

THE
REASONABLENESS
AND
EFFICACY OF PRAYER



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The measurableness and
efficacy of prayer

THE

REASONABLENESS

AND

EFFICACY OF PRAYER.

BY

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PRAYER is an essential element in all religion worthy of the name; and religion is inseparably connected with the history of the human race. In some form or other, with seeming exceptions so insignificant as to illustrate the rule, all nations, in all ages, have worshipped God; all nations, in all ages, have prayed.

To borrow the words of Guizot: "Alone, of all living beings on the earth, man prays. There is not among all his moral instincts a more universal, a more invincible one than prayer. The child betakes himself to it with ready docility; aged men return to it as a refuge against decay

and isolation. Prayer rises spontaneously from young lips that can scarcely lisp the name of God, and from expiring ones that have scarcely strength left to pronounce it. Among every people, celebrated or obscure, civilized or barbarous, acts and formulæ of prayer meet us at every step. Everywhere there are living men, under certain circumstances, at certain hours, under certain impressions of the soul, whose eyes are raised, whose hands are clasped, whose knees are bent to implore, or thank, or adore, or appease. With joy or terror, publicly or in the secret of his own heart, it is to prayer man turns as a last resource to fill the void places of his soul, or bear the burdens of his life. It is in prayer he seeks, when all else fails, a support for his weakness, comfort in his sorrows, and hope for his virtue."

Especially is prayer identified with Christianity. As faith is the essence of the divine life in the soul, so prayer is the first evidence and constant

exercise of that life. The religion of the Bible, both in its Jewish and Christian forms, teaches men to pray to a personal God, who does listen and will answer. In all ages there have been men who are represented as having been specially instructed and aided by God, who have lived in the constant practice of prayer. From Genesis to Revelation the ascription goes up, — “O Thou that hearest prayer, unto Thee shall all flesh come.”

“But,” says an objector, “are we not already in the presence of God, — if there be a God? By the necessity of things we cannot be absent from those powers of Nature which you call God, and which operate throughout the universe. Where, then, is the necessity of *coming* into a Presence where we are already?” But in this sense every sparrow is in the presence of God, and we are of more value than many sparrows. Nay, every blade of grass, every drop of water, every grain

of sand is already there. Cannot we in any higher sense come before God? Is there not a coming to Him which is in harmony with our superior nature, — a voluntary approach, a coming of the mind and heart and soul, — such a coming as we call prayer?

And if so, may we not infer a corresponding act on the part of God? To be convinced of this is a necessity for those who pray, else their petitions would be absurd. No one would make a request to a person of whose existence he was ignorant, or in whose favorable disposition he had no confidence. So “he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.” We are not taught by these words that our belief will be rewarded by a favorable reply, but that it is an absolutely necessary prerequisite for prayer itself. As we cannot walk without feet, nor see without eyes, so we cannot pray

without some degree of belief in the existence of Him whom we address, and in His power and disposition to grant our request.

But there have always been sceptics who doubt and scoffers who deride ; and old missiles, newly polished, have recently been launched by skilful hands against the citadel of Faith, for the purpose of discrediting Prayer as being contrary to a universal experience of the uniformity of natural law, and therefore unreasonable. We have been told that, whatever may have been the case in former times, Science knows nothing of a personal God acting now, but only observes a chain of physical causes and sequences, — a system of laws invariable in their operations and certain in their fulfilment. We are told that as the course of nature never is and never can be changed, it is wrong to ask it, and absurd to expect it.

We do not pause to inquire how far such an

objection strikes at the root of all the religions of mankind; but it is certainly opposed to the most cherished belief and the habitual worship of all Christians, who, whatever their differences, believe alike in a God who hears and answers prayer, and who therefore have a common interest in a subject of vital importance to them all.

Because it is of such vital importance, there is some danger lest we should feel angry with our assailants. It is natural to be incensed against those who would rob us of any treasure, — and this in proportion to its value: yet the more firmly we are convinced of its security, the less are we likely to be irritated by vain threats. Documents enclosed in a fire-proof safe cannot be hurt by a match ignited outside. An iron-plated ship may defy pop-guns. Firm faith is not soon frightened. “He that believeth shall not make haste.”

It must be admitted that some defenders of Christianity, by their hasty fright at the discoveries and theories of philosophers, have given occasion for the suspicion that their own faith was not very strong. The fatal impression has gone forth that Science is regarded by them as opposed to Revelation. But Science, so far from being an enemy, is the handmaid of Religion. Philosophers, engaged in their true work, are helping, not hindering, the faith. All honor and gratitude to those who are devoting their learning and genius to the great business of examining and explaining the wonders of the physical universe; for the facts of nature are the works of our God and Father,—which, the better they are understood, enlarge our conceptions of His wisdom, power, and goodness, and furnish us with fresh material for praise.

Hitherto we have treated the subject on the assumed truth of the Bible. If the Bible be

divine, prayer is reasonable. Let us now try to meet the arguments of those who do not admit the authority of the book.

The chief objection to prayer is based on the supposed uniformity of natural laws. The argument seems to be, — “We know nothing of any deviation from the course of nature; therefore there is none, and can be none. It is, therefore, unreasonable to expect any such deviation in answer to prayer, and therefore unreasonable to pray.”

In such an objection we presume to think there may be some fallacies, which those who exact so much accuracy from others should themselves avoid. Do sceptical philosophers never forget the laws of exact science when they assail the faith of Christians? Do the lovers of positive truth never jump at conclusions somewhat beyond the bounds of positivity, and in a manner they would condemn in their own scientific investigations?

Ignorance seems to be confounded with knowledge. It is supposed that our not knowing a fact is proof of the fact not existing. "I do not know that a certain event ever happened; therefore, I know it never did happen." But surely far more is here inferred than is contained in the premises. In proportion to the range of my investigation my non-discovery of something may render me cautious how I admit the testimony of another explorer; but surely my failure to discover it would not warrant my assertion that it is undiscoverable, because non-existent. I may have spent my life in exploring the physical universe, but have I yet reached the outmost bounds of it? Have I examined every thing within it? Is it safe to reason from the little province I may know something of, so as to dogmatize as to what can or cannot exist throughout the vast empire of God? From what I know of the phenomena of fifty years, may I

pronounce an infallible judgment as to what always was and always will be? Is my ignorance of a thing's existence equivalent to my knowledge of its non-existence?

