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THE WORLD OF PRAYER.

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THE
WORLD OF PRAYER;

OR,

Prayer in relation to Personal Religion.

BY

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TRANSLATED FROM THE FOURTH GERMAN EDITION BY

THE REV. J. S. BANKS,

GLASGOW.

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1879.



TO THE

REV. W. B. POPE, D.D.,

DIDSBURY, MANCHESTER,

THIS TRANSLATION IS DEDICATED WITH ALL RESPECT
AND GRATITUDE.

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

ON two points the present volume is calculated to throw considerable light.

It is often alleged that there is some incompatibility between a deeply devotional spirit and a life of active Christian service,—that, in order to the maintenance of high religious feeling, a more or less complete separation from contact with the world is necessary. The life of St. Paul, and still more of the Saviour Himself, should be a sufficient rebuke to such an opinion, but still it exists. No one who reads the present volume will doubt that it is instinct with the very spirit of devotion. It deals with the innermost mysteries of spiritual life, and evidently reflects the experience of the author. But so far from the author being a recluse, it is intimated by the German translator, A. Michelsen, that he is one of the most active of the Danish bishops, and lives a most busy life. Thus modern combines with ancient experience, in teaching us that the alleged inconsistency has no foundation.

We often read in the public prints of the decline and threatened extinction of religious life in Germany, and many are ready to point to this as the inevitable issue of Protestantism. It is surely not un instructive in this reference to observe, that such a work as the present rapidly passed in German into a fourth edition. No language has a richer devotional literature than the German. Such facts suggest that the decadence may not be so great as is sometimes represented.

THE WORLD OF PRAYER.

I.

INTRODUCTION.

PRAYER is a world by itself, known only to those who live in it. If any one conversant with prayer were asked, "Where did thy soul first realize God's presence and taste His goodness? Where did the truths of eternal life dawn upon thee?" the answer would certainly be, "*In prayer!*" It was while praying that I gained the direct assurance that God lives, that He is my Father, and that in His fatherly love I enjoy the pledge of eternal life." Prayer forms a wall of division between those who pray and those who do not. Neither class understands the other: they live in two different worlds. "Friend, how is it thou art so joyous? Thou art the merest child of poverty; thou possessest nothing, art without power, and honour, and consideration among men; thou mayest be called rich in care, sorrow, and anxiety, but in nothing else: how is it, then, thou art so joyous? Thy prospects of happiness and good days are vanished like the fabric of a

vision, all thy toil and effort gone like the foam of the ocean-wave. The end of life is at hand. What hast thou gained and accomplished? Nothing!" Suppose, now, to such inquiries the answer were given: "Still I claim the right to be joyous. I know I have good cause to be anxious about this and that. But my soul lives in the world of prayer. There all is clear and bright, all is full of beauty and peace. There my soul lives in my God. Therefore am I so joyous." Such an answer would only be understood by one who knows from his own experience what prayer is.

"Friend, how canst thou be so downcast and gloomy? Thou art a true child of fortune. Fortune has lavished on thee all her gifts. Can a desire rise in thy soul which thou art without the means of satisfying at once?" Were any one to reply to this question, "I know I have very much to make me happy. But to-day I feel as if I were thrust out of the world of prayer. The words pass from my lips, but they do not rise to heaven, or reach God's heart. They fall to the ground; and no beam, no warm breath of mercy, penetrates my soul. I know, indeed, that this is a sign that I ought to be still and wait, but waiting and silence are not delightful." This answer also would be unintelligible to every one who lives in and for the present world alone.

Still, let it not be concealed that in the world of prayer also grief and joy go together. Whatever has power to fill a human soul with joy has power to fill

it with grief as well. At the heart of all love lies care. Just as the sea rises and falls, so in the human breast is there the interchange of ebb and flow. If thou wouldst live free from care and anxiety, then forswear joy also; yea, turn thy back on life itself. To us life only comes with joy in one hand, and care and grief in the other. But to close the heart against the rich fulness of life,—what is this but to extinguish the light, and leave our soul all dark and lonely? In short, the essential point is, not joy or grief, but the nature of the contents, the measure of the capacity of our life. The more capacious the life, the higher swells the joy, the deeper sinks the grief. Who rejoiced like our Saviour? Who sorrowed like Him? But although the prayer-life has its cares and griefs, these are illumined by the hope, by the certain assurance, that “yet a little while” and the fountain of grace will again flow abundantly. He whose lot has fallen, whose heritage lies, in the kingdom of prayer, would not exchange his lot for all the grandeur of the world.

In judging of the happiness and wellbeing of a man, or even of an entire nation, we are apt to take into view only the outward circumstances of the one or the other. The real wealth of life, the fulness of life, revealing itself to man in prayer, escapes observation. For this reason our judgment on the destiny befalling individuals, or even large communities, is so untrustworthy and deceitful. For all the gains accruing in the life of the soul and

spirit, the observation of sense has no room. In our days we are fond of comforting ourselves and others with the thought of how rapidly we travel from place to place, with what lightning speed news flies to distant lands, or even how much the whole range and compass of life has advanced; how appropriate and good, for example, is the clothing of the people, how healthy and plentiful, how excellent the means of livelihood, etc. We by no means call in question the great importance of the outward conditions of life. But we ask whether inward satisfaction, contentment with one's actual lot in life, is very much greater than it was in former days. Could the answer be other than negative? And yet we are all agreed that where contentment of soul does not prevail, happiness is not to be dreamt of. Perhaps there was never a generation, never an age, in which, however gloomy its circumstances in our opinion, discontent was so widespread as in the present generation. Whence this discontent?

God has spread before us a limitless creation, as a visible image of His omnipotence and majesty. No one can excuse himself for not being able to see this image. To see it he only need open his eyes and send sweeping glances around and above. And just as little can the bold, haughty declaration be excused: "We will accept nothing, concede nothing, but what the understanding is able to grasp." Can any one even grasp the infinite vastness of space in the universe surrounding us? The wise ones, who

fancy that they can comprehend and explain the universe by means of their powers of reason, evade this question, this enigma, by fondly saying (making use of a newly invented phrase), "That (*i.e.* the immeasurable universe) is but a '*poor* infinity.'" That, indeed, ought not to be called poor which stands forth before our eyes as the work of God's omnipotence, as the image and likeness of His power. But no doubt it becomes a "*poor* infinity" to man when, in that which in itself is but finite, he seeks, without limit and reserve, his full, and therefore infinite satisfaction; when he dreams that in outward things he can find rest for his soul,—find his satisfaction, his life, in the temporal and fleeting, in an outward state of life either of one kind or another. Nay, our wishing and craving is never satisfied in such things, never and nowhere says, "Now it is enough." There are always others still who possess more, are richer, mightier, happier. Would it not, therefore, be unreasonable to expect thee to be content? It is mere envy which, in presence of the contrast with others that forces itself on the notice, is the parent of discontent. Discontent and envy are the two master powers of our days. Both one and the other have their root in the infinite, unlimited range, in the boundless nature of desire.

But how is it that this desire is never appeased, this thirst never quenched, this hunger nowhere satisfied? Is it to be condemned for its own sake? No; on the contrary, it is a witness that man is of

higher origin and nobler race. It says clearly and distinctly enough, "The soul refuses to be imposed on, will find its rest only in the infinite, only in God." Beneath all discontent with the temporal, sounds perpetually an unconscious hidden undertone of a longing directed to the eternal. As often as we attain an object we have been seeking without finding the satisfaction expected, the cry is heard again in the depths of the soul: "Turn back, turn inward, turn upward, seek thy God, seek *the world of prayer!*" And this longing, lying unconsciously at the foundation of all our discontent, is the secret bond that links the two worlds together, and draws the souls willing to be drawn from this world to their God. In all those who will not be drawn, discontent is either drowned awhile in the whirl of sense, or turns into utter disgust with life. But the two states often alternate, until at last they issue in complete spiritual slumber and torpor.

There is conflict in every department of spiritual life in our days. But about nothing, about none of the many "burning questions," is there fiercer conflict than about Christianity. Shall we complain of this? But what would our complaints avail? Ought we not in this respect also to say, "Thy will, O God, be done"? Amid all that is taking place, affecting us either directly and personally, or even but indirectly, we should earnestly chasten and admonish our soul till it learns to say, "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt!" Only when we make thoroughly our own

the sentiment which finds *expression* in this prayer, does the storm subside; only then do we find the peace which our Saviour promised. Why, then, should there be conflict? It is good that the secret thoughts of men's hearts be revealed. Doubt and unbelief have existed as long as Christianity in the world. They have not first come into existence in these enlightened days of ours. Utterly without reason is the boast, "*Now, now* for the first time has something hitherto unknown and unheard of come to light." Even the apostle John was compelled to write, "Many false prophets are gone out into the world," 1 John iv. 1. "Even now there are many antichrists" (*i.e.* adversaries of Christ), 1 John ii. 18. Hence it ought not to perplex or trouble us, if the same that happened in days of old is repeated in ours. We would rejoice at the fact that the doubts of unbelief and objections to the gospel no longer need to hide in the secrecies of the heart and wrap themselves in darkness, but are allowed to step forth into the open light of day.

But how is it that in so many cases all the war of opposing theories brings so little of the spoil of victory? Because men do not understand each other; and they do not understand each other, because they do not settle clearly what are the fundamental ideas on which their different theories of the world rest. The men who have come to an understanding as to their inner life, fall into two main classes,—*those who pray, and those who do not.* No doubt men are dis-

tinguished from one another as regards their outward position, their gifts, their attainments, etc., but none of these distinctions is the source of such a contrast as the question, Does a soul live within the world of prayer or without it? The Lord God, indeed, stands in relation to every human soul, but only the soul that prays stands on its part in relation, in fellowship, with God. In prayer alone does man gain experience in regard to God and the divine government, and reach that inner assurance which is to be obtained through no conclusions of reason, be their number ever so great. For him who prays, all proofs of the existence of God fall aside as superfluous, for God Himself reveals His existence to the inmost spiritual sense, just as the sun does its existence to the eye that beholds it. Just as, in natural science, we start from experience, and only attain to the comprehension of truth by means of keen observation, so, in God's kingdom, we attain consciousness of the eternal only through personal experience. This consciousness is distinguished from knowledge in the sphere of botany, mineralogy, etc., only by the fact that its experiences are drawn not from external nature, but from the world of prayer. Whoever is unwilling, by earnest toil in prayer, to seek such experiences, will just as little understand conversation about God and the things belonging to God's kingdom, as a deaf man the harmony of music, or a blind man the variations of colour. If any one says, "First *prove* to me the being of God, then I will believe in

Him," he speaks just as ignorantly as the deaf man who should say, "Let me first *see* the sounds, then will I believe that there are sounds;" or the blind man who should say, "Let me *hear* the colours, then will I believe that there are colours; meantime, I abide by my well-grounded conviction that over everything rests a veil of eternal darkness."

The soul has its senses which are turned outwards, and therefore to the world; but it has also its sense which is turned inwards, to God. In the claims of conscience, man becomes aware of a sacred, supreme authority, that issues its command, "This thou shalt do, that thou shalt not do;" and in the disquiet following the evil deed as its shadow, as well as in the joy and peace accompanying the good, he is made to know that this sacred authority is also just, and not to be trifled with. It is possible for us already to anticipate eternal ruin,—its forerunner in this world is a remorseful conscience,—and eternal bliss, in inward joy. God wills that in every human breast a mighty prophetic voice raise its testimony to eternal condemnation and eternal blessedness. At first this inner sense manifests itself as a listening, a giving heed. An inward voice may be heard speaking, whether the man wishes to listen or not. By great labour and effort he may succeed in maiming his nature and closing his inward ear, so that he believes that the voice has grown silent, and henceforward comes to assert that conscience is but one of many old-world prejudices. Now that which makes

itself known in conscience as holy, righteous, judicial authority, of this the praying Christian becomes conscious, as the Almighty Father. To him the supreme authority reveals itself as a *personal* being, who bends His ear to our prayer. We listen to the voice of our God, and speak to Him. In this converse with God we acquire the complete consciousness of His existence. And in this intercourse of prayer the mighty stream of love and grace, pouring from Golgotha and the cross over the whole earth, finds its way to our hearts, and discloses to us more and more the depths of the nature and heart of God. For God is love; and by giving up our heart to the power of love we obtain glimpse after glimpse into God's inmost nature. The renewal of our heart and the true knowledge of God melt one into the other, and cannot be divorced. Hence, even the young, the simple may come to the knowledge of God; for there is no one of such slender gifts as to be unable to surrender his heart to the power of love. And, in order to render the understanding of the true nature of love easy to man, God has left certain spots in our soul as relics of that primitive state of innocence in which man possessed God's image in its purity. A father, a mother, can still sacrifice themselves, forget themselves, for their children's sake. They can find their joy, as their sorrow, out of themselves, in their children's weal and woe, joy and pain. Thus we are able to learn what should be our feelings towards all our fellow-men; we should feel towards them as towards our

children. We cannot, indeed, make the same sacrifices for strangers as for our own, but we can cherish the same feelings. Or, can we not at least desire the good of all men, as of our own children? And what do we not desire for our children? Is there any happiness — I mean, any real happiness — which should seem to us *too* great for them? Is envy conceivable in a father, a mother, towards son or daughter? And ought we not to forgive others, as we forgive our children, and do it in the spirit of the common saying: “Forgive and *forget*, as if it had never happened”?

If our hearts are enlarged by the love of Christ, not only is God’s heart and nature revealed to us, but at the same time our eye is opened to discern eternal blessedness. For he that loves is of a glad heart; the richer the soul in love, the greater becomes its joy. Love carries in its bosom the whole fulness of joy. The joy of love—herein consists eternal blessedness. Love, therefore, not merely fulfils the law, and smoothes for us the manifold duties of life; it is, in addition, the true spring whence flows the knowledge of heavenly and eternal things. It is the Yea and Amen of our heart to God’s great revelation in His only-begotten Son, and to all His revelations in the souls of those who call on the living God.

Against the doctrine that through prayer we may obtain the knowledge of God, the partisans of free-thought, so called, certainly bring the objection that

all religion is delusion,—either intentional fraud or self-deception,—and this, of course, applies to all that belongs to the world of prayer. All a Christian's so-called experiences are simply fictions of an imagination that has been heated by religious feeling. What we wish to see, we believe we see ; and what we wish to experience, we at last believe we do experience. Certainly the more the people of the inner world neglect the concerns of the outer world, the more will such a mode of thought find entrance among them, the more widespread it will become. There has been a time already in our days, when, if a vote had been taken on the subject, a majority would have agreed unhesitatingly with the opinion mentioned, and such a time may possibly return. Suppose that in a certain nation the majority were born blind. It might happen that the majority of voices would declare for the opinion that all talk of light and colours is nothing but the illusion of certain dreamers.

Nevertheless, we by no means deny that even in the world of prayer illusion and self-deception may occur. To the consideration of this question we shall return subsequently. But, at all events, as respects experience in prayer there is a means of test,—the same that is applied in all other kinds of experience. You suppose you see something, but every one else, with sight just as good, sees nothing. In this case you cannot avoid acknowledging that your eyes have played you false. If, therefore, in our prayer some-

thing befalls us which lies outside the experience of every one else, which seems altogether personal and special, then no doubt care and watchfulness are necessary lest we deceive ourselves. But suppose we cannot give up this *something* without giving up ourselves, because it is associated with some great, decisive crisis of our inner life, then it may be looked on as a secret between God and your soul. It was a message of joy for you only, not for the rest of the world. For the world there is but the one great message of joy and salvation, that of Jesus of Nazareth. Experiences like these, peculiar to the individual man, fall outside the general scheme and order of the prayer-life, unless the individual occupy an exceptional position, that of a leader, within the sphere of divine revelation. On the other hand, what all lovers of prayer learn by means of their spiritual sense, what is common to them all in virtue of this common element, bears the stamp of *general validity*, seeing that the consentient experience of all excludes self-delusion or deception as something inconceivable. But just as little is it right to say, "Those who talk of experiences of prayer are simple, narrow-minded people, deceived by their own ignorance." Among them there are unquestionably numbers of men and women of bright intelligence, of keen and practised power of thought, the best-informed and highly cultured. Nay, among the great host of worshippers we reckon some of the foremost spirits of mankind. Nor is it the case that experiences of prayer are

enjoyed only among this or that people, and therefore depend possibly on an illusion connected with the peculiar character of the people. The wide world round, prayers rise to God. Nor do they belong to a single age, so that we might possibly trace them back to prejudices of the age, which must needs vanish with growing enlightenment. In the earliest antiquity, prayers rose heavenward as they do to-day; and we are persuaded that they will not be hushed when the end of the days comes. In this respect it is with the human race as with the individual. We do not need to be able to count many years before we pray; and prayer accompanies us through the years, and we desire and hope that our last sigh may be a prayer to God. Experiences of prayer, therefore, not being limited to particular men or nations, ages or periods, we are justified in the belief that its home is everywhere, its efficacy quite universal.

Has every one, then, *the ability to pray*? Certainly every one has this, just as much as the ability to believe. There is no man born who is not designed for fellowship with God, for eternal happiness. But there may be men so uncultivated, so neglected, that the capacity lies dormant awhile. But, as a rule, the fault is not so much want of knowledge and culture, as want of will. Wilfully to close the eyes is of course to shut out the light. Men do not perceive the light of divine revelation that dawns on prayer, because they will not perceive it, because they turn the eyes of their spirit away from God, and let their

gaze fasten upon the pleasure and glory of this world.

But perhaps many will object, "I should like to pray, but cannot. In order to be able to pray to God, I must believe that He is; but to me living faith in God's existence and government is wanting. How could I pray to Him? You assure me that, if I would only pray, prayer would give me the certainty that God lives. But to be able to pray, I must have this conviction, must therefore be already in possession of that which prayer is to give me. Prayer and faith go together, and determine each other. Thus your advice, if it is not mere mockery, at any rate involves an essential contradiction."

That faith and prayer determine each other, I do not deny. It is just as little conceivable that real faith should remain dumb in God's presence, as, on the other hand, it is certain that every prayer assumes that we believe in Him to whom we address ourselves in prayer. But there are *degrees* in faith, as there are degrees in prayer. Even weak, doubting, wavering faith, that lives as it were beneath a clouded, veiled sky, has moments in which the clouds disperse, in which the light of grace and truth rises upon the soul in all its brightness. Such moments are but like solitary rays bursting through the clouds. Afterwards the darkness gathers again. Afterwards ordinary life, with its business, cares, and empty satisfactions, presses again on the man, like a canopy of lead. But if the soul prays, and makes good use

of such moments, it gains power to soar aloft in prayer, and more and more grows in the confidence that it too has an almighty Father in heaven. It may, indeed, be that days, months, years pass away, during which a man forgets his God, and lives in the world as if the visible and earthly alone were real, and beside this nothing else existed. Then danger and sore tribulation burst upon such an one, and his whole soul cries out, "God help me!" And behold, that very moment faith awakes in his heart, although but as a grain of mustard-seed, and prayer rises to his lips. Often, no doubt, such a moment is written in the book of oblivion. Then it remains of no importance, or, to speak more correctly, it serves merely to enhance the responsibility resting on a man. God called, but He called in vain. If, on the other hand, the man is able to preserve the influence of such a moment, it becomes the starting-point of a whole series, an entirely new course of experiences of a higher order.

Of course it may happen that a man is deceived as to his faith. He may imagine that he believes, while his faith is nothing but a lifeless mass of knowledge, with no influence whatever on his spirit and life. But in point of fact it more commonly happens that a man is deceived with respect to his professed unbelief. He may defy the Lord God, may question His existence, deny, mock, dishonour Him, make the Almighty the butt of witticism, and yet at times it is impossible for him to drown the

voice saying to him, "Art thou really quite sure that there is no God?" So deeply is the consciousness of God graven on man's self-consciousness, that he scarcely ever succeeds in quite eradicating it, however earnestly he tries to do so. Therefore, if a man is only *willing* really to pray, without doubt, at least in by far the greatest number of cases, he will command faith enough to *enable* him to pray.

I once had an acquaintance,—an intimately trusted friend I could scarcely call him,—and as often as we met, our conversation turned, as matter of course, upon questions of deepest interest—questions that stirred our inmost feelings. "Do you think," he once said to me, "that it is right for us to pray to the Lord God, without really believing in Him?" I replied, that if we do not believe in Him, we shall scarcely be inclined to pray. "You are right," he answered; "for this reason it is something rare, yet it is so with me. I had a desire to fold my hands and say, 'If Thou existest, O God, hear me; if Thou hast a heart for the cares and anxieties of a poor mortal, incline Thine ear, and hear what I would say to Thee.' But I know not whether I ought to pray thus,—whether it is not sinful." On this I observed, "All depends on the *motive*. Some one might, perhaps, desire to speak thus, in order, in a sense, proudly to challenge the Almighty, and, if he remains unpunished, to proclaim the impotence of God, under the foolish notion that man is able to force the Almighty to a display of His power. But

if no evil motive of this kind lay at the bottom of his wish, he need feel no scruple about carrying it into effect. The very scruple expressed by him clearly testifies how earnestly he desires to be allowed to pray, because he longs to believe in almighty God with the whole heart." "On thy responsibility be it," he exclaimed, and broke off the conversation.

Years have passed since I gave that answer. But if the same question were put to me to-day, I do not think—God forgive me if I err!—that I could answer differently. Poor soul! driven hither and thither by doubt, fear not, in all thy weakness and imperfection, to draw near to thy God. No man would ever come to pray, if he determined to wait until he became a calmer, purer, more perfect man. Certainly all doubt is tainted with sin; but even suppressed doubt, dumb doubt, is sinful, nay, it poisons the soul to the very core. The guilt of doubt seems insignificant as long as it does not prevent the desire for prayer (*i.e.* the converse of the heart with God) finding expression, even if it force its way into prayer itself, and the latter remain at first nothing more than a feeble attempt. Of course, were any one *convinced* that there is no God, he would be unable to pray; but whoever is still in doubt, has in his soul at least a glimmer of God's holy presence. *Doubt is, so to speak, a twilight, including therefore in itself two elements. It is a state of transition, in which two opposite convictions are*

contending together. Doubt implies a movement; all depends on what quarter it starts from, and what goal it is aiming at. It may be black night that is approaching in the twilight, but it may also be the brightness of day. Accordingly, doubt need not always be the budding seed of unbelief, it may also be the emergence of faith. Suppose a man who has hitherto lived in unbelief begins to doubt, *i.e.* to concede the possibility of the being of God, in this case unquestionably doubt denotes an advance in his spiritual life. Christ once revealed Himself to doubting Thomas. Just so the grace of God may still reveal itself to a doubting soul, and that during prayer. Let no one, then, be held back from prayer by his doubts. Certainly it is best to pray with a believing mind; but if thou canst not pray in faith, then pray as thou art, even as a doubter. It is the sick who need the physician and medicine. At the beginning of prayer may stand doubt, but at its close faith may meet thee; *for prayer is simply the way from doubt to faith.* I dare not, indeed, assert that this will be the result the first, second, third time that the doubting soul prays. But of this I am quite sure, let any one only persevere and not be discouraged, though the soul remain long at the outset of prayer flat and empty, and at last the fulness of grace will be found. Not without man's toil and strenuous effort is fruit drawn from the earth's bosom. Just so for the most part is it in the world of spirit. And who can tell the secret ways in

which God's love seeks our souls and draws them to Himself?

Between faith and prayer there is a close affinity, an action and reaction on which in reality the growth of our inner life depends. When the Redeemer says that faith like a grain of mustard-seed is able to remove mountains, can we doubt the power of such faith to raise our souls higher and higher in prayer? Though the prayer be ever so weak and imperfect, all seamed and scarred with doubt, resembling nothing so much as the stammering of children, there issues from it a power that secretly lends vigour to faith. For however slight and feeble at first our experience of the nearness of the living God, it nevertheless strengthens our faith in God. And from the faith thus strengthened issues ever-increasing power and confidence in prayer. Thus faith and prayer, as long as we live on earth, help each other and promote each other's growth.

In our days there are many to whom it is hard to surrender their souls to the full influence of prayer. Not only has the blessing of prayer been largely lost in household intercourse, in family life, alas! in countless numbers of cases it has vanished from individual practice and experience. That prayer seems hard in such cases arises from want of faith,—a want in perfect harmony with *the ruling tendency and course of thought of the times*. In former days men were accustomed to leap over secondary causes, and go direct to God, or the gods, as the immediate cause of all that takes place. In our days, on the other hand, the disposition is to

dwell exclusively upon the secondary causes, which are most accessible to human sense and understanding, and to forget the ultimate cause—the one true and living God.

Conceive to yourselves some one standing there and observing how a lofty building is raised. He determines to watch the work thoroughly, and from the beginning. Here the clay is dug and burnt. There the stones are carried, first by ordinary carriage, then by rail, then by carriage again to the building site. In another place the lime is hewn, then burnt, and, after being brought to the place, slaked. Elsewhere, again, trees are felled, prepared in the saw-mill, and at last conveyed, in the shape of beams, to the place where the rest of the materials is collected. The same observer sees journeymen and labourers, builders and carpenters, and notes with his own eyes that it is these and these only who from the material gathered together construct the building. But *the builder*, who conceived and drew out the plan, who guides the diverse forces to one and the same end, *of him* he sees nothing. Now if he, professedly on the ground of his experience, of what he perceived with his own senses, were to put forth the assertion, “There is no builder at all; his existence is a pure invention of an ignorant, romancing age—one that we must now have done with, that is vanishing spontaneously before the enlightenment of our days, like dew before the sun!”—if, in order to explain the wonderful co-operation of many diverse forces, he

were to decide, "Chance, nothing but chance!" what would such an "exact observer" suggest to us? A true picture of many a one around us, who speaks in lofty tones in the name of European culture, philosophy, truth, and explains the origin of this whole world of wonders by chance, or a countless series of fortuitous, admirably adapted chances, while in so many words denying God's providence and creative action. We know very well that the doctrine of God the Father, almighty Maker of heaven and earth, is a simple catechism-doctrine, which we learned long ago as children; but this childhood-doctrine is precisely what we need. High as in its simplicity it towers above the glory of "exact science," it yet contains infinitely more and profounder truth than all which our age gives forth as the most modern wisdom.

In order to make clear to ourselves the relation between primary and mediate cause, we need not go far, but only take in view the relation between our soul and our body. We raise our hand, put forward our foot. As long as we stay at second causes, we get no farther than the muscles, nerves, at most gravitation, etc.; but the primary cause, from which every movement of ours proceeds,—*the will*,—does not come into view. Now the relation between God and the world-fores, the laws of nature so called, is exactly similar to that between our will and the bodily powers standing at our beck. The relation between God and His creation, between the first cause and

the numberless second causes, certainly remains an inscrutable mystery for the human understanding. But are we on this account to reject the being of God? Does any one understand how and by what means it is really possible to raise the hand, to put forward the foot? The secondary causes, indeed, we see and understand; but do we see and understand how the soul influences the body? And yet we do not reject the being of a soul.

It is especially young people who, following popular faith in the Darwinian "ancestral apes," are sufficiently advanced in their enlightenment summarily to deny the being of God, and why not of the soul as well? On the other hand, men of the old school, if they are unwilling to adhere to positive Christianity, reject, indeed, miracles and all intrusion of higher powers, but at the same time admit that there is a God, and do not deny the immortality of the soul. But it not seldom happens that these persons elevate the loving God so high, that they denounce it as wrong, nay, declare it to be out of the question, *to pray* to Him. According to their representations, God is too great, too exalted, to concern Himself about man's poor life and its petty concerns. But in thus excluding God from their own sphere of existence, while, on the one hand, they rob themselves of the great comfort implied in the assurance of a paternal ruling Providence, on the other, no doubt, they find a certain satisfaction in the thought that God does not concern Himself about their *sins*, their forgetfulness of Him.

In their wisdom they perhaps intend to do special honour to the Lord God, by separating Him as far as possible from the world, and excluding the omnipresent One from His own works, and fail to observe that omnipotence displays its greatness by including in its sweep just as much the least as the greatest. True greatness shows itself precisely in supremacy *over* and care *for* the individual, while at the same time embracing and sustaining the whole. By the desire to exclude God from what is called small and trivial, we make this small thing a limit to His greatness. But God's greatness is without limit and bound. He is the Almighty One. And how often it happens that decisive crises in the life both of individuals and nations are linked on to some insignificant occasion, which to men's eyes wears the look of something purely accidental! But, in a word, what is there truly great in the wide world, if the individual soul, *the personality*, with its thinking and struggling, is not to be called great and precious?

