified, be Thy Name.’ Not one special name, as though it were ‘Thy name of Father.’ It has a wider embrace. Nay, surely we may say it is a petition *all-embracing* in its height and depth and length and breadth. It is a simple act of lowliest adoration; yet what does it not contain? Think of it as the instinctive utterance of a soul conscious of being in the very presence of God, a sinful worm gazing up to its

Creator! What sense, what thought, can possess the soul that realises this position, save a sense and thought of the awful distance between itself and its God, and of the glory and majesty of Him before whom it falls? See how it is the germ, the root, the fountain, of all acts of worship; or rather, how it holds, as it were, all acts of worship within itself fused and mingled, glowing with the brightness of pure light, its several coloured rays not yet disentangled and separately seen. It is Confession; it is Praise; it is Thanksgiving; it is Creed; it is Prayer. It is Confession, for it is the act of the soul bowed in lowliest humiliation before its God, confessing that itself is nothing, and God all in all. It is Praise and Thanksgiving, for it is called forth by the sense of the greatness and the goodness of the God whom we adore. It is Creed, for it acknowledges the Name of God to be worthy to be praised and glorified by His creatures. It is Prayer, for it asks for that which implies in itself all other benefits we can ask for. It is indeed a little seed, which, as we meditate upon it, grows into a great tree with many branches.

But there is one branch upon which we must chiefly fix our eyes. While Angels and Archangels, all the tribes of man, and all the things which God has made, set forth His glory and hallow His all-holy Name, we ask that with them *we ourselves* may do this. It would be a vain prayer to ask that God's Name may be hallowed by others, while we think not of ourselves. We want to make our prayer a practical one. Though it is for God's glory that we ask, yet we would ask for ourselves the high privilege of being instruments in the setting forth of that glory. We would *ourselves* hallow His holy Name. But how? "Not with

“our lips only, but in our lives.” “Herein is My “Father glorified,” said Jesus, “that ye bear much “fruit.” If our prayer is not a mere empty sound of words, but comes from the heart, we shall desire that in all our life we may glorify God’s Name. We all know how a pure, true, devout, consistent life does exalt and hallow the Name of God. It is this that is meant by men seeing our good works, and glorifying our Father which is in Heaven. The faithful walk of a true Christian does more to set forth God’s glory than all the praises he may utter with his mouth in the worship of the sanctuary. On the other hand, is there any one thing which does so much to dishonour God’s Name, and to bring scandal upon religion, as the inconsistent, ungodly living of a professing Christian? If men see one, who is regular in his church-going, perhaps from time to time kneeling at the holy Table of his Lord, during the week no more careful or strict in his words or in his dealings, no more humble or patient or charitable or forgiving, no more pure and truthful and conscientious, than his neighbour, who makes no profession of religion, will they not say, and say rightly, that the religion which does not make a man any better in his daily life must be all a mockery and a sham? And so the Name of God is blasphemed through the miserable stumblingblocks we so often put in a brother’s way.

O my soul, art thou bent upon hallowing God’s Name? Hast thou any care for this great end—any anxious desire to promote it—any real longing to be permitted to work for it? Hast thou resolutely set this before thee as the great aim and object of thy life? Is God’s glory the true end of thy conscious

being? Oh, to pray more earnestly and more understandingly! And oh, to live more as we pray!

O Father, give Thy children grace in all their lives and actions to hallow Thy Name, that, as all Thy creatures magnify Thee, so they too may conduce to Thy glory. Let them never bring shame and disgrace on Thy Name by their inconsistent lives or their unworthy conduct; but let Thy glory be their guiding motive, and the end of all they do. "Father, glorify Thy Name," in us, and by us, through thy dear Son. Amen.

XXXIV.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

"THY KINGDOM COME."

LIKE the last, this petition also is of wonderful breadth of meaning. And it is the first fulfilment of that. For God's Name will be most truly hallowed in the coming of His Kingdom.