If so, the barbarian prince was wise when he condemned to death as an impostor the traveller who told him that in his country people walked on water and chopped it with axes. There is a mountain in Eastern Africa called the Silver Mountain. A friend of the writer described the first ascent of it by himself. He could not persuade his native attendants to accompany him the last few hundred yards. After a very difficult climb he reached the "silver," and brought some of it down to his guides. Not till they saw the rapidly melting snow, would they abandon their persuasion that the mountain was crested with the precious metal. They had known silver, but had never seen snow; but were they right in their inference? Would it have

been wise if before comets had been observed astronomers had denied the possibility of their existence? If the inhabitants of an inland district were told that the waters of the river they had always known as sweet and as flowing westward became salt and sometimes flowed eastward, would they be wise in denying it? Because they had never seen nor heard of this, would they be philosophical in asserting that it never was and never could be?

Grant that the knowledge of a barbarian or a child is far less than that of a philosopher; but is not the knowledge of a philosopher that of a child compared with what is still unknown? Is it not but the sea-shore pebble to which Newton likened his discoveries, while the great ocean of truth rolled undiscovered before him? If I am ignorant of a fact, I cannot of course affirm its actual or even probable existence; but is it philosophical to deny its possibility, especially

when I have authentic testimony that others have witnessed it? Therefore, although we may never have witnessed any deviation from the course of nature, it is not unphilosophical to admit the possibility, nor even to acknowledge the fact on authentic testimony.

Another fallacy results from the ambiguous meaning of the term law. In government a law is an edict, made by competent authority and executed by the appointed officer. But what is law in the realm of nature? Do positive philosophers see it or hear it? Where is it written, and by whom enforced? We observe resemblances in natural phenomena. We notice how similar results follow similar causes. We then imagine a law which those events obey. But this is the realm of imagination, not of exact science. This is not consistent Positivism.

We are told of the "operation of laws." They are said to "work." But who ever saw a law

work? We see the constable, the judge, the sheriff executing the law in reference to crime; but the law itself does nothing: it needs an agent. How, then, can the laws of nature work? They need an agent capable of fulfilling them. It is God who works. From the wise and beneficent regularity of His operations, we deduce that He has a plan on which to work. But that plan is the product of His wisdom and goodness, and all that happens is the working of His own right hand. Does our ignorance of His having worked exceptionally, warrant our assertion that He never has done so, and never can?

A fallacy often arises from the ambiguous meaning of the word necessity. We sometimes speak of a necessary truth, when the question is one merely of words. To say that the whole is necessarily equal to the sum of its parts, is merely to express what is involved in the terms themselves. There are propositions which we say are

necessarily true, because the mind cannot possibly conceive of them otherwise. Thus it is a necessity that things which are equal to the same thing are equal to one another. We say there is a physical necessity that a certain weight requires an adequate force to move it; or a financial necessity that expenditure requires an adequate income to sustain it. But what is meant by the term necessity when applied to the course of nature, so as to exclude the influence of prayer? Would there be any logical contradiction and absurdity if events were to happen otherwise than we expect? Do we know of any absolute law which natural events cannot possibly violate? Have we any right to affirm more than this, — that we observe a certain regular sequence of phenomena; that as far as our own limited observation and knowledge extend, we are aware of no deviation; and that, therefore, we may expect similar phenomena in the

future? But regularity is not necessity. We expect the sun to shine to-morrow; we expect it with the utmost degree of certainty. But is this the same as absolute necessity? Does the conception of its not rising involve a logical contradiction or a mathematical absurdity? Gravitation is a great fact, but can we assert that of necessity it is universal and eternal in its influence? Is it of necessity that there can be no part of the universe where it does not operate, or that it could not be suspended? We say that a certain power is necessary in order to overcome a certain weight. But are there not powers of which we are ignorant, and might not that weight be raised by agencies beyond our range of experience?

There have already been departures from what had seemed to be the necessary course of nature. If the universe itself is not eternal, should any change in that universe be regarded as impossible in face of the greater event of its origin? There

are obvious records of change in the strata of the earth's surface. There have been successive constructions and destructions. Why should it be a necessity that all things remain for ever as they now are, when they are not now as they once were?

It is replied that these changes are only different stages of development of eternal necessary forces. Since it must be admitted that there is some eternal existence, we prefer to believe in an eternal God who governs all things, rather than in eternal forces without thought, or feeling, or character. We believe in "God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." He is the only necessity: He is necessarily what He is; but He is free, and if He chooses to act according to some plan which you call the necessary order of nature, and if what we call changes you call developments of the eternal order, may not my prayer and may not His response be parts of

that eternal order; and may He not help me in some way which to me is new and unexpected and contrary to what I know of the order of things, but which may yet be in harmony with that order, as known and ordained by Himself?

Had I lived in earlier ages I should have been ignorant of, and could not have anticipated, the present development. If so, may not God help me now in some manner not within the range of my experience, yet in harmony with His own perfect plan and with higher laws than those which philosophy is able to codify? May not what we call miracles be parts of the eternal order, — God working according to pre-arranged principles which are developed whenever their appropriate sphere of operation opens; and may not our prayers be a part of the eternal order, bringing about the very conditions in which the results we pray for may come to pass, in harmony with the higher order which includes moral as well as physical forces?

We are told that we know nothing but facts, and that to these positive palpable facts we must confine our observations. But is not our freedom a fact in the Kosmos? We are more certain of our own existence than of the existence of any thing else which we only know through our own faculties. Thus our moral freedom—the power of the will—is a positive fact; and it is a fact also that one mind can influence another mind. By the expression and exercise of my will, I can affect the will of some one else, and induce him to perform some action which otherwise he would not perform. May it not be a fact that as our minds influence one another, we may influence the mind of God? Is not His freedom a fact? We can exercise our freedom in relation to the physical universe so as to direct the powers of nature in one course rather than another. What we can do in a lower sphere, cannot God do in a higher? And if we can influence one another to

do this, may we not also influence God? We believe that God has encouraged us to do this in prayer; but can philosophy prove that what is actual in regard to our own minds and actions, is impossible in relation to God?

It is said there is no such force as prayer in the natural universe, and that it is incredible that any creature can launch at will a new agency on the pre-arranged system of nature. We admit there is no such *physical* force. Prayer is a moral force. That there is such a force as this, our daily experience testifies. We exert it on one another. We do "launch at will" this agency on society. Under its influence the mind originates new actions, and gives a new direction to the various forces of nature. Where is the proof that it is impossible such a moral force may influence Him who rules the universe? We believe He has commanded us to employ it.