As long as any one has faith in the being and government of God, and in the immortality of his own soul, I cannot but deem it great folly if, in the thousand needs of body and soul, he does not flee to God and pour out his heart before Him, even supposing that the divine glory of Christ, the mild radiance of God's love in the face of His Son, has not yet dawned upon his soul. And why should he not join in our Christian prayer, although certainly the height and depth of that prayer can only be realized by the

believing Christian? Why should he not pray, *Our Father, which art in heaven?* In the Lord's Prayer there is no express mention of the relation of the only-begotten Son to the Father, nor of miracle or supernatural revelation. Even one who wished to know nothing of such things might still join in the Christian prayer. Why shut themselves out? Why not let themselves be engirdled by this chain of prayer, which, from the days of Christ, has bound in one the whole of Christendom, however numerous the sections into which it seems divided? It is true we hear such an one say that he would gladly believe in Christ, but he is unable. But these are empty words and worthless self-delusion, as long as he does not in prayer carry into effect the faith in God he possesses, be it much or little. It should not be forgotten that, whatever the form and degree of our faith, it will, unless it be dead faith, in some way manifest its life and energy, both outwardly in action and inwardly in prayer. But how is it possible for a man really to desire to become a believing Christian, and yet refuse to join in the Christian's prayer, that prayer including nothing at variance with his creed? This is one of the marvellous features of the Lord's Prayer, that it makes such slight demands on faith. Every one who can say with truth, "I believe in God the Father almighty," can also pray with truth, though in weakness, "Our Father, which art in heaven." The Son of Man knew man's soul, and knew that to the end of the days there would be

many whose faith is the weakest of the weak. Therefore did He accommodate His prayer to those of weak and little faith, that even they might be able to pray. The Lord breaks not the bruised reed, He quenches not the smoking flax. *Just as a mother does not withdraw her love from a child because it cannot yet call her mother, so the Saviour of the world does not withdraw His salvation from a soul because it is yet too ignorant to give Him His Saviour-name.* If, therefore, a man desires to believe, but is still held back by doubt, the Lord approaches such a soul with His "Our Father," and says, "Pray this prayer. This even thou canst repeat, although as yet thou believest not in me, and thy prayer is therefore imperfect." If, then, such a weak believer observes the exhortation of His Saviour, and throws himself with all the confidence he can command into the Lord's Prayer, and that prayer gains more and more its just influence in his thoughts and life, then without fail faith will so grow in such a soul, that at last, in the words "Our Father," it will only be able to see the Father, in whose bosom lay the only-begotten Son from all eternity; and in "Hallowed be thy name," the Spirit, who hallows God's name in the hearts of men, the complete faith, in which he was baptized, thus becoming a living power in his soul.

Where the development of spiritual life proceeds in this way, faith will follow as the consequence of prayer. But occasionally the development takes another course. Some one has made faith his own :

no doubt, no wavering exists, conviction is firm and immoveable. But just as with many a one the confession of his faith *before men* in word and deed is weak and imperfect, so with others their confession *before God* in prayer labours under the same infirmity. Morning and evening one says his "Our Father," but does not allow his soul to linger and expatiate in the wide world of truths which the prayer includes. In the words uttered *soul* is wanting. Thus the words become empty, unmeaning sounds. As a rule, the cause of this inner contradiction is that, while faith is present, it is not yet developed to the full measure of its capacity. In our faith, indeed, eternal life with all its blessings is already involved, but this fulness of faith only unfolds itself gradually and piecemeal.

Further, it were a great mistake to suppose that the prayer-life and fervour in prayer are special gifts of grace, bestowed only on certain select spirits. To prayer just as little as to love or assurance of faith or hope is extraordinary talent needful. Nay, in the case of every baptized Christian, prayer is a filial right given along with his adoption, while it forms part of his filial duties as well; and upon ourselves lies the burden of responsibility, if we allow our faith to die out, instead of furthering its development by a life of prayer. Our spiritual toil is never to stand still, our exertion never to slumber. But if our minds are only made up to toil and fight our way through to the world of prayer, we ought not im-

patiently to give up hope if we advance but slowly, if our eye fails to note the quiet, imperceptible growth of life. It cannot, however, be denied that this impotence, this feebleness in our prayer-life, is intimately connected with the tendency of the age about us—the air, so to speak, that we breathe. Nay, with many believers prayer even retires into the background, their souls being engrossed and kept on the strain by contests against equivocal doctrines, tendencies, and parties; by fierce ecclesiastical conflicts on the right hand and left; and, along with these, by endeavours to assert for the Christian faith an unassailable foundation, and give the Church the forms and institutions indispensable for its permanent existence. In our days this cannot be otherwise, and we are very far from finding fault with the simple fact. But even then there is of necessity all the more room, not merely for earnest, fervent toil in prayer, for the communion of prayer, but in a special degree for reflections such as we wish to make here, having for their object *the development by means of prayer of our life of faith.*

II.

IMITATION OF CHRIST.

IT is a lofty aim which Christianity sets before human effort—so lofty and far away, that in its presence we cannot help becoming conscious of the insufficiency of our power, and raising our hands to Him without whom we can do nothing. And this aim shines out on us from the very first words in which we address the Lord God in the Lord's Prayer. When we call Him our Father, we thereby declare that we are *God's children*; and if we are His children, it is self-evident that we ought to strive to grow increasingly like Him. This is implied in the very name of child. Our first feeling, indeed, is one of joy at the *blessing* granted us in our being permitted to call the Almighty our Father. But this joy is to permeate our moral volition, and serve as an impulse to our effort *to become* God's children in the true and full sense. An echo of the words "Our Father" is to run through all our spiritual impulses, our thinking life, our daily work and rest. In order, therefore, that we may enter upon a thorough course of self-examination, nothing is more to the purpose than to set these two words before us in the light shed upon them by Scripture.

No one has the right to lower himself to such a degree as to place the aim of his life and effort lower than it was placed by the Lord God, when He created man *in His own image*. When we let this aim drop out of view, while slumbering in the folly and trifles of the world, or even forgetting what this great and glorious aim implies, there bursts upon us the arousing peal of the apostle: "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and *Christ shall give thee light*" (Eph. v. 14). May *Christ* then give us light, while we bend our effort to arrive at clear conceptions as to our life's aim and vocation, and realize it more perfectly in practice. But He says, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you, *that you may be the children of your Father in heaven*; for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. Be ye therefore *perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect*" (Matt. v. 44 ff.). "Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and *ye shall be the children of the Highest*: for He is kind to the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, *as your Father also is merciful*" (Luke vi. 35 f.). The apostle John writes (1 John i. 5, ii. 9-11), "This, then, is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, *that God is light*, and in Him is no darkness at all. He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother,

is in darkness even until now. *He that loveth his brother abideth in the light*, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes."

God is *light*, and God is *grace*. He is truth, and He is love. Thus, whoever works for truth works for Him; and whoever lives in love lives in Him. One is inseparable from the other. Both are intimately connected, and are one. Love without truth is a mere jugglery of falsehood; and truth without love is untruth, falsehood itself. For the law of all laws, the truth of all truths, and the prime source, the deepest ground of all existence, is *the love of God*. He that denies this one truth denies the truth itself. In many ways has God revealed Himself to men, but in Jesus Christ He has disclosed to us His nature wholly and perfectly; for "grace and truth came by Him," came in actual manifestation (John i. 17). Hence, when Philip said to the Saviour, "Shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us," He answered, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? *He that hath seen me hath seen the Father*. How sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?" (John xiv. 9). Hence, too, the apostle Paul teaches us that in Jesus of Nazareth dwells the whole fulness of the Godhead bodily (Col. ii. 8); that Christ's glory is the image of God; and that God, who on the morn of creation made the light to shine out of dark-

ness, has caused the light to shine in our hearts, that the knowledge of the glory of God may shine upon us in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. iv. 4, 6). While, therefore, Christ gives us the *command* to be merciful, to be perfect, like our heavenly Father, He has *Himself embodied* this word in His whole life, in which a divine fulness of truth and love is revealed. Whoever strives to carry out His command is cheered and mightily sustained in his efforts by the sight of that sacred image, which, before every living, love-thirsty soul, rises up in ever-increasing completeness. The first Christians, who had not themselves seen Him, obtained this image through oral tradition, through the living testimony of those who had received in their own person the overpowering impression of His manifestation (1 John i. 1-3). We obtain the same image through Holy Scripture. Here it is no doubt written down in dead letters; but before the eyes of every one who reads the Gospels with a believing, loving heart, the Spirit makes it rise again in all the freshness of life. Just as the apostle writes to the believers in Asia (1 Pet. i. 8, 9), that they had not known their Saviour personally, but still loved Him; that they had not seen Him, but still believed in Him and rejoiced in Him with joy unspeakable and full of glory; so, while we have not seen Him with bodily eye, in spirit we behold His true, living image. Thus we only know Him as He walked once upon earth, as He through the centuries has revealed Himself in the

history of humanity,—in this character we only know Him as at second-hand, through the accounts of others. But in respect that as His people we now *live with Him*, we come to know Him from our own experience as well. Thus can we too joy with joy unspeakable, and live in hope of attaining “the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls.” Herein lies the study and aim of our life, that our soul may be *transformed into the image of Jesus Christ*, because in this image God’s glory is expressed. That this is our real destiny, the apostle Paul testifies when he says, “For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren” (Rom. viii. 29). And the more we fulfil this our destiny, the more confidently can we say with the same apostle, “But we all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. iii. 18). The whole work of our sanctification consists in this renewal of the soul after the image of Jesus Christ. Again and again Holy Scripture points us to Him as our true *pattern*. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation. He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also *so to walk, even as He walked*. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as *He* is pure. He

that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as *He* is righteous. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, *because as He is, so are we in this world.* Christ also suffered for us, *leaving us an example*, that ye should follow His steps, who did no sin." And He Himself says before His departure, "For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. That ye love one another, as I have loved you" (Phil. ii. 5 ff.; 1 John ii. 6, iii. 7, 16, iv. 17; 1 Pet. ii. 21 f.; John xiii. 15, 34).

But now, if we compare our life with our Saviour's, our own image with His, and thus realize how far we still are from our goal, it cannot but be that discouragement will seize our souls. We may attempt, indeed, to get rid of this, by remembering that we are not justified through our own merit and works, but through faith. But if our souls are really in earnest, we soon perceive that the same difficulty meets us here, only in another form. For if our faith were as warm and vigorous, as deep and strong, as it should be, must not all sin, weakness, and impurity vanish from us, like clouds before the sun? Must we not be unselfish, loving, merciful, yea, perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect? The imperfection of our walk is nothing but the imperfection of our faith. There is thus nothing left for the disciple of Jesus but to commit himself entirely to the grace

of God, and say with Peter, "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee" (John xxi. 17). When we look right into the divine glory beaming upon us from the living image of Jesus Christ, with what joy it at once fills us ! With such power does it draw us, that nothing is easier for us than to follow Him. But when we afterwards discover that this is not a goal to be reached by a few giant strides, by a few sacrifices made in moments of excitement, but only by going forward step by step, day by day ; by never and nowhere letting our aim fall out of sight, or forgetting our Saviour any moment, however brief, in any work, however insignificant, in any of our thoughts, however fleeting their stay with us ;—when we discover how easy it is to form high resolves in solemn hours of worship, but how hard really to carry out these excited resolves in all the minute ramifications of our spiritual life, and this, too, amid the petty, constant wear and tear, the manifold complexities of everyday life ; how hard it is, without directly striking out for ourselves new paths in the great world, to go on our quiet, unobtrusive way as children of light and peace, every one doing his work cheerfully, bearing his burden patiently, and this in such a way that the new, higher life permeates everything in the petty routine of life ;—when we discover that the transformation of our nature goes forward only little by little and almost imperceptibly ; that it requires a long time to change barren sand into good, fruitful soil ; that although a new, nobler graft

has been planted in our natural life, and some fruit begins to appear, still many a wild shoot at the same time bursts forth from the root, and we are forced to learn with wonder how that which we had supposed to be overcome many years ago still lives and stirs in us: when we make these and many like discoveries, it is inevitable that discouragement should seize our souls. Such discouragement is not in itself of the nature of sickness and disease, although we may become aware of one thing and another in our inner life that is sickly and diseased. Really it is nothing but the "godly sorrow" spoken of by the apostle (2 Cor. vii. 9),—nothing but the longing one day to reach the lofty aim floating before the eye of our soul. To be compelled to own to shame is always an unwelcome experience; but it is better to be ashamed and watchful, than to slumber and dream away one's life in self-deception and self-complacency. Though such discouragement is an uncomfortable guest, we will not dismiss it on the instant, or make an excuse that we have so much else to think of; we will not put it off with a few moments of transient reflection. It crosses our threshold as a guest sent by God. We ask it at least to stay with us overnight, that in the morning it may be able to assert over us its full influence. No soul stands so high as to be above the need of examining itself again and again. But this discouragement ought never to degenerate into hopeless despair, so as to make us give up contending and pursuing the aim set before

us, because our strivings remain so often without effect. Whoever allows despair to become master of his soul, is heir to destruction.

But it is a far commoner case for discouragement, after having dwelt with us a longer or shorter time, to give place to carelessness. This transition of discouragement into carelessness is the grave of good intentions. A man is carried away by sudden passion. "It shall not take place again," he says. He keeps guard over himself, and overcomes in many cases. Gradually he calms down, and acquires confidence that he has tamed his fiery disposition and become another man. The watchful thoughts which were set as sentinels are withdrawn, and—the first time that severe temptation comes—he falls! The apostle Paul exhorts the Philippians (ii. 12) to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. Such an exhortation is needful in every age, even the most cultured, and for all men, even the most gifted, the most eminent and farthest advanced in spiritual things. On this account discouragement should just as little degenerate into carelessness as into hopelessness. When its gloomy clouds pass away and its chilly mists disperse, it should leave in the soul a wholesome fear—a fear lest unobserved we should go farther from, instead of drawing nearer to, the glory that is seen in Christ. But how strong should be this fear? No stronger than is necessary. And for what end is it necessary? To keep us cautious and watchful. The Saviour exhorts us again and again

to watch. Thus fear should be the fruit of discouragement, and watchfulness of fear.

One sometimes meets with persons who, though they do not allow discouragement to sink into utter hopelessness, still do not banish it from their souls, but rather cherish it as an abiding state; yea, look upon it as something good and praiseworthy to live in constant, uninterrupted sorrow and distress for their own and others' sins. We will judge no one; it is so hard to transfer oneself into the spiritual position of another. If any one believes that it is only by cherishing such feelings that he can keep free from sin and follow Christ, let him by all means retain his sadness, and bear his discouragement as his cross. But let him not refuse to others, who are otherwise constituted, the name of Christian. The same apostle, who exhorts the Philippians to work out their salvation with fear and trembling, not long afterwards says to them, "Finally, brethren, *rejoice in the Lord,*" and repeats soon afterwards the same exhortation: "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice" (iii. 1, iv. 4). Joy at God's love and glory revealed in Christ must be the abiding strain heard above all else in the soul of a living Christian. Are we to dwell for ever on the thought that our Lord and Saviour was crucified, dead and buried? Are we to forget the other truth, that He rose again, ascended to heaven, and sits on high at the right hand of God? Are we to forget the message of the angels, ringing at His birth: "Behold, I

bring glad tidings of *great joy*, which shall be to all people" ?

The Christian turns his glance back on himself, on his sin, his suffering ; hence distress, hence fear. The Christian raises his glance to God, to the grace and glory of God ; hence joy, hope. He must needs turn his glance upon himself, for he must needs take care not to resist the power from on high that is to transform and renew his whole nature. But he must also at once raise his glance to the revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth, for He it is from whom this power comes. Even when in such hours of devotion we forget ourselves for joy in Jesus Christ, He forgets us not ; for in this very self-forgetfulness of joy the power of regeneration grows and develops. But when from our retirement we go out to our daily work, out to all the bustle and turmoil of everyday life, then it is well not to forget who we are ; to remember not only our lofty birth, our nature akin to God, but also the weakness which has so often made us stumble and fall.

This joy in the grace of the Lord, this sorrow for sin, go hand in hand through the whole Christian life. They are found associated in diverse forms and degrees, but never quite apart. Even when the former sings its loftiest notes, the latter strikes in like a gentle, subdued voice. In the time of serenest joy in the Lord, the desire is felt to be at home with Christ. And amid the penitent sigh, " God be merciful to me," gleams, like a ray of dawn, the assurance

that God will not cast off His child longing for salvation. Death is mightier than this fleeting life hence earth's afflictions are mightier than its joys. But eternal life is mightier than death ; hence joy in the grace of God is immeasurably mightier than all affliction. And thus it is ordained that while joy grows, affliction and tribulation diminish, and leave behind, like a shadow by way of remembrance, a longing for home,—the thirst of the soul for the living God.

As often as Christ speaks of following Him, He also alludes plainly to what the lot of Christians is in this world. He says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me ; for I am meek and lowly in heart : and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. xi. 28-30). Here the Lord promises us the highest of all gifts, that which is most coveted by all—*rest of soul*. The soul can only rest in God. If any one ask us why we believe on Jesus Christ and cleave by faith to Him, we reply, "Because we have found, and find every day afresh, that in Him we have rest." But while the word of the Redeemer is above all a message of joy and peace, He speaks also of a *yoke*. The yoke is salutary, but it is still a yoke. He speaks of a *burden*, which, although light, is still a burden. His word alludes by anticipation to conflicts, struggles, tribulations of believers. He does not hide the fact that there is something to be borne, something to be

overcome. And who has not at some time exclaimed, "The yoke is no doubt salutary, but it presses hard; the burden is no light one, but sufficiently heavy"? This sense of oppressive burdensomeness, often connected with the imitation of Christ, He Himself foresaw and foretold. In every point the word of the Lord has proved true; and no soul that has given itself up to Him has ever been deceived. He says: "He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. Strait is the gate and narrow the way that leadeth to life, and few there be that find it" (Matt. x. 38, xvi. 24; Luke xiv. 24; Matt. vii. 14). From these and other passages it is evident that no burden, however hard, was ever laid on a Christian which our Saviour did not foresee and foretell. And yet withal He declares that His burden is *light*. In this paradox is hidden the mystery of all suffering, the great secret of sorrow. If thou wouldst go through life free from all burden, choose thy own ways, but choose not Christ for thy Lord and Master. Thou mayest succeed, as many a one has succeeded, in reducing thy soul to such shallowness that it no longer feels the shallowness and emptiness of a life that is stripped of all eternal import. Let us suppose a man as good and pure, as blessed and happy, as it is possible to conceive; even to him the sense of burden will not be wanting, directly he becomes a Christian. While the contemplation of the glory revealed in

Christ exalts a soul, the soul is humbled again by the thought that it must say farewell to all notions of its own wisdom and superiority. To this we must add, that whoever learns to love the Son of Man, cannot do otherwise than deeply sympathize with and love those for whom his Saviour humbled Himself to the death of the cross. But when the soul bursts through the narrow limits which have hitherto confined its life, the limits of selfishness, and even of love to intimate friends alone, and enters into sympathetic fellowship with the great mass of humanity, does it not enter into fellowship with a world brimful of need and woe, brimful of sin and darkness, brimful of reckless frivolity and unbelief, brimful of contention and strife? This world, surrounding him on every side, the Christian cannot regard with indifference, or treat with cold unconcern. For all sufferers he feels loving sympathy. And when Christ says that every one who would be His disciple must deny himself, every one knows that, although he only need renounce what is positively sinful, sin, alas! is so bound up with our whole nature, that the severance cannot take place without suffering; and we must all often enough confess, with shame and distress, that we have failed in the duty of self-denial. Let us therefore now see how the Redeemer helps us to carry these burdens, that we may be able truthfully to confess that not only is His yoke good and salutary, but that even the burdens He lays on us are not hard but easy to bear.

The pressure of our suffering is greatly aggravated by the want of spirit with which we bear it. As a pent-up bird dashes against the window-frame in its effort to regain freedom, so the soul labours to shake itself free of the want and trouble besetting it on every side. These struggles give the soul the greatest pain. But such want of spirit on the part of sufferers is nothing but cowardice. This moral cowardice shows itself in another form, in the disinclination to fight against our desires and lusts, which is certainly always an ungrateful task. What are usually described as sins of infirmity, spring as a rule from such cowardice. Thus it is of the first importance that our soul, instead of letting itself be carried away and overwhelmed, should quietly calculate what is the real extent of the loss suffered, to what our affliction really amounts. We shall then many a time wonder how we could let ourselves be cast down, and even let our course be determined by such trifles. No doubt it may also happen that we are not able to measure the depths of our suffering, for it really resembles a bottomless abyss. But however deep and severe our suffering, however severely our affliction may press upon us, whatever the sacrifices thus imposed on us, still the Saviour says, "*Take up thy cross and carry it!*" And it is ever a decisive point in the history of all sufferers, when they say to suffering, "I take thee upon me, I will carry thee; thou art mine, thou belongest to me." It is wonderful how calm everything at once grows in a soul,

where shortly before a storm of passion was raging, when we become fully resigned, cease all restless striving or resistance, and submit unreservedly to the divine will. This calm is the *peace* promised by the Saviour to all who turn to Him amid the tribulations of this life. But a harder resolve still remains—for a man to take on himself his suffering, and actually to bear it; but the Saviour lightens the burden for us, by ennobling our suffering with the high and holy name of the *cross*. It is true that the disciples, when they heard such sayings of the Lord, could not grasp their full significance, for as yet they knew nothing of *Christ's cross*. Like so many of the Saviour's words, these at first were prophetic words, and, like all prophecy, could only be clearly understood in the days of their fulfilment. But we who are familiar with the cross, and with all the blessings which for centuries have streamed from Golgotha upon the earth, can appreciate the grace shown us in our being permitted to describe our poor suffering, our tribulation, as our *cross*. When we hear a Paul declaring that he counts all else as nothing that he may win Christ, that he may know, that is, experience in himself, the power of His resurrection and *the fellowship of His sufferings*, in order to be conformed to His death (Phil. iii. 7-10), certainly we are compelled to acknowledge the infinite distance between us and the man who actually sacrificed everything for Christ's sake. But if with all seriousness we take our suffering upon us and carry it, and thus

acquire the right to call it our cross, we enter into suffering-fellowship with the Saviour. But even in this fellowship of suffering our attitude to the Saviour is the same as in every other relation, namely this, that He is the giver, and we the receivers. From Christ's cross flows the power to will what God wills, to be willing even to suffer, if such is God's will. By such calm resignation, by the prayer amid suffering, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven," Christ is *glorified* in the sufferer (John xvii. 10). As to all the great works and miracles which Christians are able to accomplish (John xiv. 12), it is not Christians themselves who do them,—it is Christ's name that accomplishes such things in them and through them. If all this were done by *their* power, it would redound to their glory. But since it is Christ through whom the work is effected, it is He who is glorified, and through Him our Father in heaven. Let every one who groans beneath suffering—who is crushed by trouble—so shattered, so rent and torn, that in the eyes of the world it is all over with him,—let him know and comfort himself with the thought that even in such distress and sorrow he may enter into fellowship with the Son of God, and glorify Him here below. Even when he mourns alone in the deep darkness of night, though no eye of man sees, no ear hears him, still Christ the Lord is glorified in him and through him. The beaming smile of the patient sufferer may prove a more powerful witness to the power of God's grace than the most

eloquent words. I for my part confess that never and on no occasion was I so powerfully moved by the grace of faith as one day on a quiet bed of sickness.

While the consciousness of being in suffering fellowship with Christ generally manifests its power under such severe tribulation, the great afflictions of our life, it is by no means limited to particular, specially earnest, and solemn moments, when we are engaged in a conflict for life and death. Nay, we should cherish the same consciousness in the many small trials and cares, annoyances and unpleasantnesses, of daily life, which, as it were, overgrow the soul and stifle all its higher life. Whereas great, deeply-stirring events carry in them a certain dignity, so that the soul is directly challenged to summon up all its strength, there is something depressing and wearing in a long succession of petty troubles, each one of which matters nothing, but which, crowding one upon another, leave us no time to breathe, and overwhelm by mere force of numbers. Come, let us gather them all into one pile, and place beside them the cross of Christ. It would be strange if we did not then blush for our weakness, which allows itself to be overcome by such bagatelles. Of course the cross of Christ is to beam brightly before the eyes of the soul, when storms roar and tempests gather over our head, when the gloomy terrors of despair threaten our soul; but even when a mere shadow of misfortune rises and obscures our joy in the Lord, that cross

must be the sun of the soul. "Rejoice *always*, and again I say, Rejoice." Jesus of Nazareth is our source of bliss, our fount of joy, just as much in the little as in the great. He redeems us not only from the heavier, deeper afflictions, but also from the petty troubles of daily life.

As the passages quoted show, Christ speaks sometimes of *His* burden which is to fall on our shoulders, at another time of *men's* own cross. Do these phrases mark any difference? No; when we cheerfully take our cross upon us and carry it in Jesus' name, we enter into the fellowship of His sufferings, and thus our burden becomes His, and therefore light. When thy burden becomes His, He helps thee to bear it, and does this by making the joy of the Lord thy strength (Neh. viii. 10).

This joy in the Lord and His grace is gained by humility and preserved by calm endurance. No one can find the Redeemer unless he has first become conscious of his need of a Redeemer—a consciousness which one can only reach by the path of humility. No one for whom the light of his own wisdom suffices will choose Christ as the light of his soul. It is by means of humility that we conform ourselves to the limits of human reason. And there is no better means of preserving the joy of faith than a patient mind. The patient soul never gives up its trust in God's help, and is satisfied with calm, unnoticed growth in grace. He is assured that in his soul also grace is in a state of constant progress.

Hence, he murmurs not against God in heaven in heavy calamities, but accepts them as gifts from his Father's hand. Herein he possesses a charm, by means of which he blunts the sting of the sharpest thorn ; for although this is the work of human wickedness, he accepts it in Jesu's name from the hand of God. If we were only able, in all that happens to us in life, to hold fast these two thoughts : " I have deserved no better," and, " It comes from my heavenly Father," adverse events would not so often rob us of the joy in the Lord which we realize in following Christ.

In directing our gaze to the life of Christ that we may renew ourselves after His image, we perceive that it is mainly to be contemplated under two aspects. One is turned outwards, to the world ; the other inwards, to God. On one side we see His intercourse with men, on the other His converse with God. It is true that of the latter aspect only single scattered traits are met with in the Gospels ; but we wish here to collect and combine them in one picture, in order that in this respect the Redeemer's image may stand so clearly before us as to serve as a pattern for constant and faithful imitation, in order that *the world of prayer* may be revealed to us, in which the Son of God breathed here below, and into which He desires to draw His people.

III.

CHRIST PRAYING.

IT was the Sabbath. Jesus had been in the synagogue at Capernaum, and by His teaching had astonished those present, for He taught as one having authority, possessing higher power (Matt. vii. 29). He had also astonished them by His wonder-working power, for He commanded the unclean spirit to come out of a man, and the spirit obeyed His word. From the synagogue Jesus betook Himself to the house of Simon and Andrew, where He healed Peter's mother-in-law, who lay sick of a fever. But when even was come, and the sun had gone down, when the Sabbath therefore was past, they brought to Him all kinds of sick and possessed persons, and the whole town was gathered before the door; and He healed many who suffered from various diseases, and cast out many devils. Probably a great part of the night was past before this labour of love was finished. "And in the morning, rising up a great while before day," adds Mark to his narrative (i. 35), "He went out, and *departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.*"

This was our Saviour's morning devotion.

The Passover was near. The apostles, whom Jesus

had sent forth, had returned and told Him all they had done and taught (Mark vi. 30 f.). “And He said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat. And they departed into a desert place by ship privately. And the people saw them departing, and many knew Him, and ran afoot thither out of all cities, and outwent them, and came together unto Him. And Jesus, when He came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and He began to teach them many things.” And when the day was now far spent, He fed them, five thousand in number, with five loaves and two fishes. Afterwards He constrained His disciples to go into a ship, and cross over to the other side of the sea. “And when He had sent the multitudes away, *He went up into a mountain apart to pray*, and when evening was come, He was there alone.”

This was our Saviour's evening devotion.

One of His most important acts was the selection of His apostles. It was an object that lay specially near His heart, from the general circle of disciples who were more or less closely attached to Him, to select some to be constantly with Him, and witness all His works and teaching, in order that, after His departure to His heavenly Father, they might go into all the world as trustworthy messengers of salvation, preaching nothing else than what they had seen with

their own eyes and heard with their own ears. That these men might be assured of their call, it was of prime importance that they should rely not on their own choice, but on the choice and will of the Redeemer. They thus knew that it was no self-deception when they believed themselves called above all others to diffuse the light of divine grace over the whole world. *For these reasons*, Christ the Lord, before making the choice, took solemn counsel with His Father in heaven. Luke vi. 12 f. recounts the incident in the following words:—"And it came to pass in those days, that He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called unto Him His disciples, and of them he chose twelve, whom also He named apostles."

Here the Saviour's evening and morning prayer blend together.

Quiet, lonely places did the Son of God often seek, when He would be alone with His Father. This, too, Luke specially notes when he says: "But so much the more went there a fame abroad of Him, and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by Him of their infirmities. *And He withdrew Himself into the wilderness, and prayed*" (Luke v. 15 f.).