This kingdom is of two sorts, or rather has two sides. It is an outward kingdom, visible to man, and growing with an external growth. And it is an inward kingdom, invisible to human eye, and growing secretly with transforming power. These two sides or aspects of God's kingdom answer to our Lord's two Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven. The former pictures the outward visible growth of God's kingdom in the world; the latter speaks of its inward and hidden power of purifying and changing the hearts of men. It is true that this kingdom is in one sense already come. Christ came to set up that kingdom in the world, and of it we are subjects. God "hath translated us into the "kingdom of His dear Son." But as yet the kingdom is only come imperfectly, and we pray for its fuller and more perfect coming. And this in both respects. Outwardly, for this is in truth a great Missionary prayer, and we pray that the kingdom of this world

may become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ. Inwardly, for the outward spread of the Church of Christ would be little to pray for if unaccompanied by its inner sanctifying power. And there is certainly one place in which we would seek this inward coming of the kingdom day by day, namely, in our own hearts. We pray God that the kingdom of Heaven which is amongst us may be like leaven coming with power in our midst, changing, purifying, transforming. Thus is this brief petition a prayer for all mankind; for those without the kingdom, that they may be brought in; and for those within, that they may be more faithful and worthy subjects.

That the presence of this kingdom in the world is one of God's best gifts to man, we cannot doubt. When our Lord began His public ministry among men, we are told that He went forth preaching "*the gospel of the kingdom*," the good news of the setting up of a heavenly kingdom among men. And the coming of this kingdom was the subject of the first preaching of the Apostles, as it was of their Divine Master. It was indeed a Gospel—a proclaiming of good tidings—that, amid all the strife and discord and weakness and unprofitableness of the kingdoms of this world, a new kingdom was to be established—a kingdom not of this world, but of Heaven,—a kingdom of peace and righteousness,—a kingdom which should gather together all mankind in the holy fellowship of "one body and one Spirit," "one hope," "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all." This was a blessed thing to tell. And yet the chief blessedness of the kingdom was surely in the presence of its King. It is in binding all its subjects to Him that its power and its glory lie. It was

good news when Jesus and His disciples preached the "gospel of the kingdom;" but it was better news when, through the "gospel of the kingdom," was brought to a dying world the Gospel of the King.

But this present view of the coming of the kingdom does not exhaust all its meaning. There is another coming of the kingdom of God which Christians are bidden to long for, to wait for, to pray for. It is the final coming, the consummation and renovation of all things. Oh, how the early Christians longed and hoped for this coming! And oh, how dimly and faintly do we of these latter days regard it! Is it not a reproach to us that at first men needed to be warned against too impatiently desiring that day? Which of us needs such a warning? Nay, which of us does not need to have our hope of this coming quickened, and the longing for it aroused within us? We are patient enough in these days. We are too content to wait. It troubles us but little that "the Lord delayeth His coming." Yet truly Holy Scripture always sets this before us as the object of our desires. It is not death—not rest and deliverance from the evils of life—which we are to hope and long for, but the coming of the Lord, the new kingdom, the new life, the new glory. When we say, "Thy kingdom come," we pray God, in the language of our Burial Service, to accomplish the number of His elect, and to hasten His kingdom. Our prayer takes now a wider sweep than before. Before, it was for all the world. Now, it seems to enter within the veil, and to regard in its breadth of loving anticipation the whole Church of the Redeemed from the beginning to the end. It beseeches God, in whose secret counsel are hidden the times and the seasons

for the perfecting of His mighty plans, for the speedy triumph of all His waiting kingdom, on earth and in Paradise. It prays that the end and crowning of all the hopes of the saints may be accomplished, and that "with them"—with those, that is, whose warfare is ended—"we"—who still have our place in the ranks of the Church Militant here in earth—"may be partakers of His heavenly kingdom."

Blessed are we who have been called into the kingdom here! What gifts, what hopes, what privileges are ours! Shall we not labour, as we pray, that the kingdom of our Father may be established in holiness amongst us, and may extend its borders unto the ends of the world? And shall we not live as those who, already subjects of God's kingdom in warfare here, hope to be subjects of it for ever in its triumph hereafter? It is well to belong to the kingdom now. But what will it be to see the King Himself in His beauty, and to reign with Him for ever?

XXXV.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

“THY WILL BE DONE IN EARTH AS IT IS
“IN HEAVEN.”

AGAIN this petition has, in its first sense, God for its object. God's Name—God's Kingdom—God's Will—these are the three things to which our prayers are first directed. Our petitions soar away from self—away from our own petty needs, and our own earthly conditions—and find their end in Him before whose throne we are bowed. And all these three petitions are most closely linked together. For even as God's Name is most hallowed by the coming of His Kingdom, so are the hallowing of His Name and the coming of His Kingdom most furthered by the accomplishment of His Will upon earth. Rebellion to that Sovereign Will most dishonours His Name, and most hinders His Kingdom.