There are laws seemingly irreversible, which

nevertheless are resisted and modified in their operation. What so universal as the law of gravitation? But see yonder majestic oak spreading wide its gnarled branches. What tons of timber have been carried up there in defiance of gravitation! "True — but it has all been carried upwards, and is held there by another physical law, — that of vegetable life." Still, here is an instance of one law modifying the action of another. But take another force. Thought can defy gravitation; mind can control matter. By gravitation this book falls; I think, and interpose my hand, and arrest its descent, — I am stronger than gravitation. I exercise my will, and my arm is extended. It weighs several pounds, but this mass of matter is moved in an instant by my volition. "Oh, but it is the muscles!" And the muscles? "They are moved by the nerves." And the nerves? "They are stimulated by the brain." And the brain? That obeys the mind!

By this outstretched arm moved by my will, I can set going a railway-train, which may destroy life, or I may apply the brake, and preserve many from death. I am made in the image of God: wherein am I like to Him? Surely this is one feature of resemblance, — that I have the power by my will to originate actions. If I then am, in fact, able — personally or by influencing others — so to interpose in connection with physical laws as to avert evil which would otherwise happen, is not God able to do the same? Can I, His feeble and imperfect likeness, do what He is unable to do? Has He endowed me with a faculty He does not possess? Has He shut himself out of His own universe? Has He made any laws to bind himself? Is His wise and beneficent order a chain by which He is kept in bondage, so that no prayer from His creatures can modify any event, bring any desired benefit, or avert any dreaded calamity?

It must be admitted that many who deny that it is reasonable to expect special answers to prayer, recommend the practice of prayer as beneficial to the mind and heart of the person who prays. We should continue to pray, though we are not to expect what we ask. The act of asking, not the thing we ask, will bring the blessing. But shall we continue to ask when we have no expectation that we shall receive?

The indirect benefits of prayer must not be underrated. They are of the very highest value in their influence on our spiritual nature. All true prayer cultivates sincerity. Whatever mask we may assume in the presence of man, it is vain to dissemble before God. In prayer we throw off our disguises, and stand revealed in the divine light. Thus we learn to know ourselves,—to detect our hidden faults,—to test the real character of our motives and conduct. We learn also our true dignity as human beings. We have

been admitted to an audience of the King of kings, and, coming forth from His presence-chamber, we are likely to feel that we are too noble to degrade ourselves with what is sordid and base and sinful. At the same time, we learn humility. For, if exalted by intercourse with God above what is degrading, we learn by contrast with Him our littleness, and can scarcely, when we have been prostrate before our Maker, rise up to treat with pride and scorn those with whom we have been confessing our unworthiness. True courage is promoted by prayer. When we have cast ourselves on the divine protection, and sought help in difficulty and danger from One so mighty to strengthen and save, we shall more cheerfully labor at our toilsome task,—more patiently bear our daily burden,—more valiantly resist every temptation to evil. And by prayer will gratitude be promoted. What we have asked from God, we shall be more likely, when

we receive it, to regard as His gift. Gratitude is an emotion always attended with pleasure in its exercise. The value of any possession is enhanced by the grateful remembrance of the giver. The common comforts of life are exalted into divine gifts when we receive them as from God: the humblest fare of His providing yields greater pleasure than the costliest dainties regarded as the mere result of accident or our own acquirement. Prayer thus dignifies the lowliest as well as the loftiest condition, and refines, elevates, and gladdens all who live in the habitual practice of it.

These indirect and collateral results, because more constant, are, on the whole, more beneficial than the direct answers to prayer. But would they be obtained apart from the expectation that the thing for which we pray will be granted? The motive of prayer is not the benefit of the exercise, so much as the obtaining of the boon.

Did Hannah think of the benefit to her spiritual nature when she asked for a little son to consecrate to the Lord? She was thinking only of the priceless treasure her mother's heart was longing for. Was Hezekiah prompted by a regard to the improvement of his own heart when he appealed against Sennacherib? He was thinking only of his country and Jerusalem, threatened by the vaunting foe.

A prize is offered to the swiftest runner. "One hundred pounds for him who first reaches the goal!" Several prepare to run for the prize. They then are told that they must not expect to get the hundred pounds, but that the race itself and preparation for it will be more valuable than gold, as it will develop their muscles and increase their strength. Who would run?

In the old fable we read how the orchard was dug to find hidden treasure. None was found; but the digging made the orchard more fruitful,

and a golden crop was the result. But suppose they who dug had been assured at the outset that no treasure was hidden there, would they have taken up the spade?

You say to your child, "It is very important that there should be constant intercourse between us. Always come to your father or mother with any sorrow or any wish. Do not by day and night think about your troubles, but come at once and tell me. Do not for days and weeks think anxiously about something you would like to have, and do not talk about it only to your playmates, but come and tell me what you wish, and ask me for it. But remember,—you will never obtain what you ask for, nor escape the trouble you fear, any more than if you had not applied to us. Only by coming to us, with all your sorrows and wishes, you will benefit your own moral nature!"

I am ill: I send for a physician, entreating him

to come to me. I tell him my symptoms,—my pain,—my fear. I say to him, “Doctor, you know more of the laws of disease and of health than I do: I do not expect you to perform a miracle; but I do ask you to consider carefully my case, and to apply your knowledge of natural laws in such a way as to relieve my pain and save my life.” The physician listens to my appeal, undertakes my case, prescribes the suitable remedies, and, without a miracle, effects a cure. By the laws of disease, without his interposition, my death was inevitable; but in answer to my prayer he saves my life. Cannot God do what the doctor does?

Your little boy is playing on the window-sill. See, he slips! he is falling! “Father! father!” You run to save him, and catch him in your arms. The laws of gravitation would have killed him; but in answer to his cry you have interposed, and, without a miracle, have saved his

life. Cannot God do what you can do? Are there not occasions when we feel ourselves falling, and no help is near, and our only resource is to cry to our Father, who has said, — “Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee”?

We who accept the Scriptures as the Word of God have His own authority that the laws of nature are not necessarily immutable. He who was “God manifest in the flesh,” — the “Word by whom all things were made,” — did not, when He dwelt on the earth, give us to understand that the Creator was unable to act in any manner different from that order which it is His beneficent pleasure generally to observe. He walked on the water, — was that in accordance with the laws of specific gravity? He stilled the tempest by a word, — does meteorology recognize such a force? He cleansed the leper, he cured the blind, by a touch, by a word, — was this in

accordance with medical experience? “Lazarus! come forth!”—the dead man arose! He himself arose from the grave the third day,—was not this altogether beyond our experience of the action of natural laws? We must believe this greatest miracle of all if we are Christians. Our religion is a religion of truth, but it is based on supernatural facts. “If Christ be not risen, your faith is vain;” but if Christ rose from the dead,—since He is “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever,”—He is as able now as He was then to act in other methods than those which are understood as the order of nature. No one who believes the gospel history can doubt that He to whom we pray is still able to calm the tempest, heal the sick, and raise the dead.