However, our Saviour did not always seek loneliness in order to pray to His heavenly Father. He repeatedly prayed before a numerous company. Five thousand, besides women and children, were present

when, in the wilderness, He took the five loaves and two fishes, *looked up to heaven and blessed them*, or, according to John's account, *gave thanks*. The same on the other occasion when He fed four thousand. On sitting down at table with the twelve to keep the last paschal feast with them, with deep emotion He took the cup and *gave thanks*. And the same evening, when instituting the Holy Supper, He *gave thanks* as He took first the bread, then the cup in His hand. After His resurrection He was guest with the two disciples in Emmaus, and "it came to pass, while He sat at meat with them, He took bread, *gave thanks*, brake, and gave to them." No doubt with every meal of which He partook on earth a similar thanksgiving was connected.

Our Saviour had been no true man if He had known no alternations of feeling,—if at one time grief, at another joy, had not swelled His breast,—if He had not shrunk back from the great atoning sacrifice He was to offer. Though He knew nothing of grief for sin of His own, He knew and felt the deepest grief for the sin of the world. But this grief was accompanied by joy for the salvation, the everlasting grace which He brought to the whole world, and this in such a way that now the one, now the other feeling rose uppermost in His soul. It is related that when the Pharisees desired "a sign from heaven" to tempt Him, He groaned in spirit, and said: "Why does this generation seek a sign? Verily, I say unto you, there shall no sign be given to this generation" (Mark viii.

12). Here it is not expressly mentioned that this groan was addressed to God. But for this reason it is the more evident on other occasions. When a deaf man was brought to Him, muttering scarcely intelligible sounds, Jesus took him apart and put His fingers into his ears, spat, touched his tongue, *looked up to heaven, groaned*, and said to him, "Ephphatha, that is, Be opened" (Mark vii. 33 f.). Thus, glance, prayer, groan, and word blended into a single divinely-efficacious act; for the ears of the deaf man were opened, and the string of his tongue loosed. How can we doubt that many such sighs ascended to heaven from the soul of our Redeemer while He walked on earth as the gentle Lamb of God, bearing the sin of the world, and about to make atonement for it? But only in solitary cases did the feeling, corresponding with this vast burden, find expression in words in the presence of men, so that they were able afterwards to bear witness to it. In the stillness of night, in the retirement of the desert, on lonely mountain-heights, the Saviour may have had many a moment when His anguished soul sent up sighs to His Father in heaven. When it is said of the Saviour, "*In the days of His flesh He offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears to Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared*" (Heb. v. 7), these words are so comprehensive and so general in form, that they cannot fitly be applied merely to Gethsemane and the last sufferings of the Redeemer.

The last Passover was come. Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, had made His entry into Jerusalem. Then certain of the God-fearing Greeks, who had come up to Jerusalem to worship at the feast, addressed themselves to Philip, desiring to see Jesus. When the Saviour learns of their desire, He says: "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life, shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world, shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be. *Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify Thy name.* Then came there a voice from heaven, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again" (John xii. 20-28).

How was that desire of the Greeks to see the Saviour able to call forth such an outburst of feeling? When He heard that people from far-off lands desired to become acquainted with Him, then, we conceive, before the Saviour's soul rose up a picture of the kingdom of God spreading itself over the wide world. But instantly in place of this another picture appeared. This kingdom, embracing all humanity, could not be formed otherwise than by His death; for only if it die can the grain of wheat bear fruit.

And His thoughts did not stay with Himself, His eye fell on those about Him. Those who would serve Him must *follow* Him in the same path. Only by gladly giving up their life in and with this world, instead of loving it above everything, by denying and hating it, could they win eternal life. And as all the conflicts awaiting Himself and the disciples presented themselves to Him as in a picture, His inmost soul shook and trembled, and He exclaimed, "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say?" But He at once addressed Himself in prayer to His heavenly Father. It was a brief prayer, consisting of but three sentences, but each one of them including a world of thought and feeling, and all together exhausting the entire compass of prayer. Our Saviour did not turn away His gaze from the suffering at hand, but beheld it directly before Him, in imagination went through it to the very end; for in the full, clear consciousness of what lay before Him, He went forth to meet it. Hence His soul was troubled, and shuddered to its lowest depths, for He was true man. Therefore did He pray, "Father, save me from this hour!" But the same moment the natural human desire to be spared such pain and deadly anguish changed into perfect submission to the will of God. "But for this cause came I unto this hour." And now the Saviour forgets Himself in the glory of the Father. "Father, glorify *Thy name!*" It is a very, very long way from "Now is my soul troubled," to "Father, glorify Thy name." But the

Saviour trod it the same hour, nay, in a single moment, as He reflected, "What shall I say?" And when He has reached this *last goal of all prayers*, and compressed all His wishing and longing into the one wish that His Father's name be glorified, then sounds the voice from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."

But although Jesus went through the conflict just mentioned triumphantly, the conflict returned again. On entering the garden of Gethsemane with Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, He began to be sorrowful, to tremble and faint, so that He said to them, "Tarry ye here and watch with me." Thereupon He took refuge in *prayer*. He fell on His face, saying: "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto Thee, take away this cup from me: nevertheless, not what I will, but what Thou wilt" (Mark xiv. 36). Here too rises a wish not to be obliged to drain such a cup of pain, but here also in the same breath it is subordinated to the will of the Father. When He speaks again, we hear as it were but an echo of the wish that has been already offered up in sacrifice, as He says, "O my Father, if this cup may *not* pass away from me, except I drink it, *Thy will be done*" (Matt. xxvi. 42). An angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him (Luke xxii. 43). Just as a man is sometimes strengthened by a child, so was the Saviour strengthened by an angel. But by this means He was only to be armed for a still hotter, fiercer conflict, for it is said immediately afterwards: "And being in

an agony, He *prayed more earnestly*: and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke xxii. 44). That from this conflict also, in Gethsemane, the Saviour came forth victorious, we know and are able to perceive in the superiority, the calm dignity, with which in the hours following He bore treachery and denial, mockery, violence, and condemnation.

But when He hung on the cross, when only a few moments of life remained, He had to endure the conflict, the presentiment of which, as it came nearer and nearer, had filled Him with anguish. The great work of atonement, moving heaven and earth, is veiled in sacred darkness. We gain a glimpse of the awfulness of the transaction in the loud cry: "*My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?*" (Matt. xxvii. 46). His body suffers the fearful torment of the cross, His soul feels itself forsaken of God. Know you keener pain? Only a step farther, and there is before us the lot of the condemned; for these not merely *feel* themselves forsaken, they *are* forsaken of the Most High. That cry and this groan sent up to His heavenly Father,—these form the two extreme points in that experience of the Saviour which we may describe as the ebb of His secret life, of His joy in the spirit.

But He prayed not only when the heavy load of the world's sin pressed upon Him, when His soul shrank in fear from the sacrifice He was about to offer, but also when the full tide of joy in God's

eternal love was swelling in His soul. This joy unbosomed itself in *thanksgiving* and *supplication* to His heavenly Father.

Jesus had chosen and ordained the seventy disciples, whom He sent before Him into every town and every place where He Himself intended to come. And on their returning and telling Him with joy that even the devils were subject to His great name, He rejoiced in spirit, and said: "I *thank* Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight" (Luke x. 21). Why this joy of the Lord over the fact that God's grace is hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes? Because the number of the wise and prudent among men is always small, and that of babes always far greater, and His will was that *all* should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Thus we ought all to rejoice with our Saviour, that the path leading to the revelation of God's grace may be found and trodden by the many, not merely by the few. The way to the grace and friendship of God is no other than this,—that we give ourselves up to love God and our neighbour, for only by such surrender can we attain to the knowledge of God's nature. But to be able to love, a child of man need not count many years; and although it be granted that with years our spiritual powers are to some extent enfeebled, I still live in hope that God will not with-

draw from my heart this *fire of love* as long as this heart shall beat. But are the rest, the wise and prudent, excluded? Certainly, *as wise and prudent*. With all his wisdom the wise man comprehends not the knowledge of God's grace, nor the prudent man with all his prudence, until both one and the other tread the path of babes, and surrender themselves to the power of faith and love.

Jesus stood at the *grave of Lazarus*. They took away the stone where the dead lay. But Jesus lifted up His eyes, and said: "Father, I *thank Thee* that Thou hast heard me, and I know that Thou hearest me always: but for the people's sake I say it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent me. And when He had spoken thus, He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth!" (John xi. 41, 42). This account contains a remarkable point, over which we will pause a moment. Jesus does not pray, but gives thanks that He is heard. It seems likely that He sent up His prayer to heaven before. When, on the other side Jordan, He received news of the sickness of Lazarus, He stayed in the same place two days longer, and then said to the disciples: "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that ye may believe." Thus it was evident that He meant to raise Lazarus. It is therefore probable that He had already in prayer received from above the assurance that He was heard; and therefore now, at the grave of Lazarus, He was able with a loud voice to *render thanks* for this. To us there is some-

thing strangely touching in the fact that Jesus gives thanks for the raising of Lazarus while the latter is still lying in the grave. In no more expressive way could the perfect certainty of His being heard be testified.

We have all been long familiar with the beautiful account of the glorification of Jesus on the mount, when, before the eyes of the three disciples, His whole form was changed, nay, shone bright as the sun and white as the snow (Matt. xvii. 2 ; Mark iv. 2). Only one of the evangelists (Luke ix. 28 ff.) tells us something that preceded the transfiguration, and without doubt stood in close connection with it. "And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, He took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain *to pray*. And as He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment was white and glistening. And behold, there talked with Him two men, which were Moses and Elias, who appeared in glory, and spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem. But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep; and when they were awake, they saw His glory and the two men that stood with Him." From this account it is clear that the transfiguration took place while Jesus was praying, so that it looks like a natural effect of prayer. If, therefore, any one desires in his own experience to enjoy a reflection, however feeble, of the hidden glory of the Lord, prayer seems pointed out to him as the way

leading thereto. Of the contents of the Saviour's prayer, of the motive prompting it, nothing is said. But when it is said that He talked with Moses and Elias of the sufferings lying before Him, we may suppose that the sacred work of atonement formed the subject of His prayer. Seeing, as we do, that the transfiguration occurred during His prayer, we cannot doubt for a moment that just then His determination to offer the great sacrifice for the world's salvation was finally matured and consummated, and that His spirit in its musing became absorbed in this determination, and lingered over it in holy joy at the depths of the grace of God. The prayer on the mount of transfiguration, and the other in the garden of Gethsemane, belong to one class, however apparently unlike the outward circumstances. On the mountain we find ourselves in the silent world of forming purposes and growing resolves; in Gethsemane we stand at the commencement of the conflict itself. Hence here His sweat as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground, whereas there His countenance shone as the sun. Let no one then deceive himself. When, in the hour of high and holy resolve, our souls swell with the joy of victory, let us then remember that the carrying out of the resolve will be at the price of conflict, agony, and tears. But the souls of the disciples were heavy with sleep, both at the Lord's transfiguration, and afterwards on Olivet. Both times the Saviour stood quite alone. Let no one then complain, if in the fiercest conflicts of life he

stands alone, and cries *in vain* to his nearest, dearest friends, "Watch and pray with me."

The last words of the Redeemer, ere death sealed His lips, were those words of prayer on the cross: "*It is finished. Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit*" (John xix. 30; Luke xxiii. 46). Past and gone is the feeling of God-forsakenness with its horror; the stream of joy and peace has returned: for whoever can call God *his Father*, feels himself forsaken neither of God, nor of joy in God. How could he do other than rejoice at being plucked from men's cruel, and committed to God's merciful, hands? A single moment, and behold the great transition from direst woe to heaven's peace and brightness is accomplished. A Danish physician, Dr. Hornemann, in his treatise, *The Condition of Man shortly before Death*, calls attention to the fact that in very many cases immediately before death, a moment occurs when the death-struggle is all over, the soul quitting the body without pain. Such a moment seems to have come to our Saviour when He exclaimed, "It is finished." He could not have said this if in the cup He had to drink even one drop still remained. When God had finished creating the world, "He beheld everything which He had made, and behold it was very good." And in the moment when the sufferings of death were finished, while the Saviour was still alive on the cross, He compressed into a single glance His whole past life and suffering, and said, what none beside Him can say, "*It is finished.*" All the work

He had to do was done in perfect harmony with the will of His heavenly Father. In the life and teaching of one man, God's perfect grace and truth were revealed, that all who seek may find them. In that great moment, on the boundary between life and death, the Saviour looked back upon the past ages of waiting and longing, and, behold, all was finished, all fulfilled: He had glorified His Father on the earth! And He directed His eyes to what lay before Him, and looked into God's gracious "bosom" (John i. 18), "His everlasting arms" (Deut. xxxiii. 27), into the unspeakable glory prepared for Him. Therefore are we justified in understanding that exclamation of the Saviour as a cry of joy, though it falls on us from a cross.

But we have still to take into consideration the relation in which Christ's praying stood to *men*. Did Christ pray for others? Did He make *intercession*? First of all, we must lay stress on a feature impressed on all His works alike. Jesus said to His disciples: "Lazarus is dead, and I am glad *for your sakes* that I was not there, *that ye may believe*." When Jesus, therefore, raised Lazarus, He did it not only out of love to His friend, or to the sisters, but also from regard to the disciples, and *for our sakes* also, to confirm us in the faith that He is in truth the Saviour of the world. But what is here specially said of the raising of Lazarus holds good of all His miraculous acts—in making the palsied whole, the lepers clean; in giving sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf; in

feeding the four and five thousand ; in calming the storm at sea, etc. Every one may *appropriate to himself* all the works of Jesus, and say, "He did it for my sake." The distinctive mark of what He did as the Son of Man is precisely this,—that it was done for humanity, and this not merely for humanity as a whole, but really for each individual member. And what is true of Christ's work is true also of His word. Every word that proceeded out of Christ's mouth, and is preserved for us in the Gospels, is either spoken to us or for our sakes. Only when we remember this in reading the Gospels, can our soul derive from them the nourishment it ought. But if this holds good of Christ's word and work, the same may be said in respect to His prayers as well. Every one of His prayers is virtually an intercession, and we are all included in it. Even if a prayer, as to its outer wording, refers to Christ Himself, it refers to us as well ; for as our lower life was wrapped up in Adam, so was our higher in Christ. When the Son of Man prayed for Himself, He prayed for humanity, He prayed for us. On the state of the fountain depends the state of the stream flowing from it. Dry up the stream, and the channel is empty. All believers form but one communion, and this communion is inspired by one life and one force, which comes from Jesus Christ.

However, the intercession of Christ is not mere matter of implication and inference. It appears openly and without cover, in the form both of prayer

on behalf of many, and of prayer on behalf of individuals. We are told (Luke xxii. 31 f.) that the Lord, in the last hour He spent with His disciples, said to Peter: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Here we have the Saviour's express assurance that He made intercession for Peter; and unquestionably He made intercession in the same way for many others, though Scripture may not have expressly mentioned it. The last words spoken by Jesus on the eve of His death to the assembled apostles, were a prayer to His heavenly Father—the so-called high-priestly prayer; John has preserved it for us in the 17th chapter of his Gospel. After praying first of all for Himself, that He may be glorified with His heavenly Father with the glory He had with Him before the world was, He goes on to pray for others. For whom, then, did He pray? For His disciples in the first place—for those who had received His word and knew of a truth that He was come forth from the Father. He then adds expressly: "But I pray not for them alone, but also *for those who shall believe on me through their word.*" Thus He prayed for all believers, of every land and age—for all who, to the end of the world, shall bend their knees in the name of Jesus. But in order to comprehend our Saviour's prayer in its true significance, we must put entirely out of view an infirmity cleaving to man's ordinary experience.

It is difficult for us at the same time to think of a community of persons and of the individuals of whom the community consists. When it is an extensive, numerous community, it is altogether impossible, even if we are personally acquainted with the individual members. Even supposing, which can scarcely be the case with any one, that we knew every man, every woman in our town or nation, it would yet be quite impossible for us in a prayer for our nation to call to mind each distinct individual. This limitation of our power we must put entirely out of thought if we would understand the Saviour's high-priestly prayer. His praying, like Himself, had no doubt its human side and element, although this was intimately connected with the divine; but to His divine consciousness the limitation and imperfection mentioned had no application. How many doubts and suspicions respecting the providence of God have their source in the fact that we transfer to Him the conditions of our human thought, and thus suppose that He who cares for the great and universal cannot also keep in view the particular and minute. But we may rest assured that when our Saviour turned His gaze to the future, and called up before Him the vast host of believers of all places and times, He prayed for them not only as one body, one whole, but also for each individual belonging to them. We may therefore console ourselves with the truth that in that solemn hour we were in His thoughts, that He prayed for our souls' salvation. A mother's prayer for a numerous family

furnishes us perhaps with the best image ; for in her supplication *all* are present to her thoughts, and certainly each separate child.

Why did He pray for His disciples ? Because He loved them. He could no longer, as heretofore, guard them by His bodily presence : He must go away from them. Therefore He commits them to the care of His heavenly Father. In the days that were approaching, the remembrance of His mighty prayer, of which they were witnesses, was to keep and preserve them. “ I am no longer in the world,” He said, “ but these are in the world, and I come to Thee. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Thy name. Those Thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. And now come I to Thee ; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.”

And *what* did He ask for His disciples, and for us, the Christians of to-day ? We ought to be deeply anxious to learn *what*, in that great farewell-hour, the Saviour besought from the Father for us. Ought we not thus to be made willing on our part to co-operate with Him in His supplication, in order that the prayer may be actually fulfilled in us ? Let us therefore bring together the most important passages bearing on the *subject* of His prayer. “ Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of

the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil. Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also that shall believe on me through their word, that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me. And the glory which Thou gavest me I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which Thou hast given me: for Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee: but I have known Thee, and these have known that Thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith Thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them."

Here, then, the Saviour prays His Father to *preserve* us from evil, the evil one, the temptations proceeding from the world, as well as from our own corrupt nature; to preserve us from sin, from eternal death. But this is only possible on one condition—by our consenting to be sanctified by the truth. There is

but one *real truth* by which we are eternally saved—the truth of God. Men often give the fair name of truth to the wisdom and culture produced by man's limited reason in a certain age. This truth goes its own way and follows its own light, while blind to all divine revelation in nature, conscience, prayer, law, and finally in Christ, the only-begotten Son of God. But all that is so lightly called truth, although only too plentifully mixed with falsehood,—all that is commended as enlightenment, civilisation, although leading men without fail, when it is the sole ruling power, to darkness and barbarism,—all this self-invented truth and culture, as experience sufficiently teaches, possesses no real sanctifying power. There is but one truth by which men can be sanctified, and that is God's truth. And where shall we find this? It is found in the Word of God which the Saviour proclaimed. He says: "*Thy word is truth*;" and farther: "I have given them Thy word." If we ask further for the word in which as in an epitome all God's words, whether referring to time or eternity, are wrapped up, the answer is, "*It is God's name, His Father-name.*" For Christ says: "Holy Father, keep them through Thy name. While I was in the world, I kept them through Thy name." And when, at the conclusion of His prayer, He would comprise in few words all the work He had done, He says, "And I have declared to them Thy name." But why does He then add, "And *will* declare it"? Because the final, grandest declaration of all still

remained. This was to be made not in mere words, or in single expressions of love, but by acts, by offering up His life as a sacrifice. After having devoted Himself His life long to the work of declaring the divine name, of revealing God's love by word and deed, He at last consecrated to this work of revelation His *life itself* on the cross. Hence the apostle John writes: "Hereby know we the love of God, that He laid down His life for us" (1 John iii. 16). In gazing on this crucified love we gaze on the love of God, for Jesus Christ is God's image; and thus for the first time do we understand why God assumed the name of Father.

One thing which may perhaps astonish us in the Saviour's high-priestly prayer is, that He is never weary of praying for the *unity and heartfelt communion of believers*. Again and again He returns to this thought. How near, therefore, did this mutual fellowship of His people lie to the Saviour's heart, and that in the last hours He spent with His disciples! It is as if He were unable to tear His soul away from the thought; as if He would indicate to us beforehand the many hindrances and difficulties that would stand in the way of the fulfilment of this petition; nay, as if before His departure He would assure Himself that both those who heard Him pray and those who might hereafter read His prayer would be unable to do other than carefully mark and remember His words. At the same time, it is noteworthy what *significance* He attributes to the concord

and unity of believers. He places it in intimate connection with the success and extension of His kingdom, saying, "That the world may believe that Thou hast sent me," and "that the world may know that Thou hast sent me, and lovest them, as Thou lovest me." Therefore, according to Christ's express teaching, the unity of believers is the most effectual means for bringing the world to believe in His divine mission. And what is the power by means of which men are so closely banded together that, while the individual preserves his individuality, all are blended into one, "even as the Father and the Son are one"? Such power belongs to love alone, which, springing from God in heaven, is communicated to man, and becomes his through Jesus Christ, the world's Saviour.

When our Lord says further, "And I have given them the *glory* which Thou gavest me," what kind of glory is it of which He speaks? Does He mean the power to do signs and wonders? But to the disciples, full of joy that the powers of darkness were subject to them, the Saviour said: "Rejoice not in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice rather that your names are written in heaven" (Luke x. 20). The hope of eternal salvation, this unspeakably great blessing, was alone to be the glory and joy of the disciples, that, according to the Saviour's will, they should all one day be with Him and behold His glory, which the Father had given Him. If, then, even the gift and power of miracles is counted a little thing

in comparison with the glorious certainty of the soul's salvation, how could the Saviour, when promising to His disciples the glory given Him by the Father, intend that lesser gift, or anything merely subordinate? Wherein consists the glory of a believing soul? It consists in faith, in hope, in love. What kind of glory was it that the Father gave the Son from all eternity? His own divine nature. But in what does this consist? What is the name we are to give it? The apostle supplies an answer when he writes: "Beloved, let us love one another; for *love is of God*; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for *God is love*." Thus it is love whose fulness God imparted to His Son, when, before the beginning of the world, He imparted to Him His divine nature. This is the glory which Christ received from the Father, which He vouchsafed to His disciples, and which He still ever vouchsafes to His own. Hence, finally, the high-priestly prayer breaks out into these words: "And I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it, that *the love wherewith Thou lovest me may be in them and I in them*." In this epitome the Saviour Himself sums up His whole prayer.

Between the glory of the present state and that of the future there is no essential difference. Happiness does not come to man from without, is nothing outward. Its fountain springs in silence in the inmost depths of the soul, and this fountain is love (Rom. v. 5). The difference lies simply in this, that

there it flows for ever in unbroken stream, whereas here at times it seems as if it were dried up, namely, as often as God hides from our vision the light of His grace. Another difference is, that there the stream of love is far deeper, warmer, broader, embracing alike everything worthy of love. In that world is no *misunderstanding*,—every one is known for what he is. And whereas here below love is always a learner, and is gradually trained to perfect sincerity by persistence amid coldness and injustice, above, this time of education and testing is past for ever, and every one's thirst for love is perfectly satisfied by responsive love. But whatever may be reserved for us in that world, of this we may rest assured, that eternal life in its gradual development has but one aim, to fill and penetrate us through and through with *love*. Consequently even here a man may be called happy, in so far as in his inner life love has become the ruling power; for through the governance of this power does he become partaker of the life and real nature of God.

That in very deed a mightier and richer stream of love has poured upon men from Jesus Christ, is an admitted fact. But what shall we say when we are asked whether the prayer of Christ for the unity of believers has been actually fulfilled? Of course on this subject we leave out of view all those who only outwardly belong to Christ's Church; for Christ Himself, in the parables of the tares among the wheat and the fishing-net, definitely foretold that good and evil,

true and seeming Christians will exist side by side in His Church, and that no other condition will obtain until the end. But, restricting ourselves to those who are Christians in deed and from the heart, where is the unity for which the Son of God on the last evening of His life so earnestly prayed? However we may mourn its defects, there is, despite everything, a unity, a hidden unity, just as every living force is hidden. Though not evident to man, it is known to God. All who love God and their Saviour are bound together by a holy bond of love, like children in one house, who, although separated and living on somewhat distant terms, remain bound together by their love for their common parents. Moreover, this unity is every day audibly expressed. Men, indeed, hear it not, but God hears it. Daily, the wide world round, an "Our Father" resounds to the God of heaven and earth from the hearts of all believers, whatever the name of the ecclesiastical communion to which they belong. To the eyes of God these believing suppliants appear as one body; for however different the dialects they speak, it is still the same heart-prayer that rises from the lips of all. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that there is a gap, yea, a lamentable defect, as long as this unity of believers does not find expression in their joint labour, their mutual help, their confession of one Redeemer, —as long as much noble power is wasted in mutual strife. But when such reflections trouble us, let us not forget that Christ's prayer is withal a *promise*.

He cannot have prayed in vain. The time will come—of this we are confident—when the unity of faith now concealed will appear in all its splendour. But perfect unity must arise naturally and spontaneously, for it is only worth anything when it is the work of the Spirit. In vain will men make it the object of their efforts and clever schemings. Nothing but an untimely birth would be every form of unity coming painfully into existence as the fruit of human effort. No; let us, every one in the community to which he belongs, hold fast heart and soul to faith—faith in the Lord and His grace. And when the several churches have fulfilled their mission and reached the end assigned them, then will the holy, universal Church, which constitutes the real core, the life-force in them all, burst forth in visible power and glory. Then will Christ's prayer be fulfilled. But we, who live in days of ecclesiastical separation and division, prepare an abode for that unity in our hearts, and already taste its sweetness long before its visible manifestation in the world, when our hearts cleave lovingly to all who with us love Jesus of Nazareth as their Saviour; when we exercise brotherly love as far as occasion and opportunity offers; and, every time that we say "Our Father," remember that in this prayer our souls meet and blend *with all Christian souls* in God's presence.

The last of all the intercessions offered by Jesus on earth was the one for those who crucified Him: "*Father, forgive them; they know not what they do.*"

In general, it is extremely hard for men really to forget injuries and wrongs. The less agitated our life, the lower and narrower the relations amid which we live, the harder it usually becomes. Even without revenge being directly intended, it is only too easy for bitterness to linger in the heart, which breaks out afresh as often as we recall the wrong endured. Thus it is strange how, after the lapse of years, an old and, as we fancied, long-extinguished passion may blaze up again. If, then, it is so hard entirely to forgive and forget, an earnest, continuous self-discipline is necessary that we may really be able to pray for our enemies, and this even in cases where a long period of time has spread its veil over the wrong suffered. But *under the injury itself*, yea, under injury the most shocking, amid the very sufferings of the cross, to pray fervently for those who have just nailed the suppliant to the cross, this no one did or could do *before Jesus Christ*. *After Him* no doubt a Stephen prayed for those who stoned him, and in following days many martyrs trod in the same steps; but Jesus Christ was the *first* to pray thus, and only from His cross has power flowed upon others to do the same, so that in His followers and their prayers the Redeemer's glory is revealed.

There are in the world but two classes of men,—friends of Christ's cross, and foes of Christ's cross. We have seen that He prayed for friends and foes. The Son of man, He prayed for all mankind.

And Christ's intercession is not confined merely to His earthly life. At this very hour, while thou art reading here, the Son of God is interceding for men's souls before His heavenly Father, and praying for their salvation, even for thine. So says the apostle John: "My little children, I write to you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John ii. 1). In the same way, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, it is written: "Wherefore He is able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God through Him, seeing that He ever liveth to make intercession for them" (vii. 25). What gladdens and comforts us at all times is just this, that we are certain that our Saviour prays with us, and while we are calling upon Him, He prays with us and for us! Nay, when in our many necessities and tribulations we take refuge in prayer, and our prayer, with our desponding souls and darkening thoughts, sinks down to earth,—when in the wide world we discover not a single being willing to pray with us, or disposed thereto,—then is that comfort, that certainty, our last resource. And it is wonderful how the anxious soul is able to soothe itself to rest by keeping steadily before it the one thought: "He prays for thee,—He, thy Redeemer, Jesus of Nazareth." The intercession of Jesus is part of His work as Saviour.

IV.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES.

OUR Redeemer is our example; but we know also that His life was imparted to those who believed, as it is still ever really and truly imparted to those who believe on Him. It is therefore specially important for us to note how the prayer-life exhibited itself in those who, during His earthly life, stood near Him, nay, themselves heard Him, saw Him with their eyes, touched Him with their hands (1 John i. 1); and, in particular, how this prayer-life manifested itself in the great apostle whom, once a persecutor, He Himself, after His departure to His Father in heaven, called to His work. It is no doubt only little that is communicated to us, but this little it behoves us to gather together, as we thus obtain an idea of the life of prayer and practice of prayer as these obtained among the first Christians.

Wonderful days they must have been for the apostles, those ten days which elapsed between the ascension of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The entire life of Christ, then concluded, and all its separate features, blended together before their spiritual vision into one great picture revealing the grace of God; but they were still unable to obey

Christ's command to go into all the world and carry to it the tidings of great joy. With eager expectation they waited for the fulfilment of Christ's word,—the sending of the Holy Ghost,—before they could begin their official labour. Only one work they did in common, and that at the call of Peter,—they chose a twelfth apostle to take the place of the one who betrayed the Saviour, and judged himself unfit to live. But, being in doubt whether they should elect Barsabas or Matthias, they left it to the decision of the lot, after *praying*: “Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two Thou hast chosen, that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship” (Acts i. 24 f.). And with what did they occupy these long days of waiting? “These all continued with one accord in *prayer* and *supplication*, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren” (i. 14). And after the three thousand were baptized, it is said of them: “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in *prayers*” (ii. 42). After the seven poor-stewards had been elected by the Church, they were presented to the apostles, who *prayed* and laid hands on them (vi. 6).