But, although indeed it is true that God Himself is the first object of this petition, it is quite plain that it is also a petition for ourselves. It is *by us* that we pray God's Will may be done in earth. Oh that marvellous power which God has given to us of withstanding His own Almighty Will! How awful to contemplate is this freedom of choice laid upon us!

He, whose Will all things obey, has willed to give us free will. He exercises His omnipotence with no absolute and despotic force, akin to fate. Not that we dare dream that in us resides a will as strong as God's Will, so that we may stand forth in antagonism to Him, as enemies struggling for the mastery. No ; when He speaks, it is done : when He wills, that Will is instantly obeyed. Only He wills not to compel our wills. He has made known to us that which is well-pleasing to Him, and this we call His Will : but He has set before us good and evil, life and death, and He bids us choose. Therefore we pray to do His Will. O Father, all-wise, all-good, all-powerful, how can Thy poor creatures dare to will what Thou willest not ! How can they dare not to will what Thou willest ! Pardon in Thy great mercy our rebellion against Thy love !

Submission to God's Will may be either active or passive ; that is, it may consist in either *doing* or *bearing* what He wills. Sometimes He speaks to His child, and says, ' My child, I appoint thee thy work to 'do for Me. I have shown thee what I would have 'thee to do. I have set before thee duties, toils, 'self-denials, crosses. Art thou ready to *do* My Will ? ' Sometimes He speaks in different language—' My 'child, I lay this cross upon thee. It is My Will thou 'shouldst carry it. This pain, this sickness, this 'sorrow, this care, this disappointment,—it is of My 'ordaining. Thou canst not put it aside. Wilt thou 'bow beneath this cross ? Art thou ready to *bear* My 'Will ? ' Either way, both ways, let us learn to make answer, " Thy Will be done."

But how shall we do our Father's Will ? We ask to do it as it is done in Heaven,—even as the Angels

do it. Surely that is *perfectly*. When the Angels rebelled, they were cast down from Heaven. No rebellion against God's Will can find place there. To do God's Will is the Angels' purest joy. They doubtless see, as we cannot see yet, into the shining depths of God's love and wisdom. They behold, as we cannot behold yet, the harmony and majesty of His plans and dealings. And to be the instruments of such love and wisdom is doubtless to them a source of endless happiness. They have no will apart from His. Loving with an intense, absorbing, burning love, they must of necessity find their bliss in Him, and in unity with Him. We do not yet understand this bliss. Our dull flesh hinders our realising the blessedness of this life of perfect obedience. Yet we know it must be so. God makes the Angels' life one of intense happiness. And we ask that our life here may be a reflection of theirs.

But we can go farther. For we are not left quite in ignorance of the employments of the holy Angels in Heaven. They spend their time partly in blissful worship and adoration, partly in active ministrations to man. Thus we can see that, when we pray that we may do God's Will as the Angels do it, we may think of that which we pray for, not only as to the *degree*, but as to the very *nature* of the obedience. Not only do we ask to do God's Will perfectly, but also we ask to do it in the very acts in which the Angels do it. We would worship as they do; and we would serve as they do. We would lift up our hearts in loving adoration to God, and we would be the instruments of mercy and loving-kindness to man. This is the angelic life. And it was the life of one greater than Angels. From the Mount of Transfigura-

tion to the cure of the poor lunatic child, such was the Saviour's life. Blessed worship intermingled with blessed service to others ! And we pray for a life of such sort. Oh ! if our life on earth be but the faintest shadow of this pure heavenly life, of love to God and love to man, of mingled devotion and usefulness, how blessed is it ! God make us to do His Will more nearly as the Angels do it now, that hereafter we may with them adore Him and be with Him for ever !

XXXVI.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

“GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD.”

WE now come to a petition more directly for self. It is for our chief outward necessity, and so it expresses our entire dependence upon God. We are His creatures, pensioners upon His bounty. Undoubtedly here one special gift is meant to embrace many others. The simplest, commonest need is put for all our needs. In asking for daily bread we ask for all things that are needful both for our souls and for our bodies. Does it seem strange that the body is put first, that a bodily gift is chosen to represent so much? Think whether this be not the natural order. It is through our bodily needs that we first learn dependence upon our Father. They first touch us, and they are the type and emblem of the spiritual. If this prayer is to be the prayer of all baptized Christians, and not one reserved for great saints, then bodily wants must hold in it a forward place. Hardly otherwise would it be so fitted for little children and for the ignorant. And perchance also learned men may sometimes be not unfitly reminded of the simplest truths, and learn to pray as little children.