Prayer has been objected to on the ground of its presumption. To ask for something which would not otherwise have taken place, is regarded as implying that we can improve the plans of the

All-wise Disposer of events. Is it not absurd to suppose we can make things better for ourselves by prayer?

Many a metaphysical and many a theological difficulty, which cannot be easily met by logic, has been annihilated by the application of common-sense maxims and the experience of daily life. So in this case. We do not deny the pre-established order of things, and the minute fore-knowledge which implies the actual certainty of what is fore-known; yet all who are not bereft of their senses act as if they could, by prudence and diligence, make life pleasanter than it would otherwise be. Does any one practically deny this? Suppose a trader were to say,—“All things are arranged in the best way by God. By no efforts of mine can they be improved; it would be presumptuous in me to make the attempt. If my business is to prosper, it will prosper; and if not, my failure will be for some good. I shall

not, therefore, trouble myself to collect the money owing me so as to meet my obligations; and I shall not examine the quality of the goods I am purchasing; and I shall do nothing to secure customers." Or another may say,—"I feel symptoms of a disease likely to give me great pain, and to cut short my life; but it would be presumption to think that by any efforts of mine I can improve upon the arrangements of God; so I shall take no remedies, and consult no physician." Poor fellow! the sooner your friends take care of you the better; for evidently you ought not to be left at large! If every one of sane mind acts as if he considered that by his own efforts he can make things better for himself, is it presumption in us to think that *God* can make things better for us in answer to prayer, — prayer which He himself has encouraged us to present?

The principal objection to prayer for direct benefits is based on what is regarded as the uni-

form operation of natural laws. These, we are told, are undeviating in their action, so that it is unreasonable to expect answers to prayer which imply any alteration in what otherwise would have taken place. But the Bible abounds in instances of such prayers being answered. This subject is so interwoven with the entire sacred history, that it is impossible to eliminate it and treat the book apart from it. It is not accidental to it, but essential. If the book is not to be trusted in what it teaches respecting prayer, it is essentially defective, and cannot be trusted as a guide. It is impossible at the same time to reverence the Bible as the Word of God and deny the reasonableness and efficacy of prayer. If our opponents are right, the Bible is wrong. If we accept their philosophy, we cannot retain scriptural Christianity.

Let us recall a few instances given us in the sacred records, and notice the variety of the

cases in which prayer is said to have been efficacious.

Abraham prayed, and God healed Abimelech, his wife, and her maidens; he prayed for Sodom, and the city would have been saved had ten righteous men been found there. Eliezer "prayed in his heart," and Rebekah presented herself as Isaac's bride. Isaac "entreated the Lord for his wife, and Rebekah conceived." Jacob wrestled with the angel, and was commended as having power with God; he prayed, and was saved from the wrath of Esau; he thanked God at Bethel for having answered his prayers. The Israelites prayed, and the Lord heard their groaning. Moses prayed, and the Red Sea was divided, the manna fell, and the serpent-bitten people were healed. Joshua prayed, and God gave him victory at Ai. Hannah prayed, and Samuel was born. Samson prayed, and water sprang forth to revive him. Samuel prayed, and God thun-

dered at Mizpeh. David prayed, and records his experience, — “The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth him out of all his troubles.” Solomon prayed, and God gave him wisdom. Elijah prayed, and no rain fell during three years and six months; he prayed, and the heavens gave rain and the earth brought forth her fruit; he prayed, and fire came down to consume the sacrifice. Elisha prayed, and life returned to the son of the Shunemite. Hezekiah prayed, and was healed of his sickness; he prayed, and the army of Sennacherib was destroyed. Daniel prayed, and he understood the dream and the interpretation; he prayed, and while yet on his knees, the angel Gabriel, “being caused to fly swiftly, touched him about the time of the evening oblation.” The people of Nineveh prayed, and the destruction threatened was averted. Jonah prayed, and was rescued from the depths of the sea. Nehemiah prayed, and

found favor with Artaxerxes. The Apostles prayed to be directed in the choice of a colleague. Peter prayed, and Tabitha arose. Cornelius prayed, and Peter was sent to him. The church prayed, and an angel delivered Peter from his dungeon. Paul and Silas prayed, and an earthquake opened the prison doors. The Apostles bid us “pray without ceasing,” and assure us that, “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” Above all, Jesus, as man, prayed. He “continued all night in prayer.” In Gethsemane he reiterated the earnest appeal, — “Father, let this cup pass from me;” and He taught us that “men ought always to pray, and not to faint.”

Surely such examples as these, gathered from one end of the book to the other, clearly prove that the Bible teaches the efficacy, and, therefore, the reasonableness of prayer.

An apology has been made for prayer by limit-

ing its sphere of operation. There are two spheres, — the physical and the spiritual. In the former, the laws of nature operate with undeviating regularity. Here, we are told, prayer is ineffectual, and therefore unreasonable. But in the latter, prayer may be offered with a reasonable expectation of success. We may ask for mental enlightenment, for moral aid, for spiritual comfort, and we shall not ask in vain: but we may not ask for benefits which would involve any intervention in the ordinary course of nature, in regard to the weather, or health, the safety of property, or the security and duration of life. All will admit that there are some facts in the natural world which are regarded as unsuitable for prayer. But because no one, for example, would pray that the year might be lengthened, or the seasons changed, or the duration of life be doubled, it does not follow that there is no place for prayer within the domain of natural law. The

distinction has, we admit, been made in the supposed interest of religion, — but it seems like destroying an essential outwork to preserve the citadel, — or, rather, like surrendering one part of the citadel itself in order to defend the rest.

There are three replies to this theory. First — God is equally supreme in both spheres. He is equally able to do all things, both in the world of matter and of mind. Secondly — The two cannot be separated. Thoughts and emotions influence matter. A change of opinion and feeling prompts a man to act on outward things, so as to change their condition. My appeal to a fellow-creature may cause a fire to be extinguished or a life to be saved. May I not then appeal to God, who can act through mind upon matter? Thirdly — The Bible makes no such distinction. The cases just enumerated deal alike with the material and the spiritual. The healing of Abimelech, the fall of the manna, the birth of

Samuel, the raising of the widow's son, were events in the sphere of natural laws.

David was eminently a man of prayer. Beautifully he describes its efficacy in Psalm cvii. Those who wander in the wilderness cry to the Lord, and He brings them to a city where they may safely dwell. The sick who abhor all manner of meat appeal to Him, and He sends His word and heals them. The sailors, mounting to the heavens and descending to the depths, cry to the Lord in their trouble, and He bringeth them to their desired haven. These are surely cases within the natural sphere. Solomon prayed in the spiritual sphere when he asked for wisdom; but in the exercise of that wisdom he prayed at the consecration of the temple in reference to benefits in the physical sphere, about which some of our philosophers, and perhaps some of our theologians, would hesitate. They would not pray for rain in times of drought, nor for health in seasons

of pestilence. In many things they may know more than Solomon, but we prefer his wisdom when he prays, — “when there is no rain — if there be famine — if there be pestilence — what prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, hear Thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive” (the spiritual sphere) “and *do!*” (the natural sphere).