With respect to the conduct in prayer of particular apostles, except in the case of the apostle Paul, we have but rare intimations. Tabitha had died, a Christian woman in the town of Joppa, rich in good works and alms to the poor. Word was sent to the apostle Peter. “When he was come, they brought

him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them. But Peter put them all forth, and *kneeled down and prayed*; and, turning him to the body, said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up" (Acts ix. 39 f.). One of the weightiest, most penetrating questions occupying the first Christians was this, whether the Gentiles who desired baptism should be subject to the law of Moses. On the answer given to this question it largely depended whether the gospel should find an open door in the world of nations. The apostle Peter solved the question, and solved it in the sense that for the future the human race was set free from the yoke of Moses; but he did not arrive at this solution without internal struggles and powerful assistance from on high. As he himself afterwards testified in the house of the heathen centurion, in a vision he saw heaven open: "*God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore came I unto you without gain-saying, as soon as I was sent for*" (Acts x.). This ecstasy of Peter gives us a glimpse into the Spirit's methods of working. Both in a physical (see ver. 10) and still more in a spiritual respect, he had been prepared for the heavenly vision. Only while he was praying was it presented to the eye of his soul; and while he was praying the Lord God enlarged his circle of vision, and gave him to look on all mankind

as the theatre of God's kingdom. Just as there was an inner connection between Christ's prayer and His transfiguration, so was there between the apostles' prayer and their illumination, their reception of higher revelations.

Paul found himself in Damascus. On the journey there he had heard the voice of the Lord: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." Three days long he was without sight, neither eating nor drinking. Then the word of the Lord came to a Christian in that city: "Ananias, arise, and go, and inquire for one called Saul of Tarsus; for, *behold, he prayeth*" (ix. 11). Those three ever memorable days, in which the great revolution in Paul's life took place and his inner sense opened to the glory of Christ, and that while the whole outer world was for him veiled in darkness,—these were filled with prayer. He ate not, drank not; he *prayed*. Salvation and happiness were now at hand; but before the salvation itself, came—sent by God—a messenger of comfort, who helped him in the midst of his sore conflict. Ananias came: Paul recovered sight and received baptism.

In the Acts we find many other incidents characteristic of the prayer-life of Paul. At the close of the account of the great journey made by Paul and Barnabas together, it is said: "And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had *prayed with fasting*, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed" (xiv. 23). On the journey to

Rome, Paul suffered shipwreck. For fourteen days it was a question of life or death. When, in sight of Malta, they were in imminent danger of stranding, Paul announced to the company that not a hair should fall from their heads, the Lord Himself had assured him of this,—where but in the sanctuary of prayer? “And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and *gave thanks to God in presence of them all*” (xxvii. 35). Not far from the place where they ran aground, one of the foremost inhabitants of the island, Publius by name, received the shipwrecked ones at his mansion. “And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever, and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in and *prayed*, and laid his hands on him, and healed him” (xxviii. 8). Thus not only in Damascus, where Paul found his way to Christ, does prayer appear as the chief element in his life, but it accompanies him through his whole life, and emerges just as clearly in the simplest, commonest actions, *e.g.* in taking bread and eating, as when he is administering church affairs or healing the sick in the name of Jesus, and so manifesting the divine glory of that name.

But what a rich and active life of prayer the apostle lived, is shown by numerous examples in his epistles. We will say nothing of his states of ecstasy, when he heard unspeakable words (2 Cor. xii. 1–4). Over this he himself throws a veil, in calling what he heard unspeakable. We know for certain that it was in prayer that his spirit was carried up to the

celestial spheres. But another aspect of his prayers lies much nearer at hand. This is the constancy with which Paul again and again gives thanks for his personal salvation. However rich and powerful a spiritual life may develop itself, however wide the field it may command, no one should on this account forget the matter of his own salvation. To desire to forget this would be a false dignity. "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief" (1 Tim. i. 12, 13). But at the same time how wholly and solely he lived for his *life's vocation*! How his letters overflow with thanks and supplication for the churches he founded! He writes to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. i. 2, ii. 13; 2 Thess. i. 11): "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers. For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe. Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power." To the Corinthians (1 Cor. i. 4-8; 2 Cor. xiii. 7): "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in every-

thing ye are enriched by Him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates." To the Ephesians (i. 15-17): "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him," etc. To the Philippians (i. 3, 4, 6): "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." To the Colossians (i. 3, 4, 9, 10): "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, for the hope which is laid up for you in heaven. For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that

ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." Finally, to the Romans (i. 8-10): "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you."

We thus gain an insight into the comprehensive range, power, and tenderness peculiar to the prayer-life of an apostle. He prayed for the churches founded by himself, as well as for those founded by others. He prayed for those whom he had seen, and also that it might be granted him to visit those whom as yet he had not seen. He thanked God for the grace they already enjoyed, and prayed that they might remain faithful to the end. Work and prayer went together, one being reflected in the other. But with the same deep, tender affection with which he included whole churches in his prayers, he included also individuals. Thus he writes to Timothy (2 Tim. i. 3, 4): "I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy." And in the epistle—so wonderfully tender and delicate—to

Philemon (4-6): "I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers, hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints, that the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus."

There is one side of our inner life, which, while not strictly belonging to our own prayers, yet stands in close connection with them, that is, our *need of the intercession of others*. At first sight this need looks like an infirmity. Assured of Christ's intercession, how can we further need men to pray for us? And yet experience testifies what unspeakable comfort there is in the knowledge that one dear to us, who like us loves the Lord Jesus, constantly remembers us in his prayer to his Father and our Father in heaven. And why should this be reckoned an infirmity? We are commanded to love, not only God, but our neighbour. But where love is, there is also the craving for love in return; and where faith is joined with love, there certainly intercession is not wanting. Thus we feel a craving for the intercession of others, because we cannot do without the love of others. Intercession is one of the fruits of love, never wanting where there is living faith. No, it is no infirmity. Where else were the communion of saints? Is not mutual intercession one of the strong bonds encircling this communion and keeping it together?

When Christ in the garden of Gethsemane said to Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, "*Tarry ye here*

and watch with me” (Matt. xxvi. 37 ; Mark xiv. 34), undoubtedly His meaning was, “ This hour of watching must not pass away unemployed. It must be employed in prayer.” This is evident from the words He used when He found them sleeping: “ Could ye not watch with me one hour? *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.* The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt. xxvi. 40 f. ; Mark xiv. 37 f.). But did Christ mean that during this hour they were to pray *for Him*? Nay, primarily for themselves, that they might be stedfast. But in so doing they would pray also *for His work* which He was about to entrust to them. In a certain sense we always pray for a man himself, as often as we commend *his work* to our heavenly Father. For Jesus Christ we cannot pray; but for *His name* we can pray, that to many souls it may become a name of salvation, just as we pray to our Father in heaven, “ Hallowed be Thy name.” But that it was the duty of the disciples to pray for themselves that they might persevere, we learn from the account of Luke (xxii. 40), according to which, Christ, directly they entered Gethsemane, said to them, “ Pray, that ye fall not into temptation.” At the same time the Saviour was anxious that in that awful hour, when He was troubled unto death, and engaged in His sharpest agony of prayer, the disciples should pray with Him, not indeed for Him, but for His great work; for in the prayer they offered for their own souls, prayer for His name was included.

The apostle Paul was a man of strong, valiant spirit. Yet he felt an anxious desire to be supported by the intercessions of believers, convinced that those intercessions really called down blessing on his labours. Numerous testimonies to this are found in his epistles. "Brethren, pray for us" (2 Thess. v. 25). "Finally, brethren, *pray for us*, that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified, even as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men" (2 Thess. iii. 1 f.). "Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye *strive together with me in your prayers to God for me*, that I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judea, and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints" (Rom. xv. 30 f.). "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving, *withal praying also for us*, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ" (Col. iv. 2 f.). "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; *praying always* with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto *with all perseverance and supplication for all saints, and for me*, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly" (Eph. vi. 17-19). After writing to the Christians at Philippi that he wishes that "every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ may be preached," he continues: "For I

know that this shall turn to my salvation *through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ*" (Phil. i. 19). "I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you" (Philem. 22). Just so the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews writes (xiii. 18 f.): "*Pray for us*; for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly. But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner." Thus no one need be ashamed that he feels a longing for the intercessions of others, and that he ascribes power and efficacy to the intercessions of others; for even the apostle Paul felt this longing and enjoyed this faith.

We have already mentioned Stephen. The last breath he breathed was a prayer; and the love streaming from Christ's heart into his revealed its wondrous power in the fact that when dying he was able to pray for his bloodthirsty murderers. This was the crown and *completion* of the life of prayer. But let us withal remember the God-fearing Gentile, Cornelius. His prayers and his alms, *i.e.* his love to God and his neighbour, *opened for him a way to faith in Jesus Christ*. When the angel appeared and told him to send word to Peter, that through Peter he might obtain knowledge of salvation, he said: "Thy prayers and thy alms are come up for a memorial before God" (Acts x. 4). Therefore let every one who is assailed by doubt enlarge his heart in prayer, in thanksgiving and sympathizing love, that the Lord God may remember him in mercy, and bless him with the assurance of faith.

WORK WITHIN OURSELVES.

HOWEVER many and various the objects calling for human exertion, the one that is highest, and alone binding upon all, from king to beggar, is certainly that of care for the soul's true welfare. Even if some one were minded to set up happiness alone as the true and real aim of life, it does not need much reflection to be convinced that, as long as there is no joy within, all happiness—were it in appearance the most complete—must still remain a worthless, unsatisfying portion. True happiness, therefore, consists not in abundant possessions, in this or that enjoyment, but in joy and peace of soul. A glad heart,—this means in fact a fortunate, happy man, even supposing that as to his outward condition he should seem most unfortunate. If we were disposed to lay down certain outward requisites as indispensable conditions of happiness, even then we should be compelled to acknowledge a joyous state of soul, or a cheerful heart, to be the fundamental condition without which no happiness in life is to be thought of. What matters it that light and cheerfulness are around thee on every side, as long as thou hast no eyes to perceive and enjoy it? Hence, even

such as otherwise favour thoroughly materialistic views are obliged to return to happiness of soul as the real substance of all happiness. But that nothing in the wide world is able to fill the soul with joy as great, as lasting, as capable of growth, as that which springs from love to God and our neighbour, we need not stay here to discuss. Seeing, then, that inner joyousness, a cheerful soul, is a necessary condition of happiness, and such cheerfulness, if it is to be permanent, must be an intrinsic quality of the soul, it follows that *care for the soul*, the *culture* of our inner life, is altogether indispensable. And this must be acknowledged even by such as really desire no more spiritual life than is necessary simply to amass and enjoy the material possessions of earth.

But without the exercise of *freedom of will*, no one can prosecute this soul-culture. Man's free will is a transcript of the creative power of God; for by means of its decisions it calls into existence what is *new*, *i.e.* something which cannot be regarded as a necessary consequence of previously existing relations and circumstances. God has given man's soul over to the power of his free will, that the will may mould it, as a workman the clay. If this freedom of will has been lost through sin, it is regenerated through grace. As over every beginning, so over the beginning of moral freedom a dark veil rests; and still more mysterious is the relation between God's omnipotence and human freedom. Everything we have is through God's grace, but we make it ours by means

of the freedom which is itself given by God, and regenerated through His grace. But this is a question into which man's curious spirit ought not to pry; it lies beyond the limits of our powers. But thus much is certain: if thy soul is to suffer no hurt, hold fast the one as well as the other, both faith in God's almighty governance of all things, and the undoubting conviction that thou thyself hast a free will which chooses good or evil. At the same time the attainment of perfect certainty as to the apparent contradiction between human freedom and divine determination is what we are scarcely warranted to expect in the present life.

We have made a moral resolve. What preceded it, what called it forth, is here a matter of no concern. We have resolved, for example, to give up a fault, to make our own a quality which hitherto has not belonged to us; to abide by a better disposition to which we attach value, because it brings us honour and happiness; to turn our whole stream of inclination into another, yea, the opposite direction. The resolve is sincere: we have made it with all seriousness of intention. If we are believing Christians withal, we have asked God to impart emphasis, strength, and blessing to our purpose. There is no man who has not more than once in his life made such a resolution, or another of the same kind. But as often as any one has formed such a purpose, he has thereby borne testimony as to himself that his soul is in the power of the will. But in the same way must every one,

from the experience of his own life, testify this also, that only too often the will did not exert its power, the good purpose was forgotten, the resolve was never carried out, and we were compelled to confess with shame that no change for the better took place in our disposition and life. How many good and devout Sabbath-inclinations are gone before the sun has set! Christ says (Matt. xii. 43 ff.) that, when the evil spirit has gone out of a man, he often returns with seven others worse than himself, and the last state of such a man is worse than the first. How often we are compelled to express assent to this utterance of our Redeemer, when we see how some one forsakes his sins for a long time indeed, but only afterwards to plunge all the deeper into them! "The way to hell is paved with good intentions," says a familiar but dreadful proverb. But if there is any foundation for the proverb, we ought also to say that the way to heaven likewise is paved with good intentions. But the good intentions in the way to hell grow weaker and weaker, until at last they are utterly given up. In the way to heaven they grow stronger and stronger, until at last they are crowned with triumphant consummation. Seeing, then, that all true culture of self, all real regard for our souls, has for its condition that the purpose be realized in actual deed, the long way lying between the resolution and its full realization calls for the most careful inquiry and examination. And we must give special attention to the subject of the difficulties and hindrances

that so often intervene between purpose and fulfilment.

The resolve has its source and rise in the inner world of thought. The instant I form it, it lives in my consciousness. But an unbroken stream of thoughts is constantly flowing through the human soul, one displacing another. Inevitably, therefore, after a longer or shorter time, the purpose is pushed out of consciousness, however strong and firmly-rooted it may have been. Other thoughts, having no sort of connection with it, drive it from the place it had occupied in consciousness. Just as on a stormy day the clouds race across the heavens, so thought presses upon thought in the human soul. In the world of human thought all is life and action, movement that knows no rest. But *where* does the thought dwell when it withdraws from consciousness? Is it annihilated, extinct? Without doubt this is the case with a great multitude of thoughts, which every day swarm through the soul without becoming the subject of *after*-thought, and without moving the depths of our soul either one way or another. At all events, what are left in the soul are mere shadows, thoughts of such a kind, so imperceptible, that as a rule they are not to be discovered even for seeking. But how fares it with thoughts which, as serious purposes, roused our soul to action and became subjects of reflection? These may pass out of consciousness again the moment they enter, so that they are not long dwelt upon. But they do not on this account

pass out of the soul itself, but withdraw into the *under-world* of the soul. It is the memory that preserves the knowledge acquired. Recollection hides in its bosom not only our feelings, but all movements of will, our resolves and purposes. This under-world of the unconscious is as rich as nature and nature's ever-teeming womb. Just as nature, instead of being exhausted by its countless productions, is ever from its depths sending up new life, so this under-world of the inner life is never emptied, but is constantly sending up thoughts, feelings, purposes, to the light of consciousness. How is it that the under-world of the soul is never emptied? Because from the life of waking consciousness new populations are ever thronging into its domain. As day and night alternate here below, so in the human soul there is perpetual alternation, an uninterrupted stream passing out of consciousness into the under-world of the soul and back again into consciousness. This constant flow and re-flow should on every ground be observed by those who would attend to their soul's culture.

What sort of a life do these inward impressions live, or how do they really continue to exist, when they have withdrawn from the sphere of consciousness? In my judgment we obtain the best idea of the nature of their life when we conceive of it under the image of sleep. The sleeper is not dead; but he only lives a full and complete life when he awakes again. So the impressions dwelling in the slumber-

ing soul are by no means dead, but they are only fully alive when they come into the clear light of consciousness. Nevertheless, between the slumber of the under-world of the soul and bodily slumber there is an essential difference. When any one is asleep, the sleep is usually deeper and sounder during its first hours ; but gradually, in proportion as we become more and more rested, our sleep grows lighter. At last a gentle whisper is enough to arouse one whom a few hours before a loud call failed to disturb. It is the opposite with the slumber of the under-world within. At first our will is able to recall vanished impressions with a nod ; but gradually the slumber becomes deeper and deeper, until it takes labour and effort to scare it away. At last the sleep becomes a death-sleep, and we labour in vain to summon thoughts back to life and consciousness. We have heard a name some time. In the first stage it answers at once to our call, when we need it. Later on we must muse and strive long to come at it ; and again, after the lapse of some time, it eludes us altogether. Men usually pay little heed to the fact that it is precisely thus with their feelings. However strong and ardent our love, many moments occur when it retires into the background of consciousness, which is occupied by other thoughts, perhaps by opposite feelings ; and when it has passed out of consciousness, it slumbers for a time. But after a brief period of forgetfulness love opens its eyes again, having meanwhile received inward strength and refreshment. And this is often

the case. Not seldom, it is true, it slumbers so long as to sink into sleep and utter torpidity. Then perhaps we miss it, look round for it as if bewildered, and—find it not. It is gone, and we are altogether unable to call it back to life. There are few who have not had moments when, as the result of repeated visitations of divine grace, their souls were carried away by love to the Lord. Alas, it lasted but for one fleeting hour! Thoughts and sentiments of another kind arose, and holy desire died out. Days, years passed away, and now we remember it only as a beautiful dream we had long ago. But as it is with our attainments in knowledge and our feelings, so is it also with exertions of will and resolves, with our good intentions. We form a resolve with the utmost sincerity and ardour of soul, and feel ourselves elated by our genuine earnestness of purpose. “It shall never occur again,” we say of something of which we are ashamed. “I can, verily I will conquer.” And we revel already by anticipation in full draughts of triumph and joy. But then comes daily life with its toil and care. Many other thoughts crowd in, and the resolve slumbers. But we are pacified. In an auspicious hour we formed a noble resolution, and have not since recalled it. But that slumber of our fair intention becomes deeper and deeper, harder and harder. When the hour of temptation comes, we are no longer able to wake it up, and it is just the same as if we had never formed it, never made the promise. No doubt, then, with the same earnestness we form

new intentions, but it fares with them no whit better than with their predecessors. And thus it comes to pass that the way to hell is paved with good intentions.

In the days when our Redeemer's life was nearing its close, He spoke to His disciples of the overthrow of Jerusalem and the end of the world, and said: "*Watch* ye, therefore, and *pray always*, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke xxi. 36, comp. Mark xiii. 33). And after the hard conflict in the garden of Gethsemane, He said to the three disciples, heavy with sleep: "*Watch and pray*. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Yes, watch and pray! It behoves us to watch. It is the *will* that must remain awake in God's presence, and keep watch over the soul. As we have seen, it is only too easy for the good intention to be displaced by other thoughts and fancies, to fall back into slumber. Then is the time for our will—a will sustained by the spirit of faith, and invigorated by grace—to stand on its guard, and ever and anon arouse the purpose formed, that it may come again into the clear light of consciousness. Only through the good purpose being thus revived again and again does it grow and gain strength, so as to become a real power in our inner life. For however earnest and sincere our purpose, however we consecrate and hallow it by looks raised to God and vows made to Him, still in its first beginning it is

only like a tender, new-born babe. It is a real misfortune that we so often imagine that in merely willing what is good, in merely forming an infant purpose, we have done something great, something heroic; but this alone is too little. As a mother her child, so must our soul, strengthened by looking up to God, again and again firmly embrace, and, so to speak, press to her breast the good intention formed, that it may grow and advance in strength.

Sometimes there is an appearance of contradiction, in wishing to renew some good purpose by recalling it to the view of consciousness. We have solemnly resolved to forget an injury, but in renewing such a purpose we call to mind the very injury, and revive the opposite reflection which it is our wish to suppress. Certainly we do not reach the end at which we are aiming, until we forget not merely the injury, but even our purpose and wish to forget it. But to this end it is a long, long way. In cases where a wrong has made a deep impression on us, the remembrance of it will recur to consciousness, and irritate anew the scarcely-healed wound on the least occasion and slightest reference. Our duty in such circumstances is somewhat complicated and difficult. Let us, however, be heedful and watchful to suppress on the instant every remembrance of wrong as it arises, and not allow the mind to dwell thereon. This diligence, apparently in doing nothing, is no easy task. But what is there to prevent our Christian will, in a conflict with a personal opponent, so ordering it that we

do not try primarily to think of him, but only ever renew in ourselves the Christian purpose *to desire to forgive our neighbour in general*, until we are able to think even of that opponent with sincere love ?

And this every one who would win eternal life must earnestly aim at. It is certain that our soul cannot be saved unless God forgive our sins ; but God will not remit our sins if we do not forgive our debtors.

After giving His disciples the assurance that they would receive everything which they asked in faith (Mark xi. 25 f.), Jesus added the words : “ And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any ; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.” Christ is never weary of enforcing on the disciples the absolute necessity of a forgiving spirit,—one that hides offences. After teaching them the Lord’s Prayer, He dwells on it with marked emphasis (Matt. vi. 14). “ For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you ; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” The same thought is implied in the utterance (Matt. v. 23 f.) : “ Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way ; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift ;” for we

have no offering to bring to the Lord but our *prayers*. This intimate connection between God's forgiveness and ours is emphatically asserted by the apostle Paul, when he insists on our forgiveness of others being like God's of us. All forgiveness that is witnessed on earth is a ray from God. "Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. iv. 32). "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye" (Col. iii. 12 f.). A forgiving, placable spirit attains its noblest, loftiest development in *prayer for enemies*. "Love your enemies," says Christ to His own, "bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. v. 44 f., comp. Luke vi. 28 f.). With a special, one might almost say masterly wisdom, our Saviour has provided, and, so to speak, made sure that every sincere suppliant shall keep the divine command of forgiveness, if he would not lose all interest in the Lord's Prayer. Without lying to God's face, no one can pray, "As we forgive our debtors," unless in deed and truth he forgive his

enemies and blot out their offence. The command to forgive stands like a cherub at the gate of this prayer. Only by forgiving from the heart do we obtain the right to offer it.

But that we may be able to fulfil this condition of salvation, it is of great importance to learn how we shall rightly *train and cultivate* our heart. We cannot but wonder how careless many are in this matter. And yet we may assert that the condition mentioned is part of the confession of faith in which we were all baptized, and to which afterwards we freely assented. It is involved in, "I believe in a forgiveness of sins." On this account it is well worth the trouble carefully to inquire *how* we are to train and discipline our heart so as to be able to fulfil this condition.

Through the powerful influence of God's grace a soul comes to the earnest resolve: "I will henceforward hate no man. I will not be content with merely doing no evil to any one, and saying no ill word. I will also cherish no hostile feeling in my heart." But after forming so fair, so Christian a purpose, a man meets with an unheard-of wrong, the extremest injury. Now is the time to carry out his resolve. How hard this will be to most! As often as the image of the other rises again before the mind, we are at once reminded of the wrong he committed, and the former embitterment returns in all its force. We can do nothing; the thought recurs spontaneously, and there is no making wrong right,

falsehood truth, black white. Here it behoves us to be watchful and careful. Let hatred but drop and trickle into the soul through the smallest crevice, and it will soon flood the soul with its dark, poisoned, raging waters. Certainly we are not masters as to what thoughts occur to us, but we are masters as to what thoughts we allow to settle. "You cannot prevent a bird alighting on your head, but you need not on this account let it build a nest on your head." The will rules over the thoughts as unlimited lord and master. It can open the soul to thoughts, it can close it against them, it can reject or accept them. As often, therefore, as the image of the wrongdoer rises again before the soul, one ought to do violence to his soul, compel it to allow the thought of his harshness to depart; ought to prevail on it rather to think of some one of his good points, of his excellent qualities acknowledged by every one, his noble acts. Force thy soul thus to think only of the bright traits of the man, and thou wilt soon be tired of thinking of him at all; for what thy evil nature urges thee to, namely, to think of his injustice to thee, this thou oughtest not to permit, and wilt not. "But the man has really nothing good in him! whatever he does is all good for nothing!" thou art perhaps saying, for anger puts dark spectacles on men's eyes, and they then see everything black. Come now, consider whether there is not one or another ground of excuse for the man and the wrong he has done, some mitigating circumstance; whether on thy side there is no wrong,

no good and sufficient ground for his displeasure with thee: and as often as thou thinkest of the man, attend with all thy strength to these grounds of excuse, so as to compel thy soul, instead of accusing, to excuse. The victory is ours when we have got so far as, before other men, to excuse our foe, for this is the best sign that our forgiveness is sincere. And perhaps thou art saying, "On my side was no wrong; hence there is no excuse for his monstrous conduct to me." Even then the stock of weapons with which thou art to combat thy inclination is nowise exhausted. Bethink thyself, hast thou never done anything of which, in thy deepest soul, thou oughtest to be ashamed? Perhaps many a year has fled since, but the act remains thine. As often, then, as the wrong suffered recurs to thee, and thy soul is ready to flame up in wrath, oh, then, compel thyself to remember that act, that omission, *i.e.* thy own. Then wilt thou soon enough lose the desire to think of the other's wrong. And if all this avails not,—neither recalling the adversary's good qualities, nor what can be said in his defence, nor, finally, thine own sin,—then remember thy "*Our Father*," the petition "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." These words—we cannot say them from the heart unless we sincerely forgive a neighbour his fault. Remember thy crucified Saviour, who in the midst of the agony of the cross prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Whoever, then, would pray to God, it is indispensable that in this or a

similar manner he discipline heart and disposition, until he has driven all feelings of wrath from his soul.

Another example of this self-culture. In some auspicious hour our soul is carried away by fervent joy in the grace of God, in our Lord and Saviour Himself. No joy upon earth can be compared with this ; in it we taste the powers of the world to come. But how short a time it lasts ! It passes out of consciousness, and gives place to other thoughts. Then this joy dies away ; and, however long we are able, even amid occupations of other kinds, to catch as it were an echo of it, the echo itself grows fainter and fainter, and at last all sound of it is gone. Year after year, perhaps, passes away. Then it awakes once more, but only for a few moments. What are we to do that this joy may be abiding, so that at least its echo may never cease, but sound on until it returns to consciousness, and that in full strength ? What are we to do to render its slumber so light, that directly we call it—call it with gentle voice—it may open its eyes fair and clear ? This is a weighty question. And, in reality, this question amounts to asking, How are we to begin to be really happy here upon earth ?

That joy in the Lord and His grace may take up its abode with us, we must often think of our Saviour,—once every day, at least, set apart some time for calling up before us His image in all its wondrous glory, and losing ourselves in its contemplation. At

first, perhaps, a certain amount of force is requisite to do this; and the soul, left to itself, does not willingly break away from the cares of daily life and its petty concerns, does not willingly soar above the earthly. But after such force has been used a long time, the thought of our Saviour knocks, as it were, unbidden at our door, and our soul feels uneasy until the door is opened, and the thought finds room to rest and abide in our heart. But even supposing we have reached such a point that we never forget to watch and pray, still we are drowsy by nature, and the soul only too readily sinks into everyday sloth and indolence. On this account it is wise to connect the remembrance of our Saviour with our daily work, with daily-recurring circumstances. In this matter every one is free to choose what his individual needs, the particular form and plan of his life, specially suggest to him. What is instanced in the following paragraphs is only to be regarded in the light of an illustration.

When day is breaking, think, with due collectedness and devout prayer, of Him who is the Light of the world! Without Him we had not known our Creator, our heavenly Father, for he that has not the Son has not the Father; we had not known whence we come, whither we go, and what the end and aim of our life, nor that the source of our existence is *love*; that every motion of our inner life is to be more and more pervaded by love, in order that we may be able at last to penetrate to the heart of God's love as into

our haven of refuge, our true home, and find therein eternal blessedness. And when satisfying our hunger or quenching our thirst, let us think of Him who is the Bread that came down from heaven,—of Him who is the Water of life, the Living Fountain, alone able to satisfy our soul's hunger and thirst. When going to thy toilsome daily work, do so remembering Him whose meat it was to do His Father's will, and who worked while it was day. If anxiety about thy bodily support, thy daily bread, oppress thee, remember with how little He was content. His birth was in a manger, His death on the cross; and as long as He walked upon this earth He was homeless, and had not where to lay His head. Art thou troubled by bodily pain? Think of His suffering on the cross. I have myself proved how great is the strength His cross imparts in time of suffering. Or does thy sin lie heavy upon thee? Remember that thou art one of the whole world, that thou believe on Him, that thou knowest some one, or knowest of the Lord's love and understanding,—of Him who is the friend nearest thy children, father, mother, brother, and sister, who in the shades of night gather round thee in the hour of death, and that thou art a true and trusty friend, and that

Let the Word of God speak

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our haven of refuge, our true home, and find therein eternal blessedness. And when satisfying our hunger or quenching our thirst, let us think of Him who is the Bread that came down from heaven,—of Him who is the Water of life, the Living Fountain, alone able to satisfy our soul's hunger and thirst. When going to thy toilsome daily work, do so remembering Him whose meat it was to do His Father's will, and who worked while it was day. If anxiety about thy bodily support, thy daily bread, oppress thee, remember with how little He was content. His birth was in a manger, His death on the cross; and as long as He walked upon this earth He was homeless, and had not where to lay His head. Art thou troubled by bodily pain? Think of His suffering on the cross. I have myself proved how great is the strength His cross imparts in time of suffering. Or does thy sin lie heavy upon thee? Remember that He made atonement for the sin of the whole world, even for thine, provided only thou believe on Him, love, follow Him. Lovest thou some one, or knowest some one who loves thee? Think of the Lord's love that passes all knowledge and understanding,—of Him who loves thee far beyond the friend nearest thy heart, than husband, wife, children, father, mother ever loved thee. When the shades of night gather round, call to mind the darkness of death, and that in it thou wilt have but one trusty friend, and that one thy Saviour.