Let us meditate on the two words—“daily bread.”

Bread is a necessity, not a luxury. Does not our Lord teach us thus what sort of outward blessings it is best to pray for, and therefore to desire? Not abundance, not wealth, not luxury. No; simply that which is needful for life and health. It is a lesson of contentment. It teaches us, "having food "and raiment," to be "therewith content." And we ask for it "daily"—for one day's supply only. There is no carefulness for the future, no taking thought for the morrow. God would have us renew our prayer daily, that we may be daily reminded of our dependence on Him. Each day has its own cares; and God will strengthen us to bear them, and lighten their burden. But we have no pledge that He will do so if we add to-morrow's cares to to-day's.

But in this "daily bread" all Christians have loved to see more than the mere bodily requisites. The soul too has its needs. It also must be fed, nourished, strengthened; and that daily. Oh! what care we take of the perishing body; and how we starve the immortal soul! We do not let the former go without its needful sustenance. We think it a hardship if it miss one of its customary meals. But the soul—ah! this is not so sensitive. It feels no sharp pangs of hunger. When this is starved, it does not cry out, but only grows weak, and faint, and dead. But what is the food of the soul? First of all, and chiefly of all, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He said, "I am the living Bread." "I am that Bread of life." O Saviour, "evermore give us this Bread." Evermore feed our fainting souls with Thyself! It is Thou who alone canst nourish and strengthen them unto everlasting life. It is Thy Presence—Thy Grace—which alone can make them strong and healthy. This living

Bread we need daily. And daily will He be ours : for He comes to us in all His blessed means of grace. In Prayer, in the reading of God's Holy Word, in Meditation, are our souls fed and nourished, as by "daily bread." He abides with us, if the life which we live in the flesh we live by faith in the Son of God. Yet chiefly is He our Bread of life when He bestows Himself upon us in His own blessed Sacrament. It is not *Himself* only who is our food and sustenance. It is more particularly, as He himself declares, *His Body* and *His Blood*. And these He gives us in that divine ordinance. O Incarnate Saviour, who didst take to Thyself our human nature, that we might be partakers of Thy Divine nature, and who dost feed Thy faithful ones with the wondrous food of Thine own Sacred Flesh and Blood, once again we pray, "Lord, evermore give us this "Bread."

Surely without this food of the soul it were a perilous thing to receive from our heavenly Father that which we crave for the satisfying of the flesh. We may well tremble even at God's good gifts, lest, unhallowed by heavenly mercies, they turn into evil things through our sin. We can never forget that fearful verse, "He gave them their desire : and sent "leanness withal into their soul." Fulness of body, and leanness of soul ! Abundance of this world's good things, and lack of the Bread of life ! The outward man thriving, the inward man perishing day by day ! Surely this were a state terrible indeed ! Nay, we would pray God rather to take from us outward comforts than to suffer them to drag down our souls from Him. We would ask rather for scantiness of food for the body than famine of the Bread of

life for the soul. Of outward things we know not what is really for our good. But, Lord, Thou knowest. Give, or withhold, as Thou seest best, only feed us ever with the true Bread.

“Not what we wish, but what we want,
Oh ! let Thy love supply ;
The good unasked in mercy grant,
The ill, though asked, deny.”

Are we being fed and nourished with the Bread of life ? Are we ever hungering after it ? Or are we of those who feed the body but starve the soul ?
“Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.”

XXXVII.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

"FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES, AS WE
"FORGIVE THEM THAT TRESPASS
"AGAINST US."

LET us thank God that we believe in "the forgiveness of sin." All the Bible is full of this most blessed truth—the free and full forgiveness of the penitent. Through the Sacrifice of Christ this free and full forgiveness is ours. We have a great High-Priest, who has offered Himself for us—who has entered with His own Blood within the veil—and made atonement for us. Therefore we come boldly to the throne of grace, and trusting in God's mercy and pleading Christ's merits, we cry, "Forgive us our trespasses."