Our Saviour gave us a comprehensive model of prayer, which, as might be expected, chiefly relates to the spiritual sphere. But in it is one petition which comprehends all our temporal necessities, of whatsoever kind, and thus encourages us to pray in the physical sphere. “Give us this day our daily bread.” He also taught us “*always* to pray and not to faint.” Not many would regard as an improvement such an emendation as “He taught a parable to this end, that men ought always to pray in the spiritual sphere only, and not in the natural sphere.” This is not the letter, and we cannot accept it as the interpretation.

The Apostles, whom their Lord specially endowed to develop and teach the truths of His kingdom, exhort us, without any such distinction, to "pray without ceasing." There is an injunction which leaves no room for doubt on the subject. "Be careful for nothing, but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, make your requests known unto God." By using the same word in both clauses, the argument is the more obvious. "In every thing be without anxiety ; but in every thing pray." Those things which make us anxious are the things we are to make known to God. What are those things? Are they spiritual or natural? Is it not our estate, business, health, life, or friends, about which we are anxious? But in all these things, we are told to be without care. Why? Because we may cast our care on God. But if these things, belonging to the natural sphere, are beyond the region of rational prayer, the cure prescribed for care is not avail-

able; we must still be careful or anxious about them. But we are told not to be anxious, because we may carry our anxieties in prayer to God; therefore, as the anxiety arises in the natural sphere, and the remedy is prayer, the prayer also is in the same natural sphere. About every thing which may cause us anxiety, we are bidden by divine authority to pray.

We may affirm, without hesitation, that no such distinction as that which has been suggested is hinted at in the Bible. A denial of the reasonableness and efficacy of prayer is a denial of Bible religion. If the Scriptures are the Word of God, — if Christianity is divine, — we may say, if religion, whatever its form, is any thing more than a name, it is reasonable to pray.

That nature can contradict Christianity is impossible, if God is the author of both. We grant that science may contradict theology. But it must be borne in mind that while both

are occupied about what is divine, both are themselves human, and therefore fallible. Science is human knowledge of divine facts in nature, and theology is human knowledge of divine truths in revelation. Our science both of natural facts and revealed truth may be defective, and thus contradictions may result which only an amended science can remove. We are apt so much to love our knowledge as to confound it with absolute truth. If science contradicts theology, it does not follow that nature contradicts revelation. Our science of nature may be defective. Further discoveries, a larger induction, a truer theory, will remove the discrepancy. If not, then our science of revelation must be mistaken. A more correct interpretation of the book, either of nature or revelation, or both, will reveal the harmony which must exist between the works and words of the one Great Author of all truth.

Meanwhile, it is not good to be angry even with those who may seem with malicious intent to assail our most cherished beliefs. It was not wise of the clown to kill the ass because it drank the water which reflected the moon. The moon, with calmness undisturbed, still ruled the night. A few burning weeds may produce smoke enough to hide the stars, but the stars are shining all the same. It is not wise to vex and weary ourselves by angry denunciations of the smoke, which will soon pass off without our labor.

Let us hope that men of science generally have no such motive in the disproof of Christianity. Many of them are devout believers, and while prosecuting their investigations, on principles purely scientific, do so in the full confidence that the result will confirm and illustrate the truths of religion. And if there should be some so hostile to Christianity as to prosecute their investigations in the hope of disparaging it, while we

lament their spirit, we will, nevertheless, value their labors. The bad motive will not affect the good result,—and the result must be good, so far as it throws fresh light on the works of God.

There are many persons who may seem hostile to religious truth who are not really so. They are sceptics, but not infidels. They do not deny and denounce the faith. But they scrutinize, criticise, investigate it; they search beneath it and around it; they analyze and test it; they put searching questions to the defenders of it, and demand explanations of the difficulties which beset their reception of it. Such scepticism may result from high intelligence earnestly seeking the truth. It is often faith in the making. Such sceptics may become the soundest believers. Let us not then be angry at objections which may result, not from hatred, but love of religion. Perhaps they are urged in hope that they will be

refuted. Many persons lament that they cannot receive the truth in the simplicity of children. They regard with envy the humble believer who derives peace and joy from a firm reliance upon the God of the Bible. Instead of desiring to shake, they would give all they possess to share such faith. Well I remember an aged unbeliever saying, at the death-bed of a former companion who was rejoicing in hope through Christ, "I would give all the world to feel as you feel." He did so eventually, and himself died happy in the faith of Christ. Let us then encourage rather than repress the utterance of doubt. Better that it be spoken and refuted than hidden and matured. If a young man appeals to his minister or his parents for an explanation of a difficulty, or even if he appears in the attitude of an assailant of the faith, it is most unwise to meet him with a frown, and reply with a reproof. Far better for him to be mentally alive and to be inquiring about sub-

jects of supreme importance, though as yet unconvinced, than to be absorbed in the greedy quest for gold, or the frivolous pursuit of pleasure. That question which sounds so sceptical may be the birth-cry of struggling belief. God grant that if any are urging objections in honest doubt they may in some measure have those objections met by these plain words on the reasonableness of prayer.

Another objection urged against prayer is, that its being answered implies a change in God. If He has wisely determined what to do, and then changes His determination in answer to prayer, it would show that He is not "without variable-ness," and that His first and His second purposes could not both have been the best.

But may there not be an unchanged purpose with changed methods? A sailor wishes to reach Liverpool from New York. Suppose with changing winds he should keep the same tack, and

never alter the ship's course,—would he reach his port? Because his purpose is fixed, his methods must change. What is the difference between the quack doctor and the skilful physician? The former gives the same medicine to differing patients, and continues to give it to the same patient however his symptoms vary. He does not change. But the skilful physician, with a fixed purpose, changes his methods according to the condition of his patient.