While thus letting the *veritable Word of God* speak

to thee from the moment of thy awaking, while linking in the closest manner *the thought of Jesus* with the varied incidents of the day, great and small, and with the changeful feelings which in the course of the day pass through thy soul, that thought will gradually take root in thy soul, and grow firmer and firmer. It will not merely visit thee now and again, like a guest who makes haste to be gone. No; it will choose thy soul for its home, and, directly thou callest, behold it present beside thee.

And from the joy connected with this experience flows *love to God*. How should we not love Him who gave us our Saviour, and whose invisible Godhead, whose unfathomable, incomprehensible love, we see in visible bodily form before our eyes in Jesus Christ?

From the same joy, too, springs *love to men*. We know that he who loves not his brother, does not really love God. But how hard it may sometimes be to love our brethren! Certainly it is not easy to love one who is not worthy of love; and how few often enough are those who are so! In youth, indeed, the heart is warm, and easily lets itself be won over. It is full of hope, and the world of hope hides a boundless wealth of love. But in age the heart may easily grow cold. We strive against it. But every fresh disappointment, every newly-experienced injustice, brings with it a cold blast, which carries away something of the fresh glow of feeling. How many a man, then, with his frozen heart stands in the

world as good as alone ! Now, what sustains love to men in general, the love that has good wishes and kind feelings for every one, is specific love to those nearest us. Nay, experience teaches that intense love to a particular person, wedded love, so glorifies the whole world in our eyes, that it seems everywhere clothed in light ; just as, on the other hand, the feeling of hate to a particular man may extend its gloomy shadows over the whole sphere of existence. But those to whom we are bound by special ties of love and friendship go from us one after another. It becomes more and more lonely around us, and not seldom colder and colder within us. The times change, but we remain the same. We do not grow younger, but older. The new generation understands us not, and its language is a strange tongue in our ears. Then we close our lips, we shut ourselves up in past memories ; for to the pursuits of this age and the people of this age our heart is dead.

God grant our lamp of life to go out ere our heart turn cold ; for when once the heart has become cold, all joy dies out. A cold heart is one of the most dangerous maladies with which we mortals have to contend. It is, indeed, especially the old who suffer from it ; but youth is often attacked by it, when some bitter disappointment is encountered. Nay, many a human soul, in the midst of its restless activity, is made desolate by this disease. Men attempt, indeed, in all sorts of ways, to steel themselves, by hunting after riches, honour, power, enjoyment, etc., in order

thus to forget the tremendous loss they have suffered in the extinction of inward fervour and joy. But for this malady there is but one physician, Jesus Christ. No one knows Him but he who loves Him. And by rejoicing in Him, by loving Him,—*the Son of Man*,—we learn also to love man with unfeigned love; not with the transient, precarious love that comes and goes,—comes while good-will is shown us, and goes again directly ill-will and disfavour meet us,—not with the feeble love that is extinguished by the first evil word, blown away by the first injury,—not with the self-righteous love that will love none but the good, excellent, perfect,—but with the love with which God loved a poor, lost world, and gave His only-begotten Son to be its Saviour and Redeemer. “Be merciful, as your Father in heaven is merciful.” Then we love men as those who are loved of God and for whom the Saviour died, as those in whom already the powers of eternal life bloom. And though we discover in them all sorts of infirmity and great imperfection, we still love them in hope, that is, as those who carry concealed within them a man of God; for on no human brow do we dare to fix the brand of condemnation. But where this love dwells, a love which at the same time is joy in the Lord, there the heart never freezes and withers. It remains perpetually young, for the glow of eternal life streams through it.

It is a true *preparation for prayer*, when we so train and discipline our heart that love to God and our

neighbour becomes active within us, for what is more natural and easy than to pray *to* Him and *for* those whom we love? No doubt, if we resolved to delay praying until selfishness and sin no longer influenced us, until we had utterly destroyed the evil inclinations of our nature, we should have to wait long. Nay, it is prayer which is one of our strongest weapons in the warfare with sin. On the other hand, however, our prayer is not to stand *alone*, *i.e.*, as something detached from the rest of our life. Prayer thrives not, rather it turns into hollow, soulless, mechanical words, or even into vain, sinful craving, unless an *earnest* resistance to evil inclinations goes hand in hand with it. How is it that in this conflict man's exertions so often remain without effect? Because they do not attack evil inclination in its root, but confine themselves to withstanding particular outbreaks in word and deed. Through various channels, our soul, indeed, is receiving manifold impressions which may lead it either to salvation or ruin; but these impressions are of no real importance either one way or the other, as long as they do not give rise to thoughts which acquire a position and abide permanently in our soul. It is no doubt inevitable that every impression shall awaken thoughts more or less distinct; but our *will* may either chase away a thought as an intrusive, forward guest, or bid it welcome as a dear friend, and invite it to stay with us.

For care of the soul, for self-culture that aims at

renewing the heart, it is of the highest moment that the will exercise this its dominion over the thoughts in due measure. Let no one suppose that he can allow evil thoughts to accumulate and work their pleasure in his soul with impunity. Not only will they hinder prayer, they will break out into words and acts, sweep away every good intention, as when a swollen stream bursts through an embankment. Let us, then, learn the art of binding up with every evil thought another of an utterly repugnant character, so that directly the former raises its head, the latter—never separable from it even for a moment—may be at hand to repel it, like its threatening, death-foretelling shadow. A poor labourer confessed to me on his deathbed that he was formerly sorely tempted to steal. “And how did you withstand the temptation?” “By thinking, as often as it rose, of the prison.” I asked him whether he did not also think of the eighth commandment, and of God’s eye fixed on him in the darkest night; but he shook his head, and replied that at that time the thought of God lay far removed from him. Certainly a low standpoint for moral self-restraint. In our heart, then, alongside every evil thought tempting us, let God’s holy wrath and justice be found. Above all, let us summon and gather round us *good thoughts* like good angels. Let us be accustomed to link them invariably with the petty occurrences of daily life, until at last they come to us spontaneously, unbidden; and in order to assist their growth to full power and influence, let us

connect them as closely as possible with the remembrance of the blessing with which God has endowed them. But let every good thought run back, as to its deepest root, to the one central thought,—the thought of the love of God, that alone brings salvation.

Even for the practice of prayer itself, the command of our thoughts by an earnest Christian *will* is of the greatest importance. We can never pray without our own thoughts seeking perpetually to interrupt and disturb us, on which account the thoughts are to be kept under restraint, and trained to obey our will and God's will. When we cherish some earnest, fervent desire, whatever its object, and present it in prayer, how the desire then flames aloft! how, for a time, with its pressure it pushes all other thoughts aside! But ought we not always to be "*fervent in spirit*" (Rom. xii. 11), whenever we come into God's presence in prayer? Ought we not always to cherish within us intense, glowing, resistless desire to be one with God, wholly conformed to our Saviour, yea, cherish desire after a love so strong, that it shall one day bear our soul away with heavenly constraint to God, when we close our eyes never again to open them here below? Yes, it ought to be so, and there may be individual Christians who have reached such a point. To this point, without doubt, the apostle John had come; and in the case of many a calm soul, unknown to the world, it may be the same. But most of us are obliged to confess that at times our hearts are, alas! how inconceivably cold

and closed to the grace of God! It is then that we take refuge in prayer, in order that in God's presence the heart may gain new life and feeling. But when we are not so fervent in spirit as we ought to be, it happens that the praying soul is disturbed by strange thoughts of every kind. Then prayer may become the most strenuous of efforts, the severest of toil, the sharpest of conflicts. Well for us if the anxious, restless heart is at last pacified, grows calm and tranquil in prayer, like a child reposing quietly in its mother's arms.

Whence come these thoughts, often wicked and ungodly, as a rule vain and careless, but always unseasonable? They may be so irksome to us, we may be so provoked and irritated by them, that we might be disposed to deny them to be ours,—declare them utterly foreign, inspired by some evil, envious spirit, that grudges us the blessing of prayer. And yet such thoughts are certainly our own. We have seen above how thoughts that pass out of consciousness do not on this account withdraw from our soul, but only slumber, at first lightly, by degrees more and more deeply, if they are not aroused and summoned back into consciousness. But they are awakened again not only by our will, but also by this or that other thought with which they are associated. For there is no thought that lives a completely isolated life in the soul; nay, by countless threads it is connected more or less closely with others. Every one is a loop in a network of thoughts. When

our will calls some thought back to consciousness, this thought, by virtue of the connection referred to, necessarily, and without any summons on our part, awakens a crowd of other thoughts, with which, for the moment, we have nothing to do. Thus, our course of definite, conscious thought, as it moves constantly forward, is beset by a swarm of other thoughts, which press and seek to enter the sphere of consciousness. As a rule they partially succeed; and hence the function of our will is to be ever bringing our inner course of thought back to the groove assigned it at first, but afterwards forsaken. If our course of thought be represented by a line, it would be not a straight but a winding line, and we might well be astonished at its many strange twistings and turnings. Therefore is it an effort to think connectedly, even in prayer; for to do this our spirit must keep watch and ward unceasingly. On this account it is a rest, a refreshment sometimes, "to think of nothing," that is, to let the thoughts come and go at their own will and fancy.

Such are the difficulties with which our praying has to contend. Had we to appear before a king, we should be ashamed to do so with disordered thoughts. Must we not then blush that this may, and often enough does, happen to us when we *appear before God*? Therefore must our diligence in ordering, keeping, and cultivating the world of thought within know no intermission; therefore must we constrain and inure our thoughts to obedience; and

our sanctified will (*i.e.* one with God's will) must put forth such energy as to remain their master and ruler. Above all, let us take care that our prayer is ever earnest, fervent, heartfelt; for the more heartfelt and earnest our prayer, the sooner will all intrusive thoughts vanish.

VI.

HINDRANCES TO PRAYER.

ALREADY, in the introductory observations, we spoke of men who close the door of prayer against themselves, by regarding the Lord God as too great and lofty a being to care for what is minute ; and there are others who, on the pretext that they are not good, devout, and holy enough, shrink from drawing nigh to the Holy One. To them it seems like blasphemy, like a desecration of God's name, for them to think of praying. "How should a sinful man like me come before God's presence?" This unhealthy state of mind may spring from very different causes, and, when met with, should not be treated everywhere in the same way. In some instances, the sense of sin is so vivid as to overpower the sense of God's grace. The former, indeed, can never be vivid enough, but the sense of divine grace should always be more vivid still. Such a man suffers from little faith. He believes not in the forgiveness of sins, believes not that God's grace is greater than man's sin. Hence he does not dare to say his "Our Father." Before souls of this class let us hold up all the gentle, comforting words of Scripture addressed to mourners: "Come unto me, all ye that are weary

and heavy laden." But why heap sin on sin? For sin it is to deny the faith in which thou wast baptized, of which faith in the forgiveness of sins is an essential part. Standest thou afar off, like the publican, not daring to lift up thine eyes to heaven? Still thou mayest smite on thy breast and pray, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Comfort thyself with the fact that the publican went to his house justified rather than the self-righteous one. Remember that it is the lost whom the Saviour seeks. Dost thou count thyself of the number of the lost? Then the Saviour is seeking thee, seeking thee now, this very moment. Why wilt thou not let thyself be found of Him? Remember, further, that on the cross Christ made eternal atonement for all the world's sin, even for thine. Or supposest thou that thy sin is mightier than Christ's cross?

But there is another reason which holds men back from prayer, namely, that they are unwilling earnestly to say farewell to their sins. Every one who *refuses* to renounce his wrath, arrogance, and greed, his intemperance, sensuality, etc., certainly does well not to pray; for prayer is then a lie, and only serves to harden the heart still more. How can he truthfully say, "Hallowed be Thy name," while he *will* not let God's name be hallowed in his heart and life? How can he pray aright for the forgiveness of sins, with his secret purpose to retain his sins, with an implacable mind, with hatred and strife?—pray not to be tempted, when he gladly goes after temptation directly

it comes?—pray to be saved from the power of the evil one, while surrendering himself to the power of the evil one, and letting it rule over him? The door of prayer only opens to the earnest will that yields to the leading of the Holy Spirit in inclination and life. It may happen that a man who has been accustomed to pray perseveres in this—of itself praiseworthy—custom, after secretly purposing to indulge some evil passion that has dominion over him. But such prayer is an abomination to the Lord. No sin is so great that it should hinder prayer, if a man but sincerely renounce his sin; but no sin is so small as not to turn prayer itself into sin, if there is not the disposition to resist and overcome it. It is the bent of our will, our disposition, that renders prayer either pleasing or displeasing to God. Though a man sin seven times, nay, seventy times seven, but as often without secret hypocrisy turns to God and implores power and strength at last to gain the victory, from such prayer God will of a truth not turn away His ear. The hour will come when the penitent suppliant shall be able to thank God for victory.

When we said that our prayer is an abomination before God as long as we cherish the purpose to continue in sin, all the emphasis rests on the *purpose*. There is in the human soul a gloomy deep, a secret sinfulness pervading our whole nature, which is unknown not merely to others, but even to ourselves. Of this David speaks when he sings: “Behold, I was shapen

in iniquity ; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts ; and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom" (Ps. li. 5, 6). The mountain clefts and deep vales remain in the shade while the sun is low in the heavens. It is only gradually, as the sun mounts higher, that they grow light. Just so is it with the abysses of the human heart. Only when the sun of grace sends its beams upon us from on high does it so flood with light the darkest recesses of the soul that we see all that they conceal. The more the sense of Christ's grace unfolds itself in us, the keener, the finer becomes our sense of sin. How long it may be before a man is conscious of the coldness of his own heart, and learns to look on it as sin ! But as long as a particular mode of thought and conduct is not consciously realized as sin, there is no inner contradiction in a man's praying, although his prayer is not accompanied by any resolution to lay aside the specific fault from which his soul is suffering. Nay, a life of prayer itself is one of the most effectual means for developing our consciousness of sin, God thus making us to know wisdom in the hidden part, so that wisdom penetrates to the gloomiest depths of our heart. And why is there no contradiction in this ? Because our will may be bent with all earnestness upon holiness, although certain aspects of our sinful nature may not as yet be realized as such in consciousness. Provided only such sincere earnestness exists, soon will consciousness and will find their way

to hitherto unregarded and uncultivated tracts of the inner life. In the first instance, a question arises within, whether it is right to think, feel, act in this way. Then this doubt, this conscientious scruple, gathers strength, and at last complete certainty is reached. No doubt—there is no denying it—when such conscientious scruples arise and try to make their way into consciousness, we sometimes repel them by main force, in order to escape the discomfort and distress connected with the process of repentance and self-scrutiny. By such a course the soul easily suffers injury, so that want of thoroughness, insincerity, and lukewarmness creep over our prayers. Let us not forget that, although we succeed in driving the hidden sin, the secret fault, out of *our consciousness*, yet *God* has set our iniquities before *Him*, our secret sins in the light of His countenance (Ps. xc. 8).

Often recollectedness in prayer proves very hard for us, though no directly evil passion stands as a hindrance in the way. We wish to pray, but cannot. We make the attempt, but the attempt miscarries. We put forth effort, but all effort is in vain. The causes may be many and various. Some powerful thought, perhaps, takes such exclusive possession of our minds that it cannot be driven away. But why not make use of this very thought? Why not build a bridge between it and prayer? All thoughts may find a way to God, for in Him we live, move, and have our being. Even a sinful thought may find a way to God, by our praying Him to extinguish and destroy it in our soul.

To what class does the thought belong? Is it care? Why not at once cast it on Him who cares for us? Is it joy? Why not render thanks to Him, the prime fountain of all joy, the giver of all good gifts? If it is a heavy trial, why not flee for help to the Almighty and ask Him to save us, that we may come out of the trial without wound to the conscience and harm to the soul? Or is it some great and difficult work, on the right performance of which, it may be, our welfare and that of our friends depend? Why not seek wisdom from God, the Only-Wise? Is the powerful thought that carries away our soul called forth by one of the greater occurrences of life? In this case it will scarcely restrain from prayer one accustomed to pray, but rather urge him thereto. But it may also be the case that the thought disquieting our soul is called forth by some *insignificant* matter, something so trivial that we are ashamed to bring it into God's presence. Such trifles, getting the mastery of our soul, are great hindrances to prayer. It may often come about that a man's soul is so held captive by trivialities of this kind that he sleeps with them and wakes with them. It then behoves us to realize the unworthiness of such a course, and resist it with moral earnestness. Nay, it behoves us to oppose to it the solemnity of eternity.

But in many cases the difficulty of prayer, and of right feeling in prayer, springs from quite a different source. We have overstrained ourselves in prayer,

and upon the overstraining, supineness naturally follows. We try to extricate ourselves by a fresh straining of all our powers, only to sink deeper and deeper. In all things measure and moderation are needful. It might seem superfluous in these days to warn against excess in prayer; and yet the pastor meets with morbid conditions which can only be explained by such excess. The prayer-life is a life in God. But God has placed us here below in a definite position, involving duties of various kinds. Therefore every day we must away from our secret chamber to our daily work, *with God*. Often beneath prayer itself a certain morbid, indolent self-love is concealed, when prayer does not impel and qualify us to discharge the duties of our calling, even those in appearance the most insignificant and troublesome. Let us think, if we please, of the most insignificant of all employments. But if it is pursued with fidelity, and this fidelity is exalted and sustained by the thought that we are doing God's will, then is the work sacred, acceptable to God. In its silent lowliness it proclaims and glorifies the power of God's grace. Thus a truly Christian servant, by her unostentatious, faithful service, may fulfil her part as a proof, a witness, testifying before a perverse, unstable, and faithless generation the glory of Christ, and His power over human souls. As to the letter, it sounds like blasphemy to say that it is sinful to wish to love God *alone*; and yet the proposition may contain a certain amount of truth. Christ Himself says to us

(Matt. xxii. 39), that the command to love our neighbours is *like* the command to love God; and the apostle John asks: "He that loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen?" (1 John iv. 20.) If our love to God be true and sound, it ought to, and will, awaken love to those created after God's image, though this image be sorely defaced and obscured, though men least of all exemplify the new birth and the character of God's children. There is something inherently unsound in a love that desires to dwell with God *alone*, as one exalted above the world, and not to pass over from Him to one's neighbour,—that does not love the Lord God *in one's neighbour*. In such love pride and selfishness lie hidden. Just as a man cannot continue to live if he only inhales without exhaling, so we cannot again and again inhale joy in the Lord in prayer, unless this joy is also exhaled outwardly in a loving disposition towards our brethren, nay, in the whole of our conduct in relation to others. What, then, lies at the foundation of all true brotherly love? What is its kernel, its soul? What but love to God our Father? In the creature a Christian loves the Creator, in the work its Author. Thus, rightly understood, it is perfectly true to say that we ought to love *God alone*; for even in loving our neighbour we love God, *i.e.* God's image, which, though hidden and half veiled, still ever shines more or less brightly forth. On the other hand, a love that is able to forget its neighbour is halting, or

rather mere illusion. As sure as we are content with love of such a kind, the fountain of prayer dries up in our heart. Joy in God, the sense of His favour, is taken from us ; for God forsakes him that ceases to love his neighbour, but only forsakes him in order to draw him nearer to Himself by means of repentance and inward renewal. We should endeavour to maintain equanimity of life. If any one feels himself forsaken of the spirit of prayer, after having tasted that the Lord is good, let him apply himself to his daily work with new zeal and redoubled energy, as a duty laid upon him by God ; let him devote himself to the practice of works of love in one or other of their many forms ; let him learn to love men despite their weakness and imperfections, despite all injuries he has received. Of a truth the fountain of prayer will soon burst forth again, and with it a sense of joy in the Lord and His grace.

But no doubt there may be other causes for the state of emptiness spoken of, for such a feeling of abandonment. This may be found in Christians in whose hearts love of God is in no degree separated from love of brethren ; who, on the contrary, strive to manifest their faith by a loyal discharge of all duties of their calling. At such times God seems to hide from us His gracious countenance. But His meaning is to sift and prove us,—His meaning is to train us to more vigorous, more firmly-grounded faith. The light of joy in the Lord then goes out in our soul ; the whole wide world is veiled for us in

darkness; we are able to rejoice in nothing, feel genuine love for no creature. We are touched to the quick. When even the world of prayer is on the point of closing to us, the last effort of the soul is to pray for strength to pray. And sometimes such a prayer is heard at once, the disturbed equanimity within being restored; but sometimes it seems not to be heard. In this case even the strength to offer the last-mentioned prayer vanishes, and the soul is dumb; it is no longer able to pray to its God. All the gentle words of comfort in Scripture, all God's acts—collected in the briefest and withal completest of all glorious histories, namely, the Apostles' Creed—lose all power to cheer and strengthen the soul. For it everything is changed into chilling cloud-pictures. In such circumstances there is but one way of escape, namely, to contend no longer, but resign oneself completely to the will of God, and say, "Now, then, I *am willing* to go softly in my sorrow, *willing* to live on in this joyless gloom, *willing* to submit to everything, to carry on my daily work as well as I am able, and to bow patiently to the yoke that God lays on my shoulders." And this entire abandonment of all resistance, this entire surrender to God's will, is the nearest of all paths for the soul again to climb to the heights of peace. When joy in God again sheds its beams upon us, by one painful experience we shall have learnt the lesson that everything we have is not of ourselves, but through God's grace alone.

VII.

THE CONTENTS OF PRAYER.

WHAT should form the matter of our prayers? Everything that rises in our soul, great and small, we may admit into prayer. If our soul has been moved at all by any, of itself, unimportant concern, we need not be ashamed to tell it to our God. Let us not forget what the Redeemer said of the hairs of our head, of the sparrow falling to the ground. Moreover, what is important? what unimportant? How unimportant, compared with the whole nation, is our dear self, which often to us seems so great; and again, our nation in comparison with the whole race; and finally, our earth in contrast with all the worlds describing their orbits in the wide fields of space! But, while from this point of view all things are reduced to insignificant dimensions, Christianity supplies us with a fixed standard of measurement, in the doctrine that every single human soul is of boundless worth in the eyes of God. We often speak of insignificant men, but no soul made for immortality is insignificant. We live surrounded by real spiritual dignitaries. Fables tell of disguised kings and princes in twos and threes, but in real life we meet with numberless concealed

sovereigns. However we may say to one and another in so many words: "Thy mode of life is unworthy of a man; if power of speech were given to a beast, it would talk precisely as thou talkest;" we are obliged to add: "But thou art no beast; thou art a concealed immortal soul! Why wilt thou not throw off the mask, and consent to be redeemed and exalted?" How dear to the Lord God were even souls lost in sin, He showed by sending His Only-begotten into the world. And on this account nothing that transpires in a human soul is altogether without importance. By the mere fact of becoming part of our soul-life, the unimportant acquires importance. Moreover, between the beginning or occasion, often so trivial, of prayer and its issue there is a difference, and this difference constitutes the very *blessing* of prayer.

Let us therefore come boldly before God, without doubt and anxious fear, bringing everything that agitates our soul, be it great or small. Are we not in fellowship with our God,—we with Him, and He with us? And is He not merciful and gracious? He will not grow weary of us and our petitions, although men who might listen to *us* would soon grow weary of *them*. But if we begin our prayer boldly, and with childlike simplicity, we need only observe how it is with our hearts at the end of the prayer, at the Amen. If we really drew nigh to God, drew nigh to Him in our thoughts, and in a praying spirit, then *God and His holy will* drew nigh to our soul; and

therefore must it be different within us now from what it was at the outset of our prayer. Before, our soul was agitated by the concerns of daily life, its numberless petty joys and cares, desires and anxieties, and by this means the one thing needful, our soul's salvation and what makes for its peace, fell into the background. But when God draws nigh to us, when He and His holy will enter our soul, then *eternity* steps into the foreground, and all the trivialities of this life, which so readily captivate us, are placed in *its* light. Then every illusive phantom that has again and again deceived us melts away. The really great becomes great to us, and the small by nature becomes small to us. Then have we prayed aright; then was our prayer rich in blessing, and its issue other than its beginning.

THANKSGIVING.

One essential element in prayer is praise. As long as our life flows peacefully and softly along, there is something altogether natural in beginning with thanks. If at such a time our soul is at all deeply excited, whether by some desire, or by fear of threatening evil, there is no special reason why we should not first relieve our heart of such burden before folding our hands in prayer. But at all events our prayer is imperfect, maimed, if it omit thanksgiving. Nevertheless we are only too often utterly overcome by distressing circumstances, by a loss incurred, a sorrow,

a domestic or other affliction. It is good, then, to remind ourselves that there is still much for which we owe thanks. As the memories of so many benefits we have received pass before our soul, how our inner unrest subsides! We are constrained to blush that we do not now with patience bear the burdens that the hand of the good God has laid on our shoulders. And while we muse on past days, many an adverse event will recur to us which seemed at the time intolerable, but which has since proved a real benefit. By dwelling in thought on such experiences, we learn practical wisdom, for we come to regard our present troubles also with more favourable eyes, firmly persuaded that the time will come when on their account also we shall give thanks to our God. Even he that thinks himself most unfortunate, because but little is left him in which he can rejoice,—death seeming to him the most desirable boon,—even he will find relief, in picturing to himself in vivid colours the long-vanished joys of the past, of his bright, innocent childhood, his aspiring youth. And even though able to give thanks for nothing else, let him give thanks at least for this, that he is a day nearer the fulfilment of his chief desire; for the longing to be delivered from all evil is fulfilled sooner or later, without fail, to every child of God. On this account a Christian in his prayer should never forget to give thanks to God; for by thanksgiving we train our soul to watchfulness in the ways of the Lord, to contentment, to confidence in God; yea, it is in thanksgiving

that the regenerated soul first breathes again in true filial supplication.

But is there any thanksgiving in the *Lord's Prayer*? Without doubt it includes an unexpressed thanksgiving. Yea, the whole prayer supposes the experience of the grace of God, although this experience is not directly mentioned. May not the simple "my father," or "my mother," in a child's mouth, carry with it such a tone as to express a warm, heartfelt gratitude for all blessings received? When, then, in such a tone of heart and voice we say, "*Our Father which art in heaven,*" do not these words include a sense of gratitude for every grace and gift which has descended on us from above, from our heavenly Father? Every single manifestation of God's care is a revelation of His *fatherly* love and mercy towards us. And can we pray in earnest concerning *God's name*, His *kingdom*, *forgiveness of sins*, etc., without having first consciously realized that He has revealed His name to us, founded His kingdom of grace among us, promised and imparted forgiveness of sins to us? But whoever truly *realizes* all this, will certainly *render thanks* for it, *render thanks* even in silence. The two things, indeed, are one.

For what, then, are we to praise our God? Certainly for all the good that in His fatherly love He has shown and is showing us, for all His blessings to body and soul. Let every one go through his life from the beginning to the present, and reckon the amount of the good he has received. No one ought

to forget his past. If hitherto we have but seldom and little gone back upon our past lives, at first, no doubt, it will be to us like entering a dark room, in which we discern nothing but blank darkness. But the longer and oftener we linger there, the more one form after another issues from the darkness, the clearer and more distinct they grow. Our gratitude to God, as it were, like a stout hero, must conquer the past foot by foot. To be thankful for happy, joyous days is by no means difficult. They are like open country, which is quickly overrun. There the only foe to be encountered is our own heedless mind, our forgetfulness. On the other hand, it is extremely hard to be thankful for sufferings and sore trials, for these are like strongly-fenced cities, which must be besieged in due form by a mind experienced in the ways of thankfulness, before they will surrender. For the days, for the hours, when anxiety again disappeared and suffering ceased, it is, of course, easy to be thankful, such days being reckoned among the number of the good. But to feel thankfulness for anxiety itself, and suffering itself, this is hard for us. But when we bethink ourselves how those unwelcome guests rendered us good service, drew our soul away from the world's vanity and nearer to God, how they furthered our true well-being, for what should we be more fervently thankful? Now in that which, while we were forced to endure it, was utterly irksome to us, we recognise the clearest manifestations of the faithfulness and loving care of

our God. In many instances, indeed, we are able to find no such blessed fruit. Rather it seems to us as if what then befell us, instead of promoting, hindered our spiritual progress. How, then, can we praise God for that which only removed us farther from Him? Here we must exercise *faith*, and our faith must be strong enough to carry the day over our short-sightedness. Even then we can praise God in hope, being assured that the hour will come when God's love will set even the darkest, as yet unintelligible, dispensations in the clear light of day.