But has not this cry for pardon a somewhat strange sound, coming, as it does, in the middle of a prayer so plainly meant for the use of God's true and faithful children, who draw near to Him in the spirit of adoption, and who must surely therefore be already pardoned, reconciled, accepted? Yes; and if we were to understand this petition "Forgive us our trespasses" as the cry of the returning Prodigal after long absence from his father's home, we might

well be perplexed. We might well say, 'Surely this 'cry for pardon is out of its proper place. Surely it 'should rather have stood first of all, that the returning 'child might pour out the one deep absorbing need of 'his soul before aught else, and at least not dare with 'sins unforgiven to ask for daily bread.' This, in fact, is what the Church does teach us by restoring, after the primitive model, Confession to the beginning of her Daily Prayer. Now I would not dare to say that the Lord's Prayer may not be said by the unconscious penitent in first arising and going to his Father after a long course of sin. I would not dare to tell the sinner who has fallen lowest that this petition is not meant for him. But I do say that the whole of the Lord's Prayer, and therefore this petition, is meant firstly and principally for the true child of God who is living in a state of peace with God. Therefore the pardon here asked for is not that greater forgiveness which the returning sinner, when brought to God in a true conversion or deep repentance, seeks for the presumptuous sins of his past life; but rather the putting away of those lesser trespasses of weakness, which the truest saint daily mourns and confesses. Even the best can scarcely walk through the paths of this world without some of its dust cleaving to his feet. This prayer, then, is a daily cleansing of his feet from this dust of lesser infirmities. It is a daily washing of the feet by those who have part in Jesus Christ, and who have already shared in the greater washing, whether of Baptismal cleansing, or of that true and deep repentance which has been called a second baptism in tears.* The

* See St John xiii. 10, where the true sense is, 'He that hath 'been *bathed* needeth not save to wash his feet.'

holiest need this daily cleansing; the most spiritual this daily renewal. It is not of the wicked only that it is written, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." "In many things we offend all."

This truth—namely, of the necessity in the best of a daily cleansing—does not shut out another view of the words we are considering. In them we do not ask pardon for our own sins alone. The Christian never forgets that he is a member of a Body, a branch of a Vine, a sheep of a Fold. He prays for others besides himself; he intercedes for the whole Body of Christ. He knows that, if one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; and so, when he says, "Forgive us our trespasses," though he thinks chiefly of his own, still he prays for pardon for the sins of the whole Church. It is not, 'Forgive me my trespasses,' but "Forgive *us* our trespasses."

But the petition before us is very remarkable in having a condition attached to it. We do not ask simply that our sins may be forgiven us. We ask that they may be forgiven after a certain manner and degree. *As we forgive others*, so, and so only, do we ask God to forgive us. And the importance of this condition our Saviour Himself shows us by returning to it at the end of His Divine Prayer, adding words* expressly declaring that God's pardon will follow this very law. As we forgive, so we are forgiven. Do not let us make a mistake, and suppose that we plead our own forgiveness of others as the *ground* or *plea* for God's forgiveness of us. It is not *because* we forgive, but "*as* we forgive." Indeed we may almost hold this petition to be in part a prayer for the spirit of

* St Matt. vi. 14, 15.

forgiveness. For if we desire pardon, we must of necessity desire that which we affirm to be a condition of pardon, namely, the spirit of forgiveness. We may unfold the petition thus—‘Forgive our sins, O Lord, even as we do now from our hearts forgive others who have sinned against us, and increase in us this grace of forgiveness.’

Do I never condemn myself when I utter this petition? Have I never, in using it, prayed *not* to be forgiven? What if I have cherished an enmity in my heart against one who has trespassed against me, and have then prayed God to forgive me *as I forgive*? It is certainly a very daring and dreadful thing for an unforgiving heart to put up this petition. It is nothing short of saying, ‘Forgive me not, for I forgive not them that trespass against me.’ And if, not daring to say it, I think to escape by leaving out this petition, let me remember I am trying to escape the eye of God, who searches me out, and knows me through and through.

O Jesu, Saviour, bestow on us some shadow of Thine own Divine Charity! Thou didst bear with perfect meekness the mockery and insults, the blind-folding and buffeting and spitting. And what do I bear? And how? Thou, when Thou wast reviled, reviledst not again. What amount of wrong and insult can I pardon freely? Oh, how little a thing—what a little slight, what a little word, what a little action—will rouse my resentment! Oh, let me not sin in my anger. Let not the sun go down on my wrath. Let me rather pray for those that despitefully use me. Let me freely pardon, that I, who so sorely need it, may be myself freely pardoned. Amen.

XXXVIII.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

"LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION."