A parent has a philosophical child who says, "My father and mother have made all their plans for my training. It would be presumption in me to suggest any alteration; therefore, I will ask nothing from them." Parents would not like this. The house would be dull when the children never went to the parent for help in difficulty, comfort in trouble, and the supply of some real or supposed want. Desiring the expression of the child's wishes and confidence, the parent

might resolve to change his treatment, so that the child might be led to consider that it would perhaps be for its advantage to offer some request. But we will not pursue this illustration. There never were such philosophical children. They must grow older before they attain this wisdom. But there are disobedient children ; and if you are wise parents, with unchanged love, you alter your treatment, you give no tender word of endearment, no kind caress. Your object is soon gained. The child can bear no longer the seeming estrangement, but comes with tears of genuine contrition and begs forgiveness. Then you take that child to your arms and cover its cheek with kisses, and make it soon forget your displeasure. You alter your method with your child according to its altering moods, because you do not alter in your loving purpose to promote its welfare.

So afflictions are a needful discipline. Sorrows are sent or permitted for our welfare ; and when

we pray with submission, — when we come to our Father with penitence and submissiveness of spirit, asking succor from Him, — this may be the very state of mind which alone was needed to render the bestowment of the boon a blessing indeed. To withhold it in the absence of such prayer, and to give it in response, may be equally wise and equally kind. The constancy of our heavenly Father's love is illustrated rather than disparaged by such changes in the treatment of His children. The sun's rays are always shining in lines of perfect rectitude. They do not vary in their direction; in them there are no deflections. But we are not always within the line of the light, and prayer brings us into the range. It was no change in God but in the people who repented, when they heard the warning, — “Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed.” It has been well observed that it was as though one said, — “Yet forty steps, and you

will fall over the precipice." But if the forty steps are not taken, the precipice is escaped. "O wicked man, thou shalt surely die." But if the wicked man forsakes his wickedness, he shall surely live and not die. This is a change, not in God, but in the sinner.

O men of science! all honor to you in your own sphere. Show us the beauty, the wisdom, the beneficence of God, by showing us the order that pervades His works. But do not shut Him out of His own universe. Do not say that your experiments with microscope and telescope include all the facts of the universe, when the facts of Christianity and the facts of consciousness are not within your induction. These are facts which are incapable of being subjected to scientific scrutiny. God will not, at your bidding, come into your crucible, cross the field of your telescope, or enter the wing of some hospital which you may choose to designate for experi-

menting upon the Almighty. "There are a thousand things in heaven and earth not dreamt of in your *philosophy*."

To use the beautiful words of Tennyson, —

"More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of ;

For what are men better than sheep or goats

That nourish a blind life within the brain,

If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer,

Both for themselves and those who call them friends ?

For so the whole round world is every way

Bound by gold chains around the throne of God."

Yes! what better than sheep and goats if we do not pray? But why pray, if, like sheep and goats, we are subjected to the irresistible action of physical laws? Why pray if we are but as so many sparrows flitting our little life from tree to tree, with no intelligent loving guardianship from One who is above nature? He has said, "Ye are of more value than many sparrows." Yet even the sparrows are the objects of His care. They

fall, but not one of them falls unnoticed by our Father. Much more does He watch over us!

O the difference between Christianity and the philosophy which puts us on a level with sheep and goats and sparrows, — which even reduces us to the condition of inorganic atoms, — which tells us that equally with every drop of water and every grain of sand we are the helpless victims of mere physical forces, which, irrespective of any wishes and prayers of ours, must have their sway, whether in the process we be crowned or crushed. You may boast your superior endowments, — your intellect, genius, will, — but exalted as you may be above the film of dust that settles on your hand, you are equally with it in the grasp of an iron necessity, from which you cannot escape, and with which there is no God to interfere. O the difference between such a representation of humanity and that which says, “You are all the children of the Most High. However

poor, helpless, obscure, you are equally with the rich and the great the objects of His loving care. There is not a lonely wanderer unwatched by Him. There is not a sufferer to whose cries He does not listen. There is not a little child to whose voice He does not bend His ear. He is mightier than the mighty waves of the sea. The stormy wind is His servant fulfilling His word. The sun and stars shine at His command. The universe obeys His bidding. To Him all things are possible. And He is Love. He watches over His children; He listens to their prayers; He delights to do them good; they are precious in His esteem; the very hairs of their head are all numbered; and in all things by prayer and supplication they may make their requests known to Him." Which of these philosophies does the human heart feel to be most in accordance with its nature, its wants, its yearnings?

Prayer is a natural instinct. Arguments against

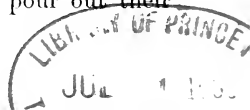
it may be multiplied a hundred-fold, but nature will ever be stronger than logic. To the end of time objections, though unanswered, will be powerless to prevent prayer. Every child begins life with prayer. The parent is in the place of God to it. By its infant cries, by the motion of its little hands, by its look of fear, or desire, or love, it prays. And the parent delights in the expression of the child's dependence and confidence. How promptly the father flies to the succor of his imperilled boy. How the mother folds to her breast, with fresh endearments, the babe whose cry is its prayer for comfort. And God, who created the parental and filial instinct, bids us from what is human conceive of what is divine. It is not a mere figure of speech when we are told, "Like as a father pitieth His children so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." From our earliest infancy we are pre-

pared to respond to the voice of our Father in heaven. "Call upon me in the day of trouble and I will deliver you."

Even those who know not the happiness of a life of habitual prayer betake themselves to it as a refuge in sudden and great calamities. When bending beneath some overwhelming sorrow, trembling in view of some enormous and impending danger, the most irreligious pray. Whole nations have suspended their pleasures and their toils to bend the knee to God. Infidelity itself often gives way under pressure.

"But is there proof in mere desire
For that to which my hopes aspire?
May I thus trust my nature weak?"
'Tis God in thee doth speak!
From God that heavenly instinct came:
He wrote on thee His holy name,
That conscious need, those yearnings strong,
He gave, and will not wrong."

What a dull, insupportable life would this be to multitudes, if they could not pour out their



sorrows into the ear of One who they believe listens to their supplications, and is able and willing to help them! How many there are who would faint under the burden of their trials, who could no longer prosecute their weary task, who would be utterly unfit to cope with their daily difficulties, but for the comfort they find in prayer! Shall they be robbed of this comfort? Yonder is a mother who has just parted from her only son. She stood on the pier watching the waving of his handkerchief till tears blinded her eyes, and the vessel was lost in the distance,—now with bursting heart she seeks her chamber, and with earnest cries beseeches Him, who is the Lord of the ocean, to give charge to the winds and waves respecting her son. “Foolish woman! don’t you know that the winds and waves are subjected to the irresistible action of physical law?” There was a little girl in the speaker’s Sunday school, who was overheard the other

day praying thus: "O God, make me a good girl, and bless father and mother; and do please send father a little work soon." Silly child! don't you know that work and wages are under the control of the laws of supply and demand, and are beyond the sphere of prayer?