Perhaps it is specially repugnant to our feelings to render thanks for an injury done us by man, a wrong we have suffered. It is easiest for us to forgive and forget, harder to forgive and yet remember, but hardest of all to forgive and yet *give thanks!* And yet, as long as we do not reach this point, our inner life is not in a right state. We are told that when an Indian is being tortured to death by a foe, he makes it a point of honour to act as if he felt no pain. In a certain sense a Christian may be compared with him, in giving God thanks for a wrong done him out of pure malice. And yet he has often reason enough for this. To suffer from the evil tongues, from the evil conduct of men, may exercise an influence on our soul as bracing and invigorating as a cold bath does on our body. In this way we are trained to moral self-reliance, to independence of human opinions, and gain courage to act according to our own conviction, and say openly what we know

to be true and right, without looking to the right hand or left. At the bottom of the harsh utterances we are compelled to hear, there may often be a grain of truth; and how healthy it is to hear the undisguised and unvarnished truth! To meet with nothing but approval and recognition easily spoils us, makes us effeminate and sensitive, so that we shiver in the cool breeze, and shun the bracing air of the open heaven. To many a one it is doing poor service to praise what he says and does to the skies, and keep silence on his rudeness and defects. But shouldst thou come to see clearly the great advantage thou hast reaped from bad, unworthy treatment, how good it was for thee to be humbled, it will then be easy for thee to give thanks for this experience, as for every experience whose beneficial influence thou discernest afterwards, little as it might please thee at the time. And supposing that, with the best intention, we are unable to perceive this, we can still so rob all human malice of its sting as that it shall no longer poison our life. Let us suppose that a fire has ruined our earthly prosperity. Does it make, in the abstract, so measureless a difference whether lightning destroyed our dwelling, or the hand of human malice? The damage sustained in both cases is the same. But certainly in the latter case our suffering has an additional element, *i.e.* irritation at the wickedness of the man, and eager desire to see him punished. Hence may spring a passionate feeling of hate, especially if we otherwise had frequent

occasion to experience the hostile disposition of the offender. Here it behoves us to manifest the strength of our faith. Let us exclude the *man* from the sad story altogether, that our heavenly Father, the Almighty One, may take his place. Did He not permit it? Could He not have prevented it, if it had been His will? This none can doubt but a fool, who in his blindness has lost faith in the rule of the living God. But this is true wisdom, to receive *everything* from God's fatherly hand, even the evil inflicted on us by human word or deed. If we allow this faith to rule over our soul, it will rear for us a strong fortress, in which the most embittered malice will be unable to assail us. And this fortress is simply our spirit of filial gratitude to God. "*I will praise Thee, for Thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation*" (Ps. cxviii. 21). "I thank Thee for joy and sorrow, for fortune and misfortune, for good and evil reports. In Thy love I trust, and doubt not Thy almighty power. To all things Thou wilt give the best issue, for Thou lovest my soul, and wilt save it."

But it would be blasphemous to think of praising God for our *sin*, although even this, having become part of our nature and life, forms a link in the chain of our progress, and the awakening consciousness of sin first brings us to Christ. But sin itself is and remains our shame, and the recollection of it must again and again awaken in us a sense of deeper humiliation. How can we doubt—although God has

linked evil with good—that He could have led us by fairer paths to brighter glory, if we had not sinned? Nevertheless our shame, our bitter humiliation, is overpowered and thrust into the background by another triumphant feeling,—by the joy of faith in God's grace, by the assurance vouchsafed from above that all our sins are forgiven and blotted out.

In this way praise spreads itself over our whole past history, over even the most humbling circumstances of our earthly life. Before us lies the glorious hope of eternal life, and behind us no longer the gloom of night; nay, from our life's darkest hours beams of grace shine full upon us. We thus live encircled by the light of the grace of God. It shines before us, behind us. And in the moment that we offer praise to God, we feel that we are ever breathing it afresh, for where God is His grace is.

But as often as we thank God for His manifold benefits, we should not forget to thank Him for our *friends*, for those nearer and more remote. This good custom cannot but have the best effect on our relationships of friendship and love themselves. It is precisely in our moments of praise that the most favourable aspects of those dear forms pass before our mind's eye. All the goodwill, all the fidelity they have shown us at different times, is compressed into one clear, shining picture. Our thanksgiving resembles a skilful artist, who, instead of giving a bare photograph, seeks to grasp and set forth that deepest nature of a man which is invisible to the

eye, as it gleams forth in his happiest moments. Just so our thanksgiving pushes aside all flaws and defects, or overlooks them, in the conviction that all these weaknesses are mere passing clouds, and that even if our picture should not fully correspond with the reality here below, it will do so in the world above.

There is one striking feature of unfaithfulness which man's heart often displays. However sadly we miss a departed one, this feeling of loss does not keep its ground in the struggle with the daily routine of life. The northern Saga calls it Thor's struggle with time. But man's soul is impoverished, even the one most richly endowed with love, in losing its past memories. Hence it is well for us, when giving thanks in quiet hours of devotion for all God's benefits, not to forget our departed dear ones. How much we owe them! How many a joy, how many a blessing, they have lavished on us, the one in this, the other in that stage of our life! Therefore should we allow their images, one after another, to rise up before us in quiet hours, and allow our thoughts to linger on what they were to us. If we have not thought of them for a long time, at first, perhaps, their features will be indistinct, and as it were veiled in clouds; but as we repeat the remembrance day by day, its image will come out more and more distinctly. "Honour thy father and thy mother." But do we really honour them, if, as soon as they depart from us, we consign them to oblivion? Or would it be too much honour and too much gratitude if we daily remember their

love with thanksgiving to God? There was some one whom we loved, and with whom, so to speak, all the threads of our life, for a longer or shorter time, were intertwined. To-day he or she no longer dwells with us. Can our love be called "stronger than death" if their memory only recurs now and then, only on rare, special occasions, or if we do not every day live over again a portion of the joy that God gave us in the beloved ones? We have lost a child, perhaps in tender years, too young to say "Father, Mother." Should our love on this account leave it, and not rather follow it into that eternity where we hope one day again to find it? Nay, every day ought the remembrance of all the dear ones we have lost to revive in us afresh, with thanksgiving to God.

The images of the departed rise up before our spirit in a glorified form, and the form in which they now appear to us is the true one, because in it the splendour of their invisible, immortal nature is expressed. Does the thought present itself: "Where dwell they? Have they perchance risen so many degrees higher in perfection, that, when we go hence, we shall be unable to come where they now are?" Then let us pray God that their love may be so strong as to draw us ever more and more where they are, and our own love may render our soul willing and apt to be drawn. Even in this imperfect world love can bridge over the widest intervals.

In our memories of the past we possess rich treasures. Gratitude to God must bring these up,

that from the dark depths of the soul they may rise into the clear light of consciousness. Yes, it is the voice of praise that should summon them to light, not any of the other voices calling up the dead. Concealed envy, long-cherished wrath and hate, may set memory to work. In that case all faults and failings are collected,—in a word, everything of the past that should remain buried in eternal oblivion. On the other hand, in filial gratitude to God dwells the power of a higher wisdom. The soul then brings together all bright traits, all joys intended or done us by dear ones, all goodwill shown in a thousand ways, and many a feature which, insignificant of itself, is dear to us because wearing the stamp of love. Only thankfulness to God shows us our friends, the living and the dead, in their true, their glorified form.

Many a time life seems to us so poor and lonely, and an unspeakable sadness is on the point of overcoming us. This feeling of loneliness returns oft and oft, especially when the end of our course seems not far away; for the lapse of years has robbed us already of, alas! how many, and death robs us of more and more the older we grow. For this very reason thankfulness to God is to brighten this loneliness, to people it with tranquil memories. It is wonderful how in quiet hours of prayer one dear form after another flits past us. Lonely one, thou art not alone; about thee is a wide circle of friends. Thus, with a thankful disposition, our life remains, amid all circumstances, rich in interest.

It is of the first importance, indeed, that love to our friends "fail not" (1 Cor. xiii. 8). It stands in close association with that unselfish disposition—love to our neighbour, to men in general—which is held up to us in the second of the two great commandments. If we love one person, though but one, with the whole soul, ardently, and without reserve, it is then easy for us to love all men; for love to one sheds a cheerful light over the whole breadth of existence (2 Pet. i. 7). If any one, therefore, loves another, let him watch over this love as over a precious treasure; for if we lose much in losing another's love, it is a far greater loss and injury to us when we ourselves cease to love. If no human being lies close to our heart; if our so-called friends are nothing but passing acquaintances, with whom we associate in order to enjoy the pleasures of social life in common; if in them all we are always picking this and that fault; if we love to dwell in talk on the failings of one and another, and so on, our friendship is cool indeed, and does not deserve the name. A heart that is indifferent to the nearest relations of life can scarcely take deep interest in men in general; for it is from these most intimate relations—those of parents, husbands and wives, children, friends—that such depth of feeling must pour into our heart, that it shall not grow cold on going forth to the bad, icy world and its unjust ways. Let us not overlook the fact that our Saviour, whose heart belonged to all humanity, still had some to whom He was attached by special

affection. When Lazarus was sick, his sisters sent word to Him: "Lord, he whom Thou lovest is sick" (John xi. 3); and the apostle John himself says in his Gospel (xi. 5): "But Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." And though all the disciples were objects of His love, one is especially described as "the disciple whom Jesus loved;" and he it was to whom on the cross Christ committed His mother.

While, then, fidelity to this or that person who has claims on our affection fosters and keeps up fervour of feeling, the faithful remembrance of dear friends, extending beyond death, has special value. If our love to them, instead of withering when we lose them, remains young and fresh, it will form one of the strongest links binding our spiritual life to eternity. And if our treasure of love beyond the grave augment more and more, nay, our treasure in beloved souls become greater there than here below, it may be that we shall so advance that our soul will soar in fervent longing to the eternal habitations.

In thanking God for all the good He has done us, how, as believing Christians, can we forget especially to thank Him for the grace manifested to our *souls*? Every man has his own history of the wondrous, circuitous ways by which he was finally led from the errors and confusions of the world, from the perplexities of human thought and opinion, to his heavenly Father. And, musing on these ways, and remembering how often he was on the point of taking other paths, he acknowledges with adoring wonder that not

his own wisdom but God's grace was his guide. For this reason he blesses the fatherly hand that has been over him and led him. But apart from what specially concerns each individual, we cannot in our prayer forget the great *general blessings* which are the unchangeable portion of all Christians. We thank God for His grace of regeneration, for refreshment and comfort in the Lord's Supper, for the words God has spoken to us men at sundry times and in divers manners, and for *the Word*, the one, only-begotten Son, in whom all these words were summed up and attained a living form. And although our spirit is indeed justified in giving itself up now to this, now to that one of God's many words, as one or the other forms the special sustenance of the soul,—justified also in dwelling on one particular feature in the glorious, majestic image of our Redeemer, as some one feature in particular dawns upon us,—still our meditation ever turns mainly to the simple *catechism-teaching*, which is wiser than all human wisdom, and beyond which none can go, however great the knowledge and however great the learning he acquires. We thank God, then, first of all for His *commands*, just and holy. There was indeed a time when they lay like a yoke on our neck. Now we bless them as a hedge of salvation planted round our life, preventing us from plunging into the gulf of sin. And above all, we thank God for the two great commands of love, in which all are comprehended, and without the fulfilment of which there is no true joy,

no true peace. We thank God, again, for the *creed* in which we were baptized; for in it we possess a firm, indestructible foundation, on which our hope of salvation may be based, and our restless, fluttering thoughts find their resting-place. With this faith as the strong helm of our soul, we commit ourselves fearlessly to the raging sea of human opinions and opposing Scripture-interpretations, firmly assured that, however many the inexplicable difficulties that trouble us, we shall nevertheless find in Scripture a true image of our Saviour, and withal everything really needful amid the manifold emergencies of our soul's life. And, thankful for this old yet never obsolete creed, let us make its glorious truths, the sacred acts of love it proclaims, pass before our spirit, lingering over each one separately, as well as over the fountain of light and life dwelling in them all. Then let us blend all the several details into one single, glorious picture embracing the world's history from creation to judgment. And within this picture our own soul finds its lowly place. Nay, its special history is inwoven with each distinct portion of our creed. Every tiny drop of water may be called a part of the sea. But, to emphasize here the first and the last portions, when we say, "In God the Father Almighty," we may, nay, we ought to apply the great truth to ourselves, for He is *our Father!* And what would our hope amount to, if, with respect to the final words, "*and the life everlasting,*" we left out ourselves? Recurring again and again to these cardinal verities—this it is which gives stability

and firmness to our inner life. It is well for our thoughts to have a *home*, where they may find rest, however in the course of the day they may sojourn now in this, now in that spot. What was the faith about which we were questioned on our conscious adhesion to the Church? Was it not the one contained in the Apostles' Creed? And I know no higher praise of a Christian than this, that he has held fast the *yes* with which he once answered this question faithfully to the end,—that his whole life has been a confirming *amen* to this *yes*. Hence the great Augustine was wont to exhort his catechumens to embody the Apostles' Creed in their daily devotion. And in what place could we better put it than in the heart of our thanksgiving? But if this is to be acceptable to God, we must previously know by personal experience that the creed is no dead treasure, which we simply count over with a complacency like the miser's in counting over his hoards, but a living force that has penetrated our nature, determining our will and transforming our spirit. It is true that sincere self-examination will constrain us all to humble ourselves. But if our faith is to be no mere lip-work, no empty profession, we must with all humility possess the consciousness that eternal life is putting forth its first green shoots and leaves within us. Only let us not be disheartened if our inner growth is quiet and unmarked. Christ Himself compares the growth of God's kingdom to the grain of corn (Mark iv. 26 ff.). Taking heed, then, that our faith is not dead and our

love not cold, let us give time and room to God's grace. In this case, if we glance back over a larger section of our life, our increase in all that is truly good and lovely will evince that our faith is a living power, although this growth does not follow without daily conflict and daily toil. And it is by no means to be set down as pride, when we praise God on perceiving that our faith is sincere and living; for how withal to our thanks can we forget to add prayer for forgiveness that we have advanced no farther?

There is perhaps no sign by which we can better ascertain the character and measure of our inner life, than the way and manner *in which we say the Lord's Prayer*. If the words glide readily and smoothly, half unthinkingly, over our lips, it is evidence of great immaturity, of a superficial and careless spirit. They are words charged with weight and meaning. The more fully we master and enter into the spirit of the words we utter, the healthier and stronger will be our religious life, the greater the blessing which prayer will bring us. When we thank God for all His benefits and gifts, we must include the Lord's Prayer as one of the greatest,—a gift that adapts itself so wondrously to all ages, all conditions of life, all characters, and which seems to grow with ourselves in intrinsic worth. If God in His grace caused us to see the light of the world among Christians, in a Christian household, we can now no longer remember the day when we said "Our Father" for the first time, just as little as we remember when

for the first time we looked on father and mother. So much else changes and grows old, but "Our Father" remains perpetually young; and, instead of weakening with age, it gains in power and strength. So much else has played us false, but "Our Father" has remained our trusty companion amid all life's changes and disappointments. They are the same words, indeed, that we say and hear again and again; and yet, how they change their character, their force, as emphasis is laid on one or the other word! How it fits itself into our everyday wants, while remaining essentially the same, ever borne up by those opening words, "Our Father," ever wrapped up in them as in its true kernel. A higher wisdom we desire not than from year to year to learn to say "Our Father" with ever-increasing truth, understanding, and depth of feeling; and with no other prayer than this on our lips do we desire at last to bow our head. Therefore do we thank Thee, gracious God, for our dear "Our Father."

When presenting to God our thanks for all His benefits, let us go back to the source of all benefits—*God's fatherly love*. Rejoicing in this, adoring this in a filial spirit, we at the same time give thanks for every individual blessing it pours upon us. This is the original spring of all that exists, essentially one with the Son and the Spirit. By the Spirit's love and power we are led to the Son, and in the Son we are apprehended by the love of the Father, and again apprehend this love, revealed in living deeds and

manifested in bodily form. Thus at last all our thanksgiving ends in our magnifying the grace of the triune God.

But when we observe more closely how our gratitude advances from particular benefits to God's everlasting love, we discover how in all directions it meets with the *mediator Jesus Christ*. If we arrange those benefits in their order of worth, what gift can compare for a moment with the gift of the Only-begotten, whom God gave to a world hostile to Him? Is life a precious blessing? Eternal life is infinitely more precious, and this life is bestowed on us in the Son. If we direct our glance to men, especially to our nearer friends, not one of them is faithful as Jesus Christ. And if it is right to say that the law of holiness is the work of the Father, the Lord's Prayer that of the Son, the Church's creed that of the Holy Spirit, still in any case it is only from Him who is the fulfilment of the law—from the Son—that the Spirit of love and life proceeds, who transforms the law from a burdensome yoke into a salutary discipline and rule of life. But as concerns the creed (of which the echo is the "Our Father" of believers), we know that only through the revelation of the Son has the Father's love been made known to us, and that the Holy Spirit was not poured out until the Redeemer had finished His work upon earth. Therefore do we magnify the grace of the triune God in the *name of Jesus*.

We have seen, in what precedes, how gratitude to God runs through our Saviour's life as well as

through the lives of the apostles, and in how many passages of Scripture we are exhorted to thanksgiving. Not only are we to offer humble supplication, prayer, and intercession for all men, for kings and all that are in authority, but to give thanks to God and the Father through Jesus Christ (1 Tim. ii. 1 f.), while doing all that we do in word and act in the name of the Lord Jesus (Col. iii. 17). "Continue instant in prayer, and watch in the same with *thanksgiving*" (Col. iv. 1). We are to learn to give thanks not only for good days, but also for evil; for Paul writes: "Rejoice *evermore*. Pray without ceasing. *In everything* give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thess. v. 16 ff., comp. Eph. v. 20). If we have only learned to give thanks even for a severe dispensation, in the end its peace shall be ours, peace will come into our heart. This inward peace is promised us; for when the apostle exhorts us to be careful for nothing, but in everything to make known our requests by prayer and supplication to God with thanksgiving, he adds: "And the *peace of God*, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. iv. 6 f.).

What great stress the same apostle lays upon thanksgiving we see from this, that he often describes it as the real aim of all that befalls us, as the spiritual fruit of all divine leadings, as the crowning-point of our course of development. In his Second Epistle to the Corinthians, after magnifying the power of God

displayed amid his sufferings and tribulations, he adds: "For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might, *through the thanksgiving of many, redound to the glory of God*" (iv. 15). And in the same epistle, mentioning the collection of the offerings by which the Christians from among the Gentiles assisted their needy brethren in Judæa, he says: "For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by *many thanksgivings unto God*" (ix. 12). And for believers there is no surer way to that free, joyous life, which is in harmony with the spirit of the gospel, than filial thanksgiving, yea, constantly renewed thanksgiving for God's abounding grace (Ps. l. 23).

CONFESSION.

After we have thus presented our thanksgiving to God, our spirit is to revert in self-examination to itself, to bring all we have done to the light, and hide nothing from God's sight. What would it avail us to attempt to hide anything? To Him everything is known. And as His children we are bound to *confess* to Him all wherein we have done amiss since coming in prayer into His presence. By such confession, such entering into particulars, much grows clear which else would remain in dim twilight. Let us, therefore, with all carefulness examine our works, words, and thoughts, even the feelings flitting through our soul. In this duty

of self-examination let us go to work earnestly and seriously, as before the eye of the all-seeing God. No vain woman is so fond of display as the human soul, and the slyest intriguer betrays us not so cunningly as our own heart. We weave a covering of excuses to hide from ourselves the truth. But God is the God of truth. Sometimes, however, it happens that in the apprehension of thinking too favourably of ourselves, we fall into the opposite extreme. We disclaim all good, every better quality. Then, in the midst of this self-abasement, a voice within whispers, "How very humble thou art!" and thus pride strikes its roots, though quite secretly, in the soul. God is the God of truth. Therefore we cannot please Him by making ourselves worse than we are. We are to pass neither too gentle nor too harsh a judgment on ourselves, but one in harmony with truth. But if in our own thoughts we disparage ourselves beneath our real worth, this inward untruth is again rebuked by the same voice that whispered in our ear of our marked humility. No doubt we are always to feel ourselves to be poor sinners; but if we are true Christians, we cannot forget that we are God's children. No doubt we should sorrow that the power of sin is not yet utterly broken in us, that we are compelled, therefore, to stand perpetually on our guard; but it were ingratitude not to rejoice in God's grace, which, provided our faith is a living one, we know not merely as pardoning mercy, but also as the living energy by which our inner nature is being more and

more renewed. We are by no means so good that, in order to remain humble, we are absolutely compelled to regard ourselves as worse than we are. Even if we were so advanced, is not all self-complacency dashed to the ground by the single thought: "What had become of thee if thou hadst had no Saviour?"

At times our days glide past so gently and evenly, without difficulty and opposition, in the quiet performance of our—not too difficult—daily duties, that it almost costs us effort to find anything definite on which sin has left a discernible impress, and for which, therefore, we need to mourn in coming before God's presence in prayer. But sin not only enters into such obvious details, it is manifest in the whole of our moral nature. Ought we not ever to have a heart so broad, that both love to God and love to man may find room in it, and at the same time one so humble as to make us forget ourselves? But who dare say: "I have advanced so far as utterly to forget myself, so far that only Christ dwells in my thoughts and rules in my heart"? The apostle was just such a man as we are, and yet he was able to say: "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. ii. 20). Could we, without deceiving ourselves, say this with Paul? Thus, if we look not to mere details, but to our entire moral condition, there will always be infirmity and imperfection enough for us to confess before the Heart-searcher.

Moreover, we shall do well to comprehend in one view our whole past life and all the sinful impulses

and desires disfiguring it; not that we may brood over our sins, not that we may surrender ourselves to doubt as to whether they are forgiven, blotted out, but that we may call to mind God's grace, and at the same time attain to deeper knowledge of ourselves. All evil springs from our own soul. Dare we then be quite confident that the evil, which formerly wrought so powerfully in our life, has not penetrated to the deepest grounds of our soul, and planted there its deadly germs? None knows the innermost folds of his own soul, with all the forces slumbering there, for it is veiled in a darkness which God's eye alone sees through. Sometimes, indeed, the husbandman believes that his field is clear, every noxious root destroyed. But let a season specially favourable to weeds come, and he sees with amazement the luxuriant crop of tares on his land. Just so a man may find it to be with himself. The times change. They become specially favourable for the development and growth of evil, and suddenly from our hearts springs a harvest of sin, of whose existence before the soul had no suspicion. Let us then despise no information that our own past days may be able to give us as to what has effected a lodgment in our heart, yea, perhaps lurks in its most secret depths. A sincere and upright heart brings everything before God's fatherly eye, and there everything stands in the clear light of truth. Therefore must we ever anew confess the sin of our past days to God, and never quite expel it from our thoughts. Let us at least so far keep it in

remembrance, that it may preserve us in a state of constant watchfulness, and we may not be surprised by the dangers and temptations of days to come.

But, after humbly confessing all our sin and sinful perverseness before God, let us pray for *forgiveness* again and again, but more and more earnestly, in Jesus' name and for Jesus' sake: "Forgive us, merciful God, our sin, as well that which is open, known to all, as that which is secret, known only to Thee and me, and also that which Thou alone knowest, which is hidden even from my sight, the slumbering seed of evil in my inmost nature."

PETITION.—GREAT AND SMALL PETITIONS.

In the thanksgiving hitherto treated of, as well as in the matter of confession, our gaze is directed to past days. On the other hand, in *petition* and *supplication* we address ourselves to the future. Supplication for the forgiveness of our sins stands midway between the past and future. It concerns the past, but asks for something to be done. It asks that what has been done may be as if undone. In the soul's converse with God, asking and desiring have a foremost place. From them all devout intercourse of the soul with God has taken its name; for in the name *prayer* we are thinking primarily of petition. At the beginning of our prayer-life, asking and desiring are wont to occupy us almost exclusively; for there is so much that we have to ask from God. Only

gradually is this pushed more into the background by thanksgiving. Ought we then to regard it as a sign of advance, a higher stage of experience, when our prayer is nothing but a thank-offering, when desire and request have become quite dumb?

There are times in our soul's history when it nowhere discerns solid ground to which to steer, but on every side looks away as into far distances. We have already, and, alas, how long! asked for so much, but were never heard by our heavenly Father. And every time that a desire was refused us, we *renounced* it. We then gave ourselves up to the will of God, and said: "Thou knowest best what is good for us." But after again and again desiring and hoping in vain, and again and again renouncing, we at last grow weary; and now it seems easier to us, instead of so many small acts of self-denial, to perform *one great act of self-denial*, the renunciation of all further desires. We then desire and seek *nothing* more, for ourselves, or for our friends, or for our fatherland, or for mankind. We simply resign ourselves to what is to take place or is taking place as ordained of God, and compress all our petitions in one or another respect into this sentence: "Not my will, but Thine be done!" To a restless, eager heart, there is something wonderfully soothing in thus giving up all longing, all desiring, and committing what is to take place altogether to a higher determination. All grows as still in the soul as in the silent night, so that all fates and events glimmer like stars in God's broad heaven.

But in spite of all this, with all the nobleness and dignity which undeniably belong to such a state of soul, there is something unsound, something morbid in it when it becomes permanent. As a mere transition-state it is justifiable. Just as the wearied body has a right to sleep, so may the wearied soul, after all its toils and struggles, after its long hoping and waiting, take rest in quiet submission to the will of God. Where should it better find rest than on its Father's breast? Just as a sleepy child falls on a mother's bosom, and lets her do with it what she pleases, so the jaded, spent soul commits itself to the arms of God, of His all-ruling wisdom and mercy. Often, without doubt, such a feeling has a certain amount of justification. For example, we have sustained a great, a cruel loss. We did all we could to avert it, and did not forget to call on the Lord for His gracious help; but the blow fell, and the loss was irreparable. What is left us in such a case but to accept the loss from God's hand, and seek relief from suffering in the comforting thought that He means it well? When smarting under the pressure of some trial, after trying in vain to escape it, this is often the last solace left us, but a solace that never disappoints,—to take the affliction on our shoulders as a burden from God's hand, and carry it, in the name of Jesus, calmly and patiently, without again craving any change in our lot. Both these together—the thought of God's hand over us, and the renunciation of all further wishing

—certainly impart to the soul a mighty power of endurance.

Nevertheless, the utter renunciation of every desire, every request, if it is to be more than a passing state of the wearied soul, is not really natural to man. Did our Saviour cease to pray and desire? He prayed for those whom He had sought in vain, prayed for His enemies on the cross, and with a prayer to God He gave up His spirit. We have no wish to be more perfect than the Son of man. Are we not to repeat "Our Father" in all circumstances? And this prayer is full of great petitions,—petitions embracing the whole world of existence, from its brightest heights to its blackest depths, from the name and kingdom of God down to the Evil One, from whom the soul craves to be delivered in this world and that to come. Besides, we are to love, first and above all, the Lord God, next, our neighbour; and love abounds in wishes, overflows with requests. As long as our heart loves, we can do no other than desire and ask and crave. Perhaps we are able to do nothing for those dearest to us; but we who believe in the power of prayer, are we to give up praying for them? The Lord of heaven and earth has assigned to our free will, our acting, our praying, its own place in the great domain of existence. We do not fill up this place of ours, if we as it were efface, annihilate ourselves, and leave everything to Him. Nay, we are to exert and develop all the powers entrusted to us, and then commit them and ourselves and all our

work to God. Would it not be in the highest degree contrary to God's will, yea, culpable, for some one, *e.g.*, to leave the needs of the poor to God, under the idea that it would be an invasion of God's authority to stretch out to them a helping hand? Just so it would be sinful for us, in order that our spiritual rest may not be disturbed, to stifle the manifold desires and requests of love, and prevent them drawing near to God in prayer, under the pretext of leaving everything to the divine will. If, hitherto, the soul has thus put away each and every desire as it arose, and by this means procured for itself a sense of repose, which it is now absolutely unwilling to give up, it may gradually become the prey of selfish coldness, insensibility, and indifference,—nay, in the end, come even to look on sin itself, this or that piece of wickedness that is afoot, as a *divine ordinance* to which it must conform itself. If, therefore, as long as our heart beats, we may not forbid its indulging various wishes and inclinations, the only question arising is, in what relation these desires stand to our life of prayer.