WHAT is "temptation"? It is anything which tries and proves us. In the commonest use of the word we mean by it anything which may draw us into sin; but that this is not the only use of it we may be quite sure when we are bidden to count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations. In this place it plainly signifies what we more commonly call 'trials.' Now these two sorts of temptation are alike in this one point, that they prove us, and show what we are. They are most unlike in two other points—(1) in their source, and (2) in their end or purpose. In their source; for temptation, in the first sense, comes from Satan, while trials come from God. In their end or purpose; for the temptations of Satan are meant to draw us to sin, while the trials which God sends are meant to train us in holiness and godly graces.

It is in the former of these two senses that we use the word in the Lord's Prayer. Not that we would quite shut out the second sense of 'trials,' for so far as these may, by our own frailty and Satan's wiles, become the occasion of falling, we may surely pray to be kept from them. But we do not, in saying the

words "Lead us not into temptation" mean 'Lead us not into trials and sufferings'; but 'Lead us not 'into anything which may cause us to sin.'

Now St James tells us that God never tempts any man, and he is speaking there plainly of temptation to sin—not of trials. But if God does not tempt, how can He *lead us into temptation*? Is not that the same thing as tempting? Surely no. God cannot seek to draw us into sin. He cannot set a snare in our way to make us stumble and fall. But we know that our path in this world lies of necessity in the midst of numberless temptations. And though God "will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are "able," yet we tremble at our own weakness and ignorance. Oh, for some guide to turn our steps aside when we are walking blindly into the snare! We cannot see the fatal pitfall. We go on our way as men with their eyes blindfolded. It is well. If we could see all, how little trial would there be for faith and trust and watchfulness. The future of our path is in mercy veiled from us. Yes; but *One* knows and sees it all. To *One* Eye every coming peril is perfectly clear. To Him, then, we flee in our weakness and blindness and danger. To His guiding hand we would cling as we tread our difficult path. 'Guide us,' we cry, 'lest we 'fall. Turn our steps aside when we are drawing 'near to some peril.' "Lead us not into temptation."

"The Lord ordereth a good man's goings." We ask Him so to order our goings that we come not into such temptation as might make us fall. How often are we vexed and disappointed when some plan on which we have set our heart is brought to nought! How often are we inclined to murmur when something we have longed for, perhaps even prayed for, is

denied us! How know we that such disappointments may not be direct answers to this prayer? The fulfilment of our plan, the attainment of our desire, might have brought with it some great temptation, and imperilled our souls. But God, in His loving-kindness, has averted our steps from the danger. He has not led us into temptation, but has turned us aside into some path that perhaps seemed rougher and harder, but was in reality safer and better for us. It were easy to trace out His merciful dealings in our lives. Let any one think over the path by which God has led him, and mark the chief disappointments and sorrows and troubles he has met with. It will not be hard to see how every one *may* have been a leading not into temptation. It may be that God thus uses those ministering spirits whom He sends forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation. A Guardian Angel may by God's appointment oftentimes turn our steps aside from the pitfall. God may often give His Angels charge over us to keep us in our ways. They may often bear us up in their hands lest we dash our foot against a stone. We know not how, or with what instruments, God works out His gracious purposes. But we know that, when He is on our right hand, we shall not fall; or, if in our weakness we do fall, that we shall not be cast away, for He sustaineth us with His hand.

But Jesus did not rely on this promised protection so as to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple. This were to tempt God—that is, to try His patience and forbearance. And this is what *he* does who, praying “Lead us not into temptation,” goes with his eyes open into temptation. If he goes lightly and carelessly, it proves that his prayer has been no

real prayer. No one can pray with earnest desire, and straightway go forth and by his actions defeat the end of his prayer. There can be no true desire where there is no attempt to gain the fulfilment of such desire. And "he that desires nothing prays for nothing." His prayer is a mere empty sound. But if he goes intentionally, believing that he is capable of resisting the temptation, let him take care that his reason is good, and that he has not mistrusted his strength. Jesus went among publicans and sinners, but not a spot of defilement could pass upon His pure soul. It may be our duty at times to go where we know temptations will assail us. We may be called to rush into the fires to snatch a brand from the burning. If God call us there by evident tokens of His guiding grace, we need not fear. Only let us take care to arm our souls with the shield of faith and the breastplate of righteousness. When we are like Angels, we can go freely into the doomed city to save others. In this matter of temptation we must watch as well as pray. Our Master tells us so.