Alas! for the lonely wanderers in crowded cities; alas! for the exile far from home; alas! for the broken-hearted to whom life has no more charm; alas! for the injured struggling against wrong; alas! for the tempted, fighting the fierce fight for honesty and virtue and truth; alas! for the bereaved; alas! for the sick; alas! for the poor, if they may not take their sorrows to God, and expect help and comfort from above. And alas! too, for many in seeming prosperity whose wealth and position cannot satisfy the craving of their souls; and alas! for many of our greatest merchants, and lawyers, and physicians, and statesmen, who feel they could not perform their

responsible duties, but must give way under the pressure, but for the thought derived from prayer! Without this solace, how many a great intellect would fail,—how many a valuable life would prematurely close!

“ O Thou who driest the mourner’s tear,
How dark this world would be,
If, pierced by sin and sorrow here,
We could not fly to Thee!

“ When joy no longer soothes or cheers,
And e’en the hope that threw
A moment’s sparkle o’er our tears,
Is dimmed and vanished too;

“ O, who could brave life’s stormy doom,
Did not Thy wing of love
Come brightly wafting through the gloom,
Our prayer-branch from above.

“ Then sorrow, touched by Thee, grows bright
With more than rapture’s ray;
As darkness shows us worlds of light,
We never saw by day.”

— T. MOORE.

We do not always obtain just what we ask;

but we pray to One who, we believe, is able to give us any thing. His ability, however, is directed by wisdom and love. We cannot judge of what is absolutely best, whether as regards the universe at large, or our own personal interests. But we may be sure He always hears us, though we may not see how the answer comes. We cannot pray without deriving some benefit. We are sure to be benefited indirectly by the influence of such prayer on ourselves; we may also obtain, if not what we ask, something better. We may receive a blessing even in what seems a contradiction to our prayers; but we may expect, and we often do receive, the actual granting of our requests. Why should not prayer be answered as literally now as in the days of old? Is not God the same loving Father? Has His ear become heavy that it cannot hear, — His arm shortened that it cannot save? The history of the church abounds in illustrations of the effi-

caety of prayer. Every one who has lived a few years in its exercise possesses personal proofs of its power.

If the preceding arguments do not carry conviction to the sceptic, illustrations will be of little value; but they may confirm the faith of those who already believe. For this purpose I refer to a few facts which have come under my own knowledge. It would be easy to cull from histories and biographies incidents of a much more striking nature; but those with which one is personally acquainted more powerfully impress the mind, though in themselves they may possess inferior interest.

On a recent evangelizing visit to Newport, one of its citizens said to me: "In yonder house dwell a man and his wife who recently needed a sum of £30 to meet some payment the next morning. Having failed in their efforts to collect it, they earnestly prayed God to provide it. The store

was being closed for the night when a sea-captain knocked at the door and asked for some seamen's clothes. The gas was relighted and various articles were selected ; the purchaser then asked for the account, and the money was paid, — a little more than £30." "A lucky accident?" The man and his wife thanked their heavenly Father for sending it in answer to prayer.

Another house was shown me. "In yonder room lies the body of a young woman, who, though near to death, seemed unprepared. Her friends set apart Saturday evening for special prayer. Next morning, to one who visited her, she said: 'Oh, I see it all now! I see what a poor guilty sinner I am! but I can trust in Jesus as my Saviour, and I am not afraid to die!' On being asked how and when she began to feel this, she replied: 'Last evening it seemed to come to me, and I understood all you had said to me!'" Those friends regarded this as an encouragement still to pray.

Not many months ago, I was visiting on his dying bed John Cranfield, son of the Southwark tailor, who was the originator of ragged schools, under the ministry of Rowland Hill. We were conversing on prayer. He said: "A remarkable instance occurred in connection with my father. The former organist of Surrey Chapel, Mr. Heward, was dangerously ill. He was greatly beloved, and his friends met for special prayer that God would spare his life. My father on that occasion was remarkably earnest in asking that the life of his friend might be lengthened, as in the case of Hezekiah. The next day he began to recover; and during fifteen years was a blessing to his friends and the church."

My brother told me that when superintendent of a Sunday school he felt a strong impulse, one Saturday evening, to call at the house of one of the teachers, whom he had never visited before. He found his mother and sisters in such evident

distress that he inquired the cause. With much reluctance they explained that, being unable to pay their taxes their goods were to be taken on the coming Monday, and they had been asking special help from God to save them from a disaster which they felt would be a dishonor to religion. By the aid of a few friends the difficulty was at once met, — but the timely succor was regarded as the divine response to prayer.

With that brother I was once climbing the Cima di Jazzi, one of the mountains in the chain of Mount Rosa. When nearly at the top, we entered a dense fog. Presently our guides faced right about and grounded their axes on the frozen snow slope. My brother, seeing the slope still beyond, and not knowing it was merely the cornice, overhanging a precipice of several thousand feet, rushed onward. I shall never forget their cry of agonized warning. He stood a moment on the very summit, and then, the snow

yielding, he began to fall through. One of the guides, at great risk, had rushed after him, and, seizing him by the coat, drew him down to a place of safety. No one could be nearer death and yet escape. On his return home, an invalid member of his congregation told him that she had been much in prayer for his safety, and mentioned a special time when she particularly was earnest, as if imploring deliverance from some great peril. The times corresponded. Was not that prayer instrumental in preserving that life?

Whilst preparing these pages, a clergyman of great scholarship and genius has told me of a remarkable answer to prayer, authenticated by three missionaries known to himself, who are personally acquainted with the facts. A Prussian, the master of a hotel in India, was anxious to relinquish his large income, and labor as a missionary among the Santil tribes. Objection was made to him on account of an impediment

in his speech, which would render him, in speaking a foreign language, incapable of being understood. Believing in the efficacy of prayer, he called together his friends specially to ask that his impediment might be removed. The next morning he presented himself again at the Mission House, — the impediment had gone : he was accepted, relinquished his business, and is now preaching the gospel to the Santils in their own tongue. Why should those who believe the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles regard such a statement as incredible ?

My father, the author of the “Sinners’ Friend,” narrates in his Autobiography a circumstance which he often used to speak of with great emotion. My mother was very ill, and apparently dying. The doctor said that now, if at all, the children might be brought for her to look at them once more. One by one we were brought to the bed-side, and her hand was placed on our heads.

Then my father bade her farewell, and she lay motionless, as if soon to breathe her last. He then said to himself, "There is yet one promise I have not pleaded, — 'If ye ask any thing in my name I will do it.' " He stepped aside, and in an agony of soul exclaimed, "O Lord, for the honor of thy dear Son, give me the life of my wife!" He could say no more, and sank down exhausted. Just then the nurse called him to the bedside saying, — "She has opened her mouth again, as if for food." Nourishment was given, and from that time she began to recover. The doctor said it was miraculous. My father said it was God who heard the prayer of His sorrowing servant. During fifty years that mother was spared to her family, and then passed away, surrounded by children and grandchildren, to whom her example and prayers had been an invaluable blessing, her hands held by two sons, who owe whatever they are enabled to do in the ministry to her influence.