What are the kind of desires to which we may open the door into the world of prayer? For that we are not to admit all, is self-evident. Now it may be said, only *great petitions* are to be admitted into our prayer; on the other, *all the small ones* are to be left outside, and must shift for themselves. But what is great, and what small? And by what standard are we here to measure greatness? The chief point is

not, how important in and of itself that is which forms the subject of our desire, but the solicitude and earnestness with which we desire something. Every request that is to pierce through the clouds and approach God's heart, must be warm and earnest; but cold wishes do not readily turn into warm, fervent prayers. Many a petition *ought* to be very dear and sacred to our heart, but in reality it remains somewhat strange and indifferent. That it is our *duty* to pray for this or that thing we do not doubt, and prayer certainly has its *duties* as well as its rights. Ought we not, then, to discharge our duty? Are we not bound to pray? Yes, verily; but above everything we ought to deal uprightly with God, and not deceive ourselves. By a cold, heartless prayer we in no sense discharge our duty, but only fancy that we have discharged it. But then is not prayer one of the very means for kindling interest in a matter and a person, towards both of which we were at first indifferent? So it is; and certainly this is one of the most blessed effects of prayer. Pray day by day for a man who was indifferent to thee, and he will become dearer and dearer to thee. Pray day by day for a man for whom thou hadst an aversion, a dislike, and this dislike will gradually disappear. But how can we begin to pray with thorough earnestness for some one who is still indifferent to us, or against whom we are prejudiced? And yet we find that even prayer for such persons, if sincerely intended, has wonderful power to change our disposition towards them. But

above all, it is important to attain a clear understanding as to our state, and not continue to live in a hazy twilight in respect to our inner life. Many never make any advance, because they live perpetually under the influence of certain misty notions, in which truth and falsehood are strangely mingled. Two men, for example, in public service, have joined somewhat superficially and coldly in the set prayers, either silently or aloud. The one thinks no more of what he has done. Perhaps he is well satisfied with himself, as one who has performed his duty. If a slight feeling comes over him that his prayer has not been what it ought to be, he soon quiets himself, and says, "At least I have shown my goodwill; but the inspiration of prayer comes from God." This man's prayer is dead and without result; he makes no progress, however much he prays. No doubt true earnestness in prayer proceeds from God. But is not the light of God's grace always shining clearly and brightly? Is it not we ourselves who by our curtains and shutters prevent it shining into our soul? The other, it is true, did not pray with all his heart, but he soon says to himself: "That was a wretched hollow prayer! Thou must do altogether differently if thy prayer is to have any worth!" This clear understanding as to our state and this straightforward purpose next issue in the fixed determination to train our heart to fervour of feeling; and we accompany the effort with a sigh to God by His grace to dissipate our coldness of heart. Every one

may learn by experience that such a prayerful sigh will not readily return empty. Thus are we able to pray boldly to God, and that not only in respect to the petitions lying specially near our heart, but also in respect to such as *ought* to be dear and important to us, but are not *yet* so, provided we aim earnestly at making them more and more both one and the other.

God is our soul's trusted friend; with Him we are to have no secrets. There is always an uneasy feeling when we conceal something from one we love. And yet this may be a sacred duty, when, for instance, a third party has entrusted us with a secret. On the other hand, in our dealings with God we may, yea, we ought to be always open and candid. To Him we can entrust everything, great and small. Does anything, in itself trifling, strongly move us? Does our heart, on its account, burn with desire? Now, by this very means it becomes all-important, not for us only, but also for God. If we really believe that He, who is love itself, loves *us*, then we know that His love can be unconcerned about nothing that fills the soul of His dear child with strong emotion. On this account we need not be ashamed to turn such an earnest wish into a prayer, although the object at which the wish aims is in itself of no moment. In prayer we are to pour out our whole heart before God, and keep back nothing that moves us. On this everything depends. But if our soul is to advance in its life of prayer, on that point also we must come to a clear under-

standing about our state. We make no progress when our soul, which is conscious of being bound to God, is bound by too earnest desires to what is trifling and insignificant; for everything that we desire exerts an attractive, binding influence on our souls. No doubt much *seems* insignificant which is not so, in so far as it is secretly connected with our soul's salvation, or that of others. But we are not here speaking of things of this kind. But when something is really insignificant in itself, why bind the soul to it by such intensity of desire? Our will is lord over our soul; it can admit and exclude, keep and drive away. Why, then, not banish such unseasonable desires from the soul? But directly we begin to resist our desires, the conflict finds its way into our prayer; for in real prayer every movement of our inner life is faithfully reflected. First of all, then, we ask God in a filial, earnest spirit to grant our desire; but next—supposing the inward conflict to have commenced—add a request for forgiveness, that we have called upon Him for something so unworthy, to which our soul even yet clings; but, having made further progress, we are able to beseech God to give us perfect liberty of spirit, to take away the desire entirely from our soul. Then the desire gradually becomes weaker and weaker, until at last it is dumb.

Thus we see clearly two things,—first, that those who live a life of intercourse with God in prayer ought to come before Him with all their heart's

desires and petitions ; and, secondly, that only sincere and heartfelt desires are able to frame themselves into fervent prayers, such as may hope to be heard. Accordingly, it might seem as if our desires were the unlimited masters of our prayers, which, however, in fact is far from being the case. Our desires have a ruler over them, and that in the first instance is our will ; but our will, again, has a master, and that is our God. *God's holy will* it is that, by means of our volition and desire, is to determine and regulate our prayer. The aim of our will, our disposition,—these are the means through which, at one time, our dull, cold desires gain new fervour and truthfulness, and at another our eager, passionate desires are calmed and moderated,—all in proportion as we come to know the good and acceptable will of God. But that *God* Himself may more and more become the end and spring of our prayers, as well as the supreme good for which above everything else we yearn, this is and remains the aim of our Christian striving, and of all our work within ourselves. In our life of prayer is necessarily repeated the same cycle that we see in the entire world's history, and hence also in our creed, which, taking its rise from God the Father, issues at last in eternal life, as the perfect and blessed restoration of our fellowship with God.

A man's prayer-life has its calm history of progress. If we knew this history, we should know the man, though not as perfectly as God knows him, yet as exactly as one man can ever know another. Let

any one mark his chief desires and requests. It only too often happens that, when we *know* what we should be, we imagine that we really are such. But in his desires and requests every one has a mirror, in which he sees a true picture of his own soul. How he may well wonder, yea, stand aghast, as he suddenly becomes conscious what is the object of his most earnest desires! Yes, even our praying has its history, and *what* do we wish this history to tell us? That our soul is being more and more completely liberated from the bondage of the small and insignificant, and bound to the great, the momentous. And what is the great and momentous? The soul's salvation is the great, eternal bliss is the momentous. This holds good of ourselves, as of all the souls dear to us. And when we stretch our gaze beyond the limits of our narrow circle to our fatherland, to the great wide world, what is the great, the momentous, on which everything depends? That in the end of the days God may reap a rich harvest of redeemed souls.

No doubt any one may be so absorbed in glorious pictures of that consummation, that his eye becomes blinded by the vision, and his heart indifferent to all joy and sorrow of this world, as well as to the thousand petty duties of daily life. But what says the Lord's Prayer on this matter? By the petition, "*Give us this day our daily bread!*" does it not point us to the things which, compared with the truly great,—the things of God's kingdom,—seem

utterly trifling and insignificant? And did not the Saviour weep for the fate of His earthly fatherland? Did He think it beneath His dignity to satisfy the people's bodily hunger, and to render help in bodily need? No human work is so trifling, but that, inspired by love, it becomes great. And no duty is so insignificant that its discharge is of no moment; for every household or official duty is borne up by the will of God. The solitary, tiny sunbeam is next to nothing; but collect the sunbeams, and behold all the glory and splendour of the sun! So the whole rich life of love is made up of all the small acts and services, each one of which is a mere speck. Precisely in the strict discharge of all minute daily duties, it becomes clear that within the circle of our volition God's holy will has found its place. Thus, while the salvation of the soul remains the great thing, faith that leads to salvation exhibits its life and its strength amid the manifold trivialities of life, which by this very means become weighty and all-significant. And that living faith may be the soul of his thoughts and feelings, and of the least of his actions, is the warmest desire of the believer, his fervent prayer to God.

Still much is left that lies near our heart, although it does not seem to stand in immediate connection with the soul's salvation. What father, what mother, ought not to desire that their children may not find the burden of this life too heavy, and that life may prove friendly to them? What bene-

volent heart does not wish that misery may lessen upon earth? Who does not so shrink from approaching days of age and infirmity, as to pray that he may not then be forsaken, that his mental may not decay with his physical powers, and at least the heart's faith, hope, and love continue green? Who does not tremble before the last struggle, before the pain of dying, and pray that this may be lightened and softened to him, that even in the furnace of pain he may manifest a cheerful spirit, and not dishonour the Lord whom he has known his life long? However our heart may free itself from many foolish desires, from the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, we still retain a longing, not merely for future blessedness, but also for a modest, happy earthly lot.

Let, then, such petitions blend their notes in your prayer to God, but in subdued tones, like the voice of a lowly maiden, and in such a way as never to overpower the great, the main prayer for the salvation of the immortal soul. The desire to be saved may be called the divine nature of our prayer, the desire for happiness its human nature.

GOOD AND EVIL.

It is all-important that we be open-hearted in coming into God's presence. Away with all false ornament, every attempt at apology. We may not give ourselves out as other and better than we are.

The eye of the Omniscient pierces through the cleverest veil of our weaving; and the least He can require is that when we speak to Him, our language shall be the language of truth. In trade and commerce it is nothing uncommon for goods to pass under false names, that they may find a readier sale; but it is far more common for the human heart to shelter impure idols, to which it gives false appellations, in order thus to justify love for them to itself and others, yea, to God. Deceit must be called cleverness; covetousness, dutiful care for wife and child; and even passion and hate, zeal for truth and right. There is not in man's heart a single appetite, be it ever so wicked, that does not sail under false colours, and wear a name not belonging to it. This is one of the devices by which the evil forces of life ensnare their prey, never allowing them to return. Hence it is a great step in advance, when to all that dwells in our hearts we give the right names; and herein consists one of the blessings of prayer, that it summons us to earnest self-scrutiny, and drags into the light, and sets in God's presence, that which lurks in secret in our soul, half known, half unknown, half truth, half falsehood.

Everything that lives in our soul should be presented in prayer to God. But are sinful petitions excepted from this rule? May even a sinful desire be turned into prayer? Assuredly not; by such a course sin and guilt would simply be aggravated. It happens sometimes that a mighty passion bursts

from the depths of the human breast, and drags even prayer into its service. What a grievous offence, to debase the holy God into a minister of our sin! We might almost say that this is a sin for which there is no forgiveness,—the sin against the Holy Ghost,—were it not that blind passion can so transport a man out of himself and rob him of the use of his reason, that he himself no longer knows what he is doing. Then we remember the word of the Saviour, who prayed on the cross: “Father, forgive them; they know not what they do.” Alas! even to our prayer enough sin cleaves. It bears the stamp of infirmity and imperfection. How often does it lack purity, strong fervour! Must we not be ashamed at perceiving how strange thoughts steal into our hearts as we pray? However, a work does not cease to be a good work because it is not perfectly good. But when a man prays to God for the granting of a directly sinful petition, one springing from selfishness and passion, then prayer itself is a gross sin—daring presumption in presence of a holy God.

Then, are sinful desires and emotions excluded from prayer in every respect? By no means. On the contrary, they take a conspicuous place in it,—that is, in the sense that we pray not for but *against* them. In the closet, sacred truth should disarm them of all power to hurt, strip from them their array of embellishments and apologies, and present them naked, in all their enormity, before the face of

the holy God. And it is not enough to mention in petition such things as have just recently raised their voices within us, or against whose temptations we have only lately striven, for so much *slumbers* in the soul that only awaits the opportunity to break out. This is the explanation of the sad experience, that even feelings of sorrow for past offences so often remain without fruit, that so many good intentions remain unexecuted; we too hastily regard ourselves as conquerors, jump to the conclusion that we have done with a thing, that the foe is finally worsted and destroyed, that all we have to do now is to take our rest. But the foe is nowise destroyed because he has been once beaten. On the contrary, he is quietly collecting new forces. Therefore must the soul remain watchful, and send out scouts, *i.e.* its thoughts within itself, to the right and left, to spy out not merely waking or conscious, but also slumbering desires. On this point it is helpful to recall to memory past transgressions, not for the purpose of again exciting doubt whether they are forgiven and blotted out, but partly, by this means, to preserve ourselves in humility, partly to keep constantly before us what weak sides, what gaps there are, where the enemy may easiest break into the fortress. Let us search carefully for the *occasions* of sin,—those more remote and those nearer at hand. Very many never get rid of their sins,—those which trouble them most,—because, though they shun sin itself, they do not shun its occasions and opportunities. The saying,

“A burnt child dreads the fire,” at all events does not apply to all adults. We know that the power of light does not diminish uniformly, but according to the square of the distance, so that an object standing at a distance of four ells from the light, has sixteen times less light than one standing at a distance of one ell. This law holds good in moral relations of darkness also—of the darkness of sin. The farther one keeps from it, the feebler its power to tempt. We put ourselves in the way of sin, when we put ourselves in the power of the same *circumstances* which sin formerly used as an opportunity. At that time it was easy to avoid the opportunity, for the soul still enjoyed its full strength; but we stood in no dread of the opportunity, because, forsooth, in itself it was so harmless. Still, when it had opened the way for sin to operate, at first we made some resistance, but sin’s attraction was too strong,—we yielded to temptation. And this temptation retains its attractive power. Whoever, then, earnestly desires to get the better of sinful inclination, let him as far as possible avoid the opportunity, keeping far from it. In the petition, “*Lead us not into temptation,*” we ask God, for the sake of our weakness and His mercy, so to dispose our circumstances that we may not, through any opportunity, approach too near to sin, and so the latter gain power over our soul. But if our prayer is to have its full meaning and effect, it must not remain in indefinite generality; we must have a perfectly clear perception *what* circumstances we have to fear.

Sometimes a horrid evil thought rushes through the soul, one that seems marvellously strange and isolated. It stands in no sort of connection with our former life, nor has its roots in any of our inclinations, so far, at least, as we know these. We wonder awhile how such a thought could arise in us, but then give up all thought about it. But such thoughts are lightning-flashes, lighting up and revealing in our nature a depth of darkness hitherto unknown to us. Through the soul of many a deeply fallen one, of many a criminal, such thoughts may have passed in their time, and perhaps at first the man wondered in the same way. Hence we are not merely to start back with surprise at these strange, singular thoughts, but rather make them serve as a call to stricter and stricter watchfulness, to far more earnest attention to the work of self-discipline than we have hitherto given. It is true that in doing so the hope of eternal blessedness ought ever to shed its light on our path. But this hope has a twin-sister,—trembling fear *of the danger of being lost notwithstanding*. “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” Hence we are to keep an open, watchful eye for the gulfs into which we may perchance plunge. While young, we suspect not what changes of fate await us in the distance, and through what scenes in life, what perplexities, we must pass before the end comes. And even if in our old age we are tolerably secured against change, as far as outward circumstances go, this is by no means the case as to our inner life. Even old age

has its grievous temptations,—peevishness, weariness with life, greed and care, selfish indifference to others. When the frailty of life makes itself felt in every possible way, when the spiritual powers are sluggish, when an ebb in the inner life sets in, then there is danger of our faith, along with hope and love, at last suffering shipwreck. And who knows what perils the death-struggle will finally bring with it?

Not on the open sea, but when land, when the port is near, the greatest dangers threaten; for here it is that blind sandbanks and sunken reefs are often found. Therefore, as often as we pray, "*Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,*" let us think not only of the temptations lying behind us, the perils known to us by experience, but also of those still unknown, unproved, hidden in the bosom of the future.

Are we certain, then, that what we wish and long for is lawful and well-pleasing to God? Further, have we dragged all evil impulses from their hiding-places in our heart, and besought from God strength to overcome them? Then with all joyfulness let us express in prayer to God everything that agitates our breast. Whatever the desire that we cherish in our hearts without scruple of conscience, let us with as little scruple lay it on the heart of our Father in heaven. Let our petitions, great and small, rush forth in motley throng. It is a blessed thing to be able to desire and hope heartily. When the power of desire fails, our life loses all value and interest, our heart

becomes cold and miserable. Youth is so rich in the power of desire because it is the spring-time of hope. But afterwards one hope after another vanishes, either because disappointed or satisfied. Gradually life acquires a fixed shape, which no longer admits so easily the invasion of change. Desire grows less and less; and if one still lives a series of years, at last his only wish is to be allowed to live on quietly and passively. So it would seem it must needs fare with us; but so it only fares with those who have lived for themselves, for their own interests. Genuine love rejoices in perpetual youth, and therefore hides in it a rich store of desires, so that a soul which is the home of love can never be void of desire. If we become poorer and poorer in desires for ourselves, as age advances, we become richer and richer in desires for others. There are children and grandchildren, there is a circle of friends: one whose love is true being thus never reduced to drag on a melancholy existence, bankrupt in desire. And even should a man, as his day declines, linger here forsaken and lonely, bound to no one by any close tie of love and friendship, still, while his home is left him, be it village or city, while his nation and country are left him,—nay, the wide, wide world, over which the name of his God, the name of Jesus of Nazareth, is being proclaimed for salvation and peace,—how should, how can he be without desires—desires that turn into heartfelt prayers? When the exhausted powers refuse to work, when activity is no longer possible,

an evening calm sets in, an indolent repose, which, if not enlivened by good desire, is too drear and bare. Such a soul may indeed have many lonely hours by day and night; but if only love keeps warm, it lives not alone, but surrounded, as it were, by innumerable fervent desires of the heart. While youth teems with yearnings of all kinds, it looks for their satisfaction from its own strength and skill. But he whose strength is spent, whose ability for service is past for this world, leaves them absolutely to the grace of God. His heart and mouth, therefore, overflow with prayer; and because he believes in the power of prayer, and that God hears it, his toil in prayer is not in vain.

What swarms of desires venturing, in youth or age, into God's presence! But God is truth and grace. Thus, over all these desires, as they draw near to God, heavenly truth pours its clear light, and the warm breath of eternal love and grace streams towards them. How is it possible that both these should not exert their influence on our desires and prayers? Yea, must not these desires and prayers be in this way transformed and glorified, as it were spontaneously and imperceptibly, provided we are honest and sincere? If anything bearing the taint of sin has crept in among our desires, the simple thought of God's holiness at once drives it not only from our prayer, but from our heart. But even lawful desires, that stand the test of prayer, undergo a notable change. "The first shall be last, and the last

first." These words of the Saviour may be applied to what takes place in us during prayer. How many a petition issues forth which is lifted up by lively self-esteem and self-confidence, and takes a high place in our soul! Then the Lord and Master of prayer draws near. He is gentle and gracious; does not forthwith cast out such petitions, but assigns them a lower place. On the other hand, many a desire is too modest and bashful. It remains, so to speak, in the background of the soul. Then the Lord and Master of prayer draws near, takes it by the hand, and says: "Come up higher, for I am well pleased with thee." The same petitions and desires that entered into prayer, issue again from it, but in reverse order. The first have become last, and the last first. The great essential desires are placed in the position which is theirs by right.

But in another respect prayer effects a change in our desires. Let us make a supposition. A man has an ardent, passionate desire that rules his will, and claims to be lord over his senses and thoughts. When he awakes in the morning it stands by his bed, and it sleeps with him by night. Even while he is busily engaged in his daily work, which lies far enough away from such fancies, and has nothing in common with them, it forces itself violently into his daily thought and care, and says: "Behold, here I am!" Let such a desire find its way into our prayer, and how the prayer swells with excitement! Nay, we need not wonder if the man is bold enough to say: "O Lord,

in this matter let Thy will yield to mine! Let any storm else betide me, if only in this one thing Thou wilt as I will!" Thou rightly condemnest such *violent* prayer. But if thou canst not understand, perhaps not excuse it in another, let me put a question to *thee*: "Didst thou never stand at the death-bed of one dearer to thee than thy own life? Didst thou never see a friend near the pit of destruction? Hast thou never cried aloud to God for thy beloved fatherland, when it hung in extremest peril?" But when such a desire, with all its passion of feeling, forces its way into our prayer, behold, it encounters Him who permits us to address Him as "Our Father in heaven;" and while our heart glows in His presence, while the feeling of His love outshines every other feeling, the assurance is perfected within us, that He loves us truly. And with faith in His love rises and falls in man's breast at the same time filial love to Him. The two may be distinguished in thought, but not in fact, just as little as the light and its rays. The love in which our heart believes, is almighty, all-wise love. To it we commit with confidence everything that deeply stirs our soul. And the more absolutely we let our soul go forth in reliance upon His love and mercy, the brighter the light that broadens over the relation between Him, the Creator, and us, His creatures. Who are we, to think of finding fault with our God? In whose hand is our destiny safest, in our own or in His? In this way the reluctant will submits and grows

calm, and at last we say, although amid sobs and tears: "Thy will, my God, be done!"

Such, then, is the transfiguration of our desires taking place in prayer. With our own wishes and will we enter into prayer, with God's will we go forth from it. But if we rise up from prayer with such a frame of mind, this is by no means the same as a hopeless feeling. No; our hope has only obtained another companion. Formerly, beside our hope always stood our own reluctant will. Now it is accompanied, yea, directed and ruled, by trust in the love of God; and though calmer and more subdued than before, it is still certainly no less cheerful and jubilant. If afterwards brighter prospects as to the fulfilment of our prayer open, with the voice of hope blend the awakening sounds of our thanks and praise; for we thank God not only after reaching the goal, but at every step that we come nearer to it. If at length the fulfilment comes, hope vacates its office; for what we possess we need no longer hope for, and the imploring prayers of the seeker are succeeded by full-toned thanksgiving to the Lord our God. If, on the other hand, in the course of events, the vision of hope becomes dimmer and dimmer, let us indeed only pray with growing urgency and fervour in the same degree in which the gloom deepens around us. But if we observe ourselves more narrowly, we shall be able to hear the chords of another strain commencing within,—those of Christian resignation, of calm, peaceful submission to the will of God. How soft

and low are these notes at first! They would scarcely dare venture forth, did not confidence in God's love compel them. Alas, how we turn from them, seem unwilling to listen to them! for to give ear to them is to renounce all hope of better days. But while it becomes darker and darker around us, those tones are heard more and more plainly; and at last the decisive hour strikes when our earthly hopes are borne to their grave. Then kindles another hope in the soul—hope in the living God and in His salvation, which endures for ever. Then opens within the peace that is not of this world, resting solely on filial confidence in God's eternal love; and in the quiet sanctuary of the heart strikes up a new song, an anthem of praise to the glory of our heavenly Father, who is "excellent in counsel and wonderful in working."

These two great commandments, love to God and love to our neighbour, determine the shape of our life, and therefore of our prayer. These two commandments are united into one,—*love to our Saviour*. This union, the blending of the divine and the human, is the chief import of the work accomplished by our Saviour. By the love shown us He has made it wonderfully easy to love Him in return; and in loving Him we come first to love God and man. In this way He is "the fulfilment of the law." We here enter upon no inquiry as to the relation between faith and works, but simply remark that it is love in which faith and works meet. What would avail the

grandest work, if love were not its soul? What were our faith, if we did not love—if *what* we believe were not also worthy of love? What is the difference between a faith to which the heart is indifferent, and a mere knowledge such as the very powers of hell possess (“The devils believe and tremble,” says James, ii. 19)? And what were hope without love? *This* it is through which the mere expectation of future things rises into hope. And between prayer and love an intimate connection obtains. The more love gains both in depth and large-heartedness, the richer becomes our heart in desires; and the more fervent our desires, the more naturally they pass over into prayers. How comes it that it is often so hard for us to pray with the whole heart, and that we have so quickly done? Because our love is so lukewarm. But when our heart glows with feeling, love drives it with all its desires at once to God, to implore their fulfilment from His “grace to help.” And never is love to God more active than in the act of prayer. While we pray, our soul is lost in the abounding fulness of God’s grace. It is our turning in prayer to God that bears witness to the actual existence of our love to God. Whatever depth of feeling lies dormant within, only comes to its full life and strength by being raised into the consciousness that we are giving expression to it to ourselves and to God. In prayer our love to God grows, and with it grows also our confidence in God’s love.

It is through these two powers, the greatest a

human soul can possess, that the transformation of our desires in prayer takes place. Love to God sheds a transfiguring light on our love to men; every wish we cherish for them thus for the first time acquiring its true meaning and place, and desire for their *souls' salvation* becoming our first and most earnest, though by no means our only desire on their behalf. And what holds good of our desires for the welfare of others, holds good also in reference to ourselves. How can we ever forget the prayer: "O Lord, keep my soul, that it perish not"? Let our soul be fully assured of God's love, and what a blessed influence this assurance exerts! With what gentle violence it curbs the heart's cravings! How it prevails on our soul to yield itself completely to the leading of our heavenly Father! Confidence in His grace renders our love to Him and our labour in His service courageous and bold. In this way not only are our desires and prayers cleansed from all impurity, but it becomes the aim of all God's loved people to receive as their own Him whom they love,—to let Him who is the end of all their prayers—the almighty Creator of heaven and earth—dwell and rule in their hearts.

One characteristic of genuine love is the deep yearning *to pray for those it loves*. It is not otherwise with love to God. But of course we cannot pray for God. Were it not a childish freak of fancy to think of praying to the Almighty for the Almighty? But we pray for God's *name*, for His *kingdom*, for His *will*,

—that His name may be hallowed, His kingdom come, His will done on earth as in heaven. Beyond this the boldest thought cannot rise, however high it soar in prayer. We stop at “Our Father.” Whoever loves forgets himself and all other things in him he loves; and precisely in this act love finds its peace, its satisfaction. The three petitions just referred to imply a forgetting of ourselves and everything else, of our own as of all temporal need and trouble. They imply that our love to God attains its absolute repose in the thought of God’s name, His kingdom, His will. After God, by His majesty and beauty, has won our hearts to love Him, we pray that His name may be hallowed, and thus primarily, not for ourselves or others, but for His name. We pray His kingdom may come, because He Himself is dear to us, whose glory will be thereby revealed. We pray that His will may be done, as in heaven so also on earth, because this good and gracious will has become our joy. Ought not joy in the Lord our God to be powerful enough to make us for a time forget ourselves in it, and to fill our whole heart with love to Him? This is the love that the Saviour, in answer to the scribe, called the greatest command of the law. “Thou shalt love,” said He, “the Lord Thy God with *all* thy heart, and *all* thy soul, and *all* thy mind.” If even earthly love is so vehement, so mighty, that a man forgets himself and his in the beloved one, ought not love to God to be vehement enough to make us forget all else in joy in Him who is our all, and at least while we say

“Our Father,” sink all our thought and feeling in love to His name, His kingdom, His gracious and fatherly will?

But what is it that gives such boldness to our love as to enable us to venture so high in prayer? This is the work of the prefatory words: “*Our Father, who art in heaven.*” Let us say these words in true faith and without shadow of doubt, and how strong and passionate becomes our love, and that through the greatest miracle,—this miracle of miracles,—that the almighty God of heaven and earth has condescended to become our Father, and make us His children.

Some one says: “God’s name is already hallowed, His kingdom will come, His will be done, whether we pray for it or not.” In this there is some truth, but just as much error. Each one of us, no doubt, is merely a drop in the ocean, and the ocean remains the same although I leave it. True, but if all the drops alike were to act thus, the ocean would be gone. Each one of us is a mere leaf in a luxuriant forest. Even if we wither and are blown away by the wind, no one will observe it. True, but if all the leaves wither and are blown away, there will be no more forest. We are members in a great body, each one an individual in a countless host. However secretly we say “Our Father,” our voice is one note in a great anthem, in the great universal prayer that daily ascends to God from the lips of all believers in Christendom. Who will dare to assert

that this common prayer of Christendom is without effect on earth? Who will dare to assert that God's name is already hallowed, His kingdom will come, and His will be done, even if this prayer were silent over the whole earth? No, we do not believe that our prayer is in vain; we stay at our posts, do our work, and say our "Our Father."

In the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer, joy in God and in the glory of His revelations is to fill our heart without limit or reserve. But after love to God has thus found its rest, the thought of the suppliant sinks down to himself and his dear ones, to his nation, to the whole family of nations; and in the selfsame petitions we beseech God that *in us all* His Father-name may be hallowed by our love to Him, that by means of our brotherly love *our fellowship* may become in an increasing degree a type of His kingdom to come, and that *our* will, with all its evil tendencies and passionate desires, may from day to day submit more perfectly to His will, so that we may be His obedient children, placing body and soul with absolute confidence at His disposal. Filial love to God is involved in the first petition, love to our neighbour in the second, devout obedience and childlike submission to God's will in the third. And if we seek therein the mystery of the divine nature, the petition concerning the name relates to the *Father*; that concerning the coming of the kingdom to the *Son*, the founder and exalted

sovereign of the kingdom; finally, that concerning the accomplishment of God's will to the *Holy Spirit*, who sanctifies and endows us with the nature from above.