Oh, how surrounded we are by temptation! Nay, not surrounded only, for it is within us as well as without. "Drawn away of our own lust, and enticed,"—assaulted by the evil one with his lying suggestions, beset with all the snares of a world in which evil everywhere abounds—how can we escape? Only, O Lord, in Thy power. Teach us to watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation. Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

“DELIVER US FROM EVIL.”

FROM *the Evil one*—our ghostly enemy, as the word in all probability signifies. If so, all evil, bodily and spiritual, is gathered up in the word, for he is the author of all evil. Through him came sin, and through sin death and all other ills, into the world. Yet, inasmuch as this petition is closely joined to the last, it seems natural to understand it rather of spiritual than of bodily evil; as though it were, ‘Lead us not into temptation; but deliver us ‘from him who is the tempter, and from all the evil ‘that he would bring upon us.’ The “strong man “armed” has, we know, been conquered by the “stronger.” The Seed of the woman has bruised the serpent’s head. But his power is still great. He is still our “adversary,” and he still, “as a roaring lion, “walketh about seeking whom he may devour.” But we must not think of him as though Christ had *once long ago* come and fought with him, and overcome him, and had then left him to work his wicked will on men unrestrained. No; He who conquered once is still with us in the battle, to fight for us and conquer now. While we fight on His side, while He is our Captain, and we are ranged under His banner, we are safe.

The Evil one has in truth only such power over us as we accord to him. If we resist him, he will flee from us ; for, if we resist him, a greater than we are is withstanding him also, and in Him is our deliverance.

Mark the contest which follows from our marvellous position here in this world, as beings possessed of a free will, and encompassed with an unseen spiritual world. There are great spiritual forces, so to speak, drawing us in either direction. Temptation draws to evil ; grace draws to good. But what is temptation save the power of the Evil one, and what is grace save the power of God ? And we stand here on the battlefield *free*. God hath set before us good and evil, life and death, and bids us *choose life*. Which side are we choosing now ? O my soul, thou hast a mighty choice to make ; not once for all,—*that* were by comparison easy : but a daily, hourly choice. Is it good thou choosest, or evil ? God, or the Evil one ? Look back upon the past. Oh, how often has thy choice been made for that side, from which thou prayest (if indeed thou prayest) to be delivered ! Thou needst thy will strengthened to choose aright. Thou needst a mightier arm than thine own to keep thee back from the baits and allurements by which that wicked one would draw thee to his side. Pray then with all thy might, “ Deliver us from evil.”

We need not shut out the thought of outward or bodily ills from our petition. These, too, are evils in themselves. True, they are often by God's mercy turned into our greatest blessings ; but this is because they are permitted to be remedies to correct worse evils still. In themselves, sorrow and pain and care and want and sickness and death are evils. They

will not be in heaven. Surely our blessed Lord's continual and numberless miracles of healing are enough to prove to us that suffering is not God's will for man,—that, though “the whole creation groaneth “and travaileth in pain together until now,” yet there is a redemption, even of the *body*, which we hope for. Yes; the Son of God, in the mystery of His Divine compassion, “took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.” They entered into His soul like a flood, and filled it to overflowing. “Jesus wept” at the sight of human sorrow. He was “a Man of sorrows, and “acquainted with grief”—acquainted with it as with a bosom friend. It is very blessed to know this—to be sure of His sympathy in all our troubles and pains. But it is even yet more blessed to know that, while He willingly bare them for us, He does not willingly see us bear them. He would lift the burden from the shoulders of all His poor suffering followers, even if to carry it Himself. He became the “Man of sorrows” that we might be lifted above all sorrows to His home of faultless bliss. So it is lawful to pray to be delivered from the outward ills of this world. But only with the condition, “if Thou wilt,”—“not as “I will, but as Thou wilt.” The two sorts of evil differ in this. From *spiritual* evil we pray without doubt or hesitation to be delivered. We know it is an evil—always, in all shapes, in all degrees. From *outward* evil we pray to be delivered, if God will, if it be right for us. We cannot know that *to us* it is evil. It may be the choicest gift of God's love. So we care not overmuch to pray against outward ills. If they come, they cannot hurt us much. But the evil that destroys the soul, this indeed is to be dreaded and prayed against.

Oh, the bliss of being delivered from evil for ever !
To be free from all sin, and all temptation to sin : to
have done with weakness and coldness and deadness :
to be full of love and joy and peace : to have ended
all this weary struggle, this swaying to and fro of the
irresolute will, this miserable indecision of choice : to
be where there is no Evil one and no evil :—this will
be Heaven indeed !