But we must pause in such narrations. Facts abound in every one's experience. We will not give up praying, for all that some philosophers may say. Give up prayer? Prayer is the pillar of cloud, beneath the shadow of which we march with vigor along a wilderness whose sultry heat would else be intolerable. Prayer is the pillar of fire, in the light of which we will sing songs of gladness in the valley whose darkness would else appal and vanquish us. Prayer is the golden causeway uniting earth to heaven, by which angels ascend and descend bearing rich blessings in response. Prayer is a telegraphic wire stretching from the heart to the throne of God; and often are there times, whether or not there is an outward answer, when we feel the thrill within us of heaven's responsive vibrations, and are ready to say, — "Verily God hath heard me: He hath attended to the voice of my supplication. Because He hath inclined His ear unto me, therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live."

Alas! how much they lose who do not pray! How heavy the burden of sorrow when it is not thus lightened! How dark, and lonely, and sad the path in which we have not for our companion and guide the hearer of prayer!

But how shall they who never truly prayed, begin? As the publican, when he smote upon his breast saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Without waiting for correct views of theology, — without waiting to have every doubt removed and every difficulty explained, — without waiting to feel as much sorrow for sin as others have expressed, or as, you are convinced, ought to be felt by yourself, — without comparing yourself with others as being either better or worse; but simply as a sinner needing mercy, apply to the merciful Father who waits to welcome His wandering children. Pray in the name of that Saviour who said, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out."

Then bring to Him all your sorrows and all your desires. But ever, chief of all, ask Him to deliver you from sin, the great adversary of the soul. Let us be encouraged by that parable of marvellously compressed logical force, in which our Lord taught His disciples “always to pray and not to faint.”

There was in a city a magistrate whose office was to protect the weak against injustice and violence. But he cared neither for the authority of God nor the opinion of men. There was a widow in that city,—poor, solitary, friendless. She was suffering injury from some enemy whom she was powerless to resist. So she went to the magistrate for protection, saying,—“Avenge me of mine adversary: save me from my oppressor.” For some time the magistrate paid no attention to her request. But she went to him again and again, until he was weary with her importunity, and said to himself, “Though I fear not God, nor

regard man, yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me." And Jesus said, "Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily."

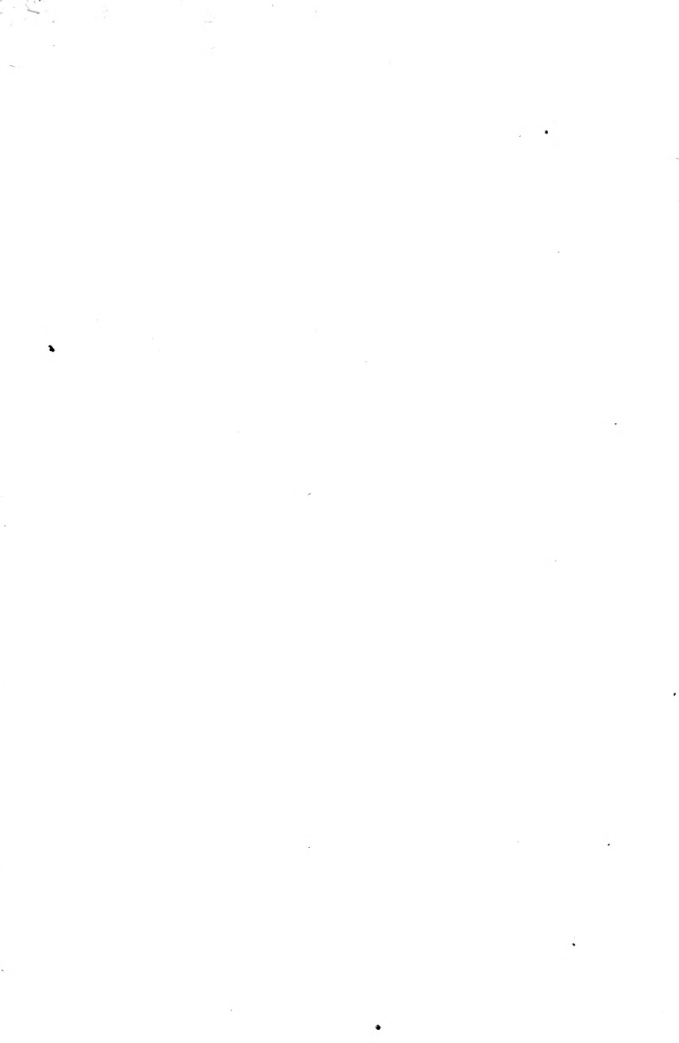
This is an argument, not of comparison, but of contrast. Because God is so unlike the unjust judge in character, and because His elect are so unlike the widow in condition, He will much more listen to them. There is a double contrast. The first is between the judge and God. The judge was unjust, disregarding all the claims of righteousness, violating his word, neglecting his duties, profaning his office. Yet he helped the woman. How much more will prayer be answered by God, who is righteous and true, whose province it is to help the needy, who has promised succor to those who seek it, and who must ever be faith-

ful to His word. The judge was unmerciful as well as unjust. He regarded his own ease alone. Even when he granted the widow's request it was from a selfish motive. Yet he granted it. How much more will supplicants be answered by Him who is a tender Father, and who delighteth in mercy?

There is also a contrast between the widow and God's elect. The widow was evidently poor, friendless, and of no worldly rank. Yet she gained her request. How much more will God help His own elect, the aristocracy of the universe, His "kings and priests," the "sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty!" The widow was answered in a cause which had interest for herself alone. What cared the judge for her adversary? But God's elect appeal to Him in a cause in which He himself is deeply interested, for their adversary is His also, their deliverance is His honor, their safety is the safety of

His own possession, their deliverance is the vindication of His own honor. The widow applied to the judge without invitation,—how much more will they be heard who are invited and commanded to pray by God himself? The widow presented a petition drawn up by herself,—but God's elect take petitions which He has inspired and recorded for their use. Will He not accept the prayers He himself has prompted? The widow was answered, though she stood alone in the presence of the judge. And will not God avenge His own elect, who never plead alone, but at whose side there standeth the well-beloved Son of God, who ever liveth to make intercession, and whom the Father heareth always!

He knows what goes on in the court of heaven, for He dwells there. And He it is who taught us “always to pray and not to faint.”



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