The prayer descends still lower, to the whole crowd of our petty cares, which although petty may become so wearing and corroding, to our manifold troubles and anxieties, to the restless struggle for existence. We pray God to *give us this day our daily bread*. If we include in this petition all our cravings for the blessings of this life without restriction, certainly nothing is easier than to offer it, for to these man's heart clings only too firmly, and lets them go unwillingly. And how, therefore, should special emphasis fail to be placed upon this petition? But in what precedes we have already treated at length on the position which desires of this class occupy in the sphere of prayer, and therefore will not here enter further upon this question. We are sure that God will bear patiently and indulgently with us, if an earthly craving, either for ourselves or for others, mingles with the utterance of the fourth petition, provided only the hallowing, ennobling influence of prayer breathes over such desires. But if we are thoroughly and solemnly in earnest in using the Lord's Prayer, we must neither add to nor take away from it, but accept all its words as they stand, simply and without gloss. If we thus understand the fourth petition, what an earnest, severe character is stamped upon it! Our desires roam here and

there among the blessings and satisfactions of this life in their endless variety. The petition says: "What pertains to the necessity of this life." Our desires stretch far away into the future, from to-day to to-morrow, from the present year to the next. Yea, we do not even pause beside our grave, for how can we leave out of consideration those whom we leave behind? But the petition says "*this day*," puts a drag on the prayer, and permits it to advance no farther. Thus this petition proves a severe taskmaster to all our desires relating to temporal happiness. What a blessing such a taskmaster may be to us, if the soul is but willing to be corrected! He frees our spirit from all care about what is superfluous, and teaches us contentment. Where lies the source of so much discontent with our lot? In comparing ourselves with others, it seems to us intolerable that others should be better off than we, who fancy ourselves as good as they in every respect. Contentment teaches us to let others enjoy their portion in peace,—in peace even from our covetous desires,—and raises us above the envy that so often poisons our life. And what, again, is the reason that we are so little content with the measure of earthly blessings assigned us? This, that usually our outward condition forms the standard of the consideration that we enjoy among men, so that we appear to rise or fall in their good opinion according as our social position improves or declines. Contentment teaches us to put up even with slight consideration, less influence

among others. It renders us independent of public opinion, for it is a small matter to be judged by men, provided only God judge and reject us not. What further does the fourth petition teach us by its "this day," which bids us ignore whatever lies beyond? It teaches us, if not to renounce care for the future, to renounce and leave to Divine Providence anxious care and solicitude. It teaches us trust in God. If we only allow this petition to enjoy due influence with us and develop its full power, it will arm us with an impenetrable shield against all temporal care. And truly, if we offer this request, and then look round and make a comparison between what we possess and what may reasonably satisfy us, most of us will feel constrained to thank God that His goodness has given us far more than in our "Our Father" we had prayed for.

And the prayer descends still lower, mentioning even our *sins*. But before we proceed farther, it compels us to stand still and give account to ourselves how we are inwardly affected to our neighbour, whether we forgive him all his faults. And only after assuring ourselves that we forgive the wrongdoer, and at least strive earnestly to forget his faults, do we turn our gaze with confidence to past days, and pray God *to forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors*, and then forward to the days to come with all their perils, and pray: "*Lead us not into temptation.*"

The prayer sinks to a lower deep still, beneath

which it is unable to go. It stands face to face with the absolute antithesis to God,—that is, the *Evil One*, the *Wicked One*. All man's sin, indeed, is from the *Wicked One*; but if a man is not in the full sense "a child of destruction," even his sins are intermingled with good powers, powers of eternal life. But here we come to *evil itself*, evil no longer tempered by good,—to the dark, destructive powers of existence, to the ultimate fruit of falsehood and evil, eternal death, eternal destruction,—and, directing our eye of faith to Him who has overcome even the prince of this world, we pray God *to deliver us from the Evil One*.

Herewith the prayer ends. But we believe that in the case of every one who offers it earnestly, a supplement follows, that he adds some words, even if unspoken. In Matthew's Gospel (vi. 13), we read after the last petition: "*For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.*" In Luke (ch. xi.) we do not find these words; and those who are versed in the oldest manuscripts of the New Testament are of opinion that they were not found even in Matthew in the original form of his Gospel, but are a later addition. This addition, however, from the liturgy of the ancient Church, is no arbitrary caprice; for we cannot doubt that whoever earnestly says his "Our Father," will at last bow adoringly in the dust before his Father who is in heaven, and whose almighty, everlasting love is the pledge that all our prayers are heard. Thus the

closing words found in Matthew, and in any case employed in prayer by the Christian Church from its youthful days, have grown out of the soil of the living "Our Father," and at the same time harmonize with the anthem of praise at its beginning.

VIII.

HOW OUGHT WE TO PRAY ?

IN what precedes, this question has been already answered in more than one aspect, on which account we here confine ourselves to a few remarks by way of supplement.

Christ says: "And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, *that they may be seen of men.* Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, *enter into thy closet,* and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (Matt. vi. 5 f.). And in His discourse against the Pharisees and scribes He says that they devour widows' houses, and *make a show of long prayers,* on which account they shall receive greater condemnation (Matt. xxiii. 14, comp. Luke xx. 47). In these days we are scarcely likely to be tempted to pray in order that we may be seen of men, for as a rule prayer does not stand in special esteem. Still, there may be particular circles where this temptation occurs. Christ, of course, does not intend to forbid social prayer in families and

churches, but only commands us never to pray out of regard to this or that person. We have several sayings of Christ, in which He directly emphasizes *fellowship in prayer* as a means of making it effectual (Matt. xviii. 19 f.). Thus both one and the other—social as well as silent, solitary prayer—have the promise of blessing. Whoever is experienced in a life of prayer knows that at times it is indispensable for him to be alone with God, and pour out his whole heart before Him. On the other hand, no community of Christians, either narrower or wider, can dispense with social prayer, which is the natural expression of common Christian life, and one of the strongest bonds of Christian fellowship. Were husband and wife only habitually to accustom themselves to repeat together “Our Father,” how many would learn what a support united prayer is to true love!

How ought we to pray? In the first place, *believing* in the presence of the almighty Father attending to our voice. “But without faith it is impossible to please God; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Heb. xi. 6). Next, we must believe that we *are heard*. James writes (i. 5 f.): “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. *But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.* For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed.”

When the disciples wondered to see the fig-tree wither at the Lord's command, He said to them: "If ye have faith and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig-tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done" (Matt. xxi. 21),—a promise which is nowise to be limited to the miracle-workings of apostolic days, but assures to *every* believing prayer victory over the proudest powers of this world, in virtue of the words which the Saviour adds: "And *all things*, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." These promises, therefore, like all similar ones, we may regard as belonging to us.

At the outset of our observations, we spoke of the right to pray belonging even to the partially-believing or doubting soul. This may be thought to be in contradiction with the Scripture passages just quoted. But the contradiction is only apparent. A child is permitted to creep before it can walk. Walking uprightly is the end, but as a rule it is only learned by creeping. A child is permitted to speak in broken phrases, while the object aimed at is power of clear utterance. But the latter does not come without much stammering and blundering. Doubting prayer presses towards its goal, the prayer of firm, joyous faith.

How ought we to pray? We ought to pray *perseveringly, urgently, imploringly*. The apostle Paul writes: "Joyful in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer" (Rom. xii. 12). "Continue

in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving" (Col. iv. 2). "Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. v. 15, 16). He gives it as a characteristic of a widow, indeed, that she "trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day" (1 Tim. v. 5). And no one gives more emphatic exhortations than our Saviour Himself not to desist or grow weary in prayer. He knew the weakness of man's heart; He knew how readily we despond, and in our despondency shrink from pressing with our requests into God's presence. Therefore, by two parables or narratives, borrowed from daily life, and by no means from its most attractive side, He encouraged the most desponding to persevere and not desist from prayer. I could name more than one owing all their endurance, their boldness in prayer, to these two narratives. The first of these is the more significant, as Jesus uttered it directly after teaching His disciples the Lord's Prayer. "And He said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, *Ask, and it shall*

be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Luke xi. 5-9). The other parable is preserved for us by the same evangelist. "And He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint ; saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man : and there was a widow in that city ; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while : but afterward he said within 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 the Lord 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. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall He find *faith* on the earth ?" (Luke xviii. 1-8.)

The story of the Pharisee and publican praying in the temple is known to all, and to many is perhaps the greatest of all comforts,—the comfort lying in the thought that God hears with approval the sigh, "*God be merciful to me a sinner!*" On this prayer the inward witness that it is heard sometimes follows immediately. Nevertheless, a soul may be left without this witness, and in its perplexity come to say : "God has turned His face from me. I know full well that I am unworthy of His love. He has left my soul to itself, as a tree lets fall the sere

leaf, to be the sport of the winds." But then come these two stories, and say : " True, it may be so. But persevere in prayer. God will hear thee for the sake of thy importunity and persistency, as though at last He were weary of thy asking." How wondrous is God's word ! How low it can stoop ! It knows how to succour a soul in its deepest perplexity and despair. This, therefore, remains an essential requisite in prayer, that it persevere. Yea, God desires it even to be importunate. James had both in mind, urgency and perseverance, when he wrote : " The *fervent*, effectual prayer of the righteous man availeth much " (v. 16).

May we in prayer use "*superfluous words*," against which many a sage warning is uttered ? Before the Lord in the Sermon on the Mount gave the people gathered about Him the Lord's Prayer, He warned them against " much speaking." This might possibly deter us from using any prayer whatever but the Lord's Prayer, which in point of fact embraces everything we need to ask, so that every other prayer might be reckoned as " much speaking," or " superfluous words." But in coming into the presence of our God, —what ! are we drawing near to a lofty, powerful sovereign, who for this reason may, and must, desire us to put our petitions into the fewest possible words ? Or are we not rather pouring out our heart before a Father of whom it is written, " He upbraideth not " (Jas. i. 5), and whose love and goodwill are assured to us in every possible way ? Superfluous words !

Is it not precisely words, liable to be so designated, that contain all the perfume of life? No doubt, where it is a question of ruling and commanding, buying and selling, in the entire sphere of business life, public and private, curt, measured words are in their place. But in the intimacies of friendly converse, in the home, where husband and wife talk together or parents chat with their children, there is room for "much speaking," "superfluous," yea, overflowing words. To place all these under a ban would be at a stroke to banish all life's cheerfulness and all its unconventional ways. A husband has probably told his wife a thousand times that he loves her, that she is dear to him; it is certainly *superfluous* to repeat it so often. But would it not be hard for both if he were never allowed to say it many a time again, yea, as long as he lives? And if a mother has often said to son and daughter, "Thou art my dear child," does she weary of saying, or they of hearing it again? And these, forsooth, are "superfluous" words!

What, then, is the value of superfluous words? Really they are to the soul what its song is to the bird, its perfume to the flower; in them *the heart* pours out its fulness. They are *nothing*, and they are *everything*! They are nothing, for they tell nothing unknown, new, unheard before. They are everything, for they reveal what is deepest in the inner life. They are the same to the soul as respiration to the physical life. Without them all intimate, enjoyable, social life were an impossibility. If we are

to suppress all superfluous words, why not at once suppress laughter, shaking of hands, speaking looks? They are nothing, and they are everything,—for trade and business they are useless. They are everything,—how poor were our life, if one soul might no longer express its friendly feeling, its love, to another!

And if “superfluous words” fill so significant a place in converse between man and man, it is out of the question for us to banish them from the converse of heart between man and his God. Before our heavenly Father our heart must needs pour out its joy, its grief, and every inner impulse, without reserve. We must needs be free to say again the same thing more than once, that is, to repeat ourselves, as the birds in wood and field sing the same song from year to year. And let the number of superfluous words be ever so great, we have a child’s right to speak to our heavenly Father until the longing of our heart to utter itself in words is satisfied, although our Father knows beforehand everything that we need. God will certainly incline His ear to our prayer, as long as *our soul, our heart* is in the words.

After teaching His disciples the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus adds the two narratives, which are meant to show how in the world dogged, untiring persistence, yea, importunity, usually accomplishes what nothing else will; and He employs the instances given for the purpose of urging to *perseverance*. But it is in this persistent, continuous prayer that “much speak-

ing” and even “superfluous words” come into play. When Christ continued all night in prayer to God, before choosing His apostles the next day, even in *His* prayer must not the same words have been often repeated, and still oftener the same thoughts in different words? Let no one put aside this view, as if it asserted something unworthy of Him. How oft, in His last, high-priestly prayer (John xvii.), He repeated the petition for the fellowship and oneness of believers! And does not the same hold good of the prayer in Gethsemane? Let us then rightly understand His warning quoted above. He says expressly: “And when ye pray, use not *vain repetitions*, as the heathen do; for they suppose that they shall be heard for their much speaking.” That saying is meant to describe speaking that is *empty of thought and soul*. The lips move, we hear words; but while words issue forth, the soul is elsewhere. When something is got off *by heart*, it may come to pass that the words, as it were, obtain feet and run forward of themselves, while the speaker’s thoughts stand still, or take their own course, far away from the end and aim of the language, nay, perhaps ramble about in all directions. Many an one learns what he has to say *far too well*. If he is *sure*, conscious to himself, that the right words will present themselves at the right time, he falls into the temptation of, as it were, giving the reins to his tongue, which runs its course without any thinking or willing on his part, while at the same time quite another set

of thoughts is found in his soul. Not without a certain degree of effort does he keep at a distance the inward wandering, which is a stumbling-block, if not to others, yet to the speaker himself. A listener with some delicacy of ear will, however, detect where anything of this kind is present,—the words, with all their accuracy, all their elegance, sound so wondrously empty, hollow, I may well-nigh say spectre-like. If we are engaged in sacred acts, in which the same words recur again and again, as for example in the declaration of the forgiveness of sins in the Confession, in the administration of the Holy Supper, the soul must needs collect all its power in order always to employ the words with all fervour of faith and devotion, without which God can only view His servant with just displeasure. That there may be words empty of thought and spirit, is easily understood. But it sounds strange to say that there may be *thoughts* apart from actual thinking or consciousness, and therefore thoughtless thoughts. We may be repeating to ourselves a discourse, a poem, a prayer, and yet suddenly be surprised to find ourselves thinking all the time of something else. On its surface the ocean-current is illumined by the shining sunlight. Other currents, however, flow far beneath in gloomy depths, where sunbeam never penetrates; others, again, in a twilight of dusky gloom. Let us suppose that there is perpetual alternation, the waters incessantly changing places one with another, now rising to the sunlit surface, now sinking through the

dusky twilight region to the dark depths beneath, and we have an image of the thoughts of a human soul. At the same time, while some thoughts are moving in the full, clear light of consciousness, others may be floating in its twilight regions. We propose to ourselves to go over again in thought what is already part of our mental possessions. But while we are carrying out our purpose, other ideas press into the foreground of consciousness. The train of thought first taken up does not on this account utterly cease. It simply sinks down into a state of semiconsciousness, and moves along in an almost mechanical way. The same thing occurs in certain moods of our senses. For example, we hear and yet hear not, we mishear. The tumult of the busy street strikes on our ear: we hear, but notice it not,—do not direct our attention to it. It therefore makes but a dim impression. That, nevertheless, it does make an impression, we may learn from the fact that if it suddenly stops, and all becomes quiet about us, we notice it. Truths, ideas, words, only become of significance when they are illumined by the full, clear sunlight of consciousness. This holds good of *prayer* as well. When a man prays, and his soul is not in the prayer, it is barren of significance and result. It then becomes the long-drawn, mere mechanical prayer, against which the Saviour warns in the words quoted. Whoever, therefore, would talk of “superfluous” words in prayer, let him say: “Superfluous is every word in which is no soul, no spirit, no beating pulse. Superfluous is no

word in which there is soul, which is spoken 'in spirit and in truth.'" Our Saviour, the great Heart-searcher, who knew so perfectly all human frailties and infirmities, knew how hard it is for us always to follow a familiar train of thought with living, real interest. For this reason He drew up the Lord's Prayer in brief words. We would fain believe that we may be able to collect our thoughts for so brief, so moderate a time as the Lord's Prayer requires. And yet even this may sometimes weary. We are surprised to find how strange, wandering thoughts occur while we are saying "Our Father," whether silently by ourselves, or aloud and in the presence of others. As is well known, Luther called the Lord's Prayer the greatest of martyrs. It requires effort and conflict, lest the rich, eternally fresh blessing bestowed on us in "Our Father" be stolen away by the benumbing influence of custom. But that this may not happen, it behoves us to persevere in our labour of *self-discipline*.

IX.

DECEPTION IN PRAYER.

CAN there be such a thing as deception in prayer? Certainly this is possible. Sin may scatter its dark shadows amid the light of prayer, as over every emotion of man's soul. There may be deception in profession, when a man professes otherwise than he really believes. There may be deception in faith, when we do not love that in which we pretend to believe. Just so there may be deception in prayer, in worship. Let us carefully consider this deception in prayer in its different forms, that we may guard against the danger of forfeiting all the benefits of prayer.

Christ the Lord says: "And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men" (Matt. vi. 5). Is anything of this kind conceivable in our days? In prayer at family worship morning and evening, before and after meals, it may happen that one who takes part in it bows the head, folds the hands, and puts on the appearance of one praying, while inwardly he is busy with other things. It is very far from being his intention to be seen of men.

On the contrary, he wishes to escape their notice, to offend no one, and therefore demeans himself like one engaged in prayer. Would he not blush for shame, if at such a moment a stranger, along with his demeanour, saw also his thoughts? Yet God sees these. But is such a man to acknowledge straight out that he takes no part in joint prayer, and thus cause offence and disturbance? No; he should rather in will join, as well as he is able, in the worship of the one praying, that God may at least recognise this effort on his part, although as yet his prayer is not acceptable in God's sight. Something similar may happen to those who, at the altar or in the pulpit, have to say the Lord's Prayer, or other prescribed prayers. For the sake of those present, the words are repeated in a solemn tone, but without the spirit and mind following the words, which therefore amount to untruth, *i.e.* a deception. By those present who are accustomed to pray this will generally be perceptible, and a cold, heartless prayer spreads a feeling of coldness around. Among the unbelieving, indifferent, spiritually indolent, conduct like this does not surprise us. But sometimes it occurs to an earnest-minded, believing Christian, that all feeling suddenly vanishes from his words, and spiritual sympathy flags, either in consequence of some outward annoyance, or because some strange fancy invades his soul. Yea, it may be that all in a moment a spiritual coldness comes over us, we know not whence, and that with all our effort we are unable

to pray aright. Then has *deception* insinuated itself into our prayer, our words being no longer in unison with our thoughts. Then nothing is left us but the imploring prayer for God to forgive us, and have mercy on our sinful infirmity and imperfection. How deeply humbled we then feel ourselves!

Great is the power of *custom* and habit, and no one can dispense with the support he derives from the influence of a good habit. When we speak of character, what does the word mean, but that our principles of thought, will, and action have grown into fixed habits? Whoever is accustomed to go to God's house every Sunday, will not omit doing so even when his inclination does not lie that way. Experience has taught him that when he omits it once, he is ill at ease the whole day, everything goes wrong with him. Whoever is accustomed, at least once a day, to pour out his heart in prayer, knows that over every day on which he omits it, a chilling cloud, as it were, hangs. But when it happens, as it does sometimes, that one prays without being constrained thereto by pressure of inward feeling, solely in consequence of the power exerted by custom, the result is no real prayer, because, though the words are in the mouth, either aloud or in silence, there is no spirit and faith in the words. If one, in such a case, fancies that he has prayed to God, he *deceives* himself. To have a clear understanding as to our own state, and to be sincere in God's sight, this it is on which everything turns. Let a man, therefore,

first of all confess to himself that he has merely attempted to pray without the attempt succeeding, and then let him earnestly take himself to task to see whether love to God will not again awake in his heart, for wherever this has not become dormant, prayer is certainly active. On the other hand, if we are content with cold, heartless prayer, well satisfied with ourselves, and call this prayer, we go farther and farther away from the blessed sphere of true prayer. Prayer then becomes more and more a matter of routine and profession, loses all connection with the real life, and is only of value in so far as it at least every day recalls the thought of God to our soul, and so, perhaps, arouses it to greater earnestness. Consider how rich would be our heart in good, loving wishes, if every time that we say "Good day," "Good night," to another, it were really the expression of a good wish, and not a mere hackneyed phrase! But now, what such an empty "Good day" is in respect to man, that a cold, mechanical prayer is in God's presence.

Of that worst form of deception, when a man is blinded by sinful passion, and makes prayer the servant of his passion, we spoke in a former place. The presumption and blasphemy of such conduct are so evident, that any further notice of the matter seems needless. But there is another form of *deception*, refined, subtle, disguised, which hinders the growth of the inner life, and thus inflicts serious hurt. It occurs not merely in prayer, but in worship generally.

Let us observe, first of all, how it creeps into public devotion. Some one goes regularly to church, not from any outward motive, or as a mere slave of custom, but because he there feels himself really edified. He enjoys the public singing, joins in it with all his heart. He listens attentively to the sermon, not a word escapes him; he assents to and notes everything. He not only advances in Christian knowledge, but is elevated above petty daily cares into a higher region, and rejoices to breathe a purer air. In leaving the church, he says it has been a grand time, an excellent sermon, he is sure he has been edified. And yet in such worship there may be deception. In what does it consist? *The power of imagination* is one of the strongest faculties of the soul. By its aid we are able to assume moods, feelings, which are ours and yet not ours. The mood is present, but merely in a passing way; the feelings are real, but fleeting. One may be elevated by worship in the same way as by grand music, a classical drama, a splendid painting, a noble statue, the only difference being that in worship it is the religious, and therefore the highest spiritual life that is affected. But is it not improving, ennobling, for an ideal, the highest life of spirit to be excited within us, even if it be but a fleeting state, and is directly afterwards merged in the routine of daily life? Of course we own this to be true. Just as we thoroughly concede to human reason the right to investigate the mysteries of existence, yea, of Godhead itself, although

Christianity long ago settled these questions, and that in a more rational way than human reason, so we are very far from unconditionally rejecting the activity of fancy, the power of imagination. And we are not here thinking of the mere tricks it plays with the images conjured up by itself. It has also the wonderful gift of being able to transfer the revelations of God with all the force of life from the past to the present, so that we live over again to-day what took place in former ages, and behold in spirit the perfect image of our Saviour as He walked upon earth. Thus even an act of worship, called forth by the vivid intuitions of imagination, may have its value, in so far as by this means divine truths, saving doctrines, may be set in clearer light, and, so to speak, come nearer to us,—in so far as by this means moods and feelings are induced in which the mysteries of our faith are reflected as in a mirror. To many, though by no means to all, this may even be a necessary stage in their course of Christian progress. But if our worship remains of this character, *deception* creeps in softly and gradually, and God's house becomes a theatre, in which, instead of seeking our soul's salvation and peace, we seek the highest form of spiritual *gratification*. But the Lord our God is a jealous God, and will not endure other gods beside Himself; and this holds good also of the practice of piety, of prayer, and devotion. It is not enough, then, for our *thinking* faculty to give assent to what we hear, and our *feelings* to experience a

certain elevation by the touching of a congenial chord. There must be something more, if deception is not to mingle with our devotion. This something is the *will*. True devotion only exists when it fills and pervades the entire man. It is not enough for thought and feeling to bend to it. It lays its embargo on the will also, seeks to rule and hallow this. Let a man continue a long time to sever his moral volition from his devotion, and his devotion will imperceptibly be more and more enveloped in lying and deceit, however such a man may feel himself elevated, touched, and edified,—in however lofty tones, without intention to deceive, he may magnify the *grand* times he spends in God's house. The will—the morally decided, sanctified will it is which throws a bridge over the broad gulf between the church and worldly life. The earnest will it is which conducts the thoughts and feelings of devotion into our everyday thoughts and acts, which alone causes the devotional spirit to leave its stamp, its impress, on the whole of the trivialities, any one of which, indeed, by itself seems very trifling, but which, taken together, make up, so to speak, the entire sum of life. But where moral will is not moved by devotion to living, healthy activity, there devotion degenerates into mere religious *gratification*, a feasting upon ideas and feelings. What is to be done? When any one feels himself edified, let him test himself and see whether his will has been influenced, whether he has formed new resolves, or whether he has even been confirmed

in his old inclinations and habits. Moreover, an earnest Christian comes not to God's house to criticise, either to praise or find fault with what is there placed before him, but rather by its means to sit in judgment on himself. Yea, he brings his whole course of thought and feeling, all his daily words and acts, his soul and personality,—places all this, and thus *his whole self without reserve*, beneath the Word that he hears or sings with the church, and from the Word gladly receives instruction, rebuke, and correction. He prays: "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth."

On these principles it might seem as if *moral sermons*, so called, were to be preferred far above all others, because their simple, direct aim is to guide men's volition and conduct. Certainly it cannot be denied that, whereas the preaching of an age now past dwelt by preference on moral truths, and busied itself with the duties of daily life, that of the present often drops these too much out of view, and loves most to linger amid the lofty dogmas of faith. But it is possible for any one to listen to such moral preaching with pleasure, feel himself elevated and edified thereby, without on that account forming the determination to direct himself or his life by what he hears. Many an one enjoys the sight of a noble deed passing before him in the theatre, nay, is moved to tears, who would be greatly astonished, nay, think it ridiculous, to be exhorted to apply this scenic emotion at once to his conduct. So, in the feeling of devotion awakened

in us by a good practical sermon, deception may entwine itself. Here, therefore, to guard against all mistake, let it be recalled to mind as briefly as may be, that, above all, everything turns on our spiritual state as a whole, on this being governed by living faith, on our praying in faith for power and willingness to do what we acknowledge to be right. If inclination and will are only directed to the Saviour, united to Him in faith and love, the man easily finds his way amid the manifold duties, emergencies, and temptations of life.

But then the deception, indicated as possible in respect to worship or edification, may also exist in prayer. Among all spiritual satisfactions, there is none to be compared in the remotest degree with the joy with which prayer inspires us. Whoever is able to sound the depths of joy in prayer, is happy whatever lot in life befall him, and however deeply he may feel the pressure of affliction and care. Hence it is in this respect a great *calamity* for any nation when it is robbed by the spirit of the age of the blessing of prayer; and at the same time the countless hosts of mourners and troubled hearts lose their best consolation. Nevertheless, if a worshipper place all the emphasis on this consolation, this joy, this spiritual satisfaction, *deception* again steals into prayer. If our prayer is to be genuine, we must pray with full surrender of soul, and devotion of all our powers. Never must our moral obligations, our *volition*, what we do and leave undone, be ignored, as something

beside the question, beyond the province of prayer. But the deception consists in this, in fancying that we surrender our soul to God, while retaining our will, and therefore the very heart of our life and impulses, within our own power. In this way an opposition springs up between our life in prayer and our life *outside* prayer. It is true that if there were no opposition whatever in this respect, we should be already free from all sin, we should be holy and happy. But for the very reason that conflict and effort are requisite in order to overcome that inner contradiction altogether, it is all-important for will and conscience to be watchful, stand on their guard, and especially to take their part in the life of prayer. Only thus does prayer obtain its full blessing. If we desire God to be with us and hear us, then must *our own will*, instead of being against us, really *desire* what we pray for. We must, so to speak, lend help to our prayer. Without this active co-operation on our part, our prayer loses truthfulness, and we *deceive* ourselves. How can we pray sincerely "*Thy will be done*," while tacitly reserving our own will in one or another respect? How can we say to our God, "*Hallowed be Thy name*," while ourselves unwilling to provide a sanctuary for His name in the feeling of true love to Him, our Father in heaven? or, "*Thy kingdom come*," when we do not labour unweariedly to make our heart and home an image of that kingdom, though certainly we know that the image always remains imperfect and feeble? Can

we sincerely say the prayer, "*Give us this day our daily bread,*" when we do not labour for *our* bread diligently and contentedly, or when, enjoying our bread, we do not also remember our neighbour, are unwilling to stretch a helping hand to the needy? What can our heavenly Father think of the prayer on our lips, "*Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,*" while His eye discerns in our heart old-established hates and new risings of passion, which we carefully nurse and cherish as though they were precious treasures? And whoever rushes into temptation, whoever places his will at the service of the evil powers of life, whether in great or small concerns,—for even in apparently insignificant things we may serve the Evil One,—can such an one without self-deception pray, "*Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*"? The proof that there has been no deception in our prayer is always this, that we go forth from it with new moral impulses, with confirmed will and sincere resolve to be co-workers in the answering of our prayer. God keep us from the *self-deception* of a deceitful heart, from all falsehood, as well in everyday life as in the sanctuary!

X.

THE ANSWER OF PRAYER. THE NAME OF JESUS.

WHOEVER lives in the world of prayer is firmly convinced that prayer is no weak, vain matter, that there is such a thing as its being answered. If a man merely makes excursions into that world now and then, only flying to prayer in extreme need as a last resource, all other means nearer at hand having been exhausted, in such a way (as it were *en passant*) he will scarcely gain an experience that will serve as the basis of firm conviction. If his petition is fulfilled, he will, as a rule, forget to return thanks. If it is not fulfilled, he will not feel called upon to repeat so fruitless an experiment. Quite otherwise is it with those into whose daily life prayer enters as an inseparable ingredient. Even these, indeed, not seldom find that their requests are *not* granted. But they are not the less convinced that many of their desires have been fulfilled only *because* they made them matter of prayer to God. Against the correctness of this conviction all sorts of objections may perhaps be raised. Some one may advance and contend for the position that "the fulfilment of wishes is in no sense God's work, but that of accident of one kind or another." Personal con-

viction of the power and influence of prayer can only be gained by a man who himself lives in prayer. It is only attainable in the same way in which one becomes convinced of the love of another, namely, by *living along* with him. And a proof that we are not the victims of any form of self-deception, is afforded us in the harmonious testimony of all those who from the beginning to the present day have been thoroughly versed and experienced in the world of prayer. Every actual experience of prayer is a Yea