XL.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

* "FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM, THE
"POWER, AND THE GLORY, FOR
"EVER AND EVER. AMEN."

As we began by praying that God's Name might be hallowed, so we end with words of adoration. The former is an act of prayer, the latter an act of praise; yet each is equally the voice of the creature humbled to the dust in the presence of the Creator: each aims equally at the honour and glory of God. So far as the voice of praise may do so, we are hallowing God's Name in this our Doxology. We are joining our feeble voices to the jubilant song of the Angels and Archangels, and all the heavenly host, who fall before the throne on their faces, and worship God, saying, "Amen: blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanks-

* It seems right to notice the fact that the Doxology is not found in some of the best ancient copies of St Matthew's Gospel, and is supposed by many not to have been given by our Lord, but, having been from the earliest times used with the Lord's Prayer in public worship, to have been first inserted by some copyist who wrote down the prayer from memory. At all events, it must be allowed that it is doubtful whether our Lord Himself added the Doxology to His Prayer.

“giving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto
“our God for ever and ever. Amen.”

Like so many other very familiar words, these too often pass the lips as a mere form. Let us meditate upon their meaning.

“Thine is the kingdom.” In this we acknowledge the absolute sovereignty of God. “The Lord is King; the earth may be glad thereof: yea, the multitude of the isles may be glad thereof.” The sovereignty of God is a great all-embracing unchangeable fact, admitting not of degrees. It is not *this* kingdom for the coming of which we have prayed. This kingdom is the universe itself. It is the kingdom of God the Creator ruling over all His creation. We bow before Him as subjects before a supreme monarch, in whose hands their whole being and well-being lie. His is the rightful dominion over the creatures He has made. He has not only power, but authority, over His kingdom. He rules not by might only, but by right. Thus we come with our petitions acknowledging His right to grant them or to deny. He is the King: we are but His lowly subjects, making our appeal to His bounty.

“And the power.” Having acknowledged His right, we now acknowledge His might. It were vain to address even a monarch if he had not the power to grant our requests. “Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst,” this is the force of these words:—‘Thou canst do all things, nothing is impossible with Thee.’ We cry to One who is Almighty. When He speaks, it is done: when He commands, it stands fast. “Let all the earth fear the Lord: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.”

“And the glory.” “Not unto us, O Lord. not


“unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory.” This would seem to refer to the *answers* to our prayer. We acknowledge that in all that God grants us, in every mercy received, in every evil averted, all the glory belongs to Him. It is sadly easy in the gift to forget the Giver; sadly easy to say, “*My* power “and the might of *My* hand” hath done this. We ascribe in our last words all to God. He is the King Almighty, and to Him belongs all glory, for ever and ever.

And now we have done. We do not in actual words offer this wonderful prayer *through Jesus Christ*, as we do other prayers, because, being His own prayer, it is in effect ever offered in His Name and through His merits. Every word of it carries with it the echo of His voice to the Throne of Grace. It is because it is *the Lord's Prayer* that we prize it so highly, and know that God will graciously accept it. Oh! that we had more of the “Spirit of prayer “and supplication,” so that these precious words might not so often pass our lips as a bare dry form! Let us ask for the Spirit of adoption, whereby we may indeed cry, “Our Father” Let us ask our Master again and again to teach us to pray. We would strive to make our petitions more and more earnest and real, praying more and more devoutly and fervently, till Prayer is needed no more. For, just as Faith will end when sight begins, though Love will live on for ever, so Prayer will end when we have no more to pray for, but Praise will never cease. In heaven we shall need no more to pray for the hallowing of God's Name, for that Name will be supremely and for ever glorified; nor for the coming of the Kingdom, when our song shall be “Alleluia! for the Lord

“God omnipotent reigneth”; nor for the doing of God’s will when we shall be “equal unto the Angels”; nor for daily bread when we “feed on the beatific vision of God”; nor for the forgiveness of sin when all are sinless; nor for freedom from temptation, “where there is nothing within or without to tempt”; nor for deliverance from evil, where evil cannot come. There will be no more asking for what we need, for we shall need nothing. But Prayer, in the sense of asking, is not the highest act of worship. And when no longer we make known our requests unto God, then will the worship of heaven be one eternal Doxology.

THE END.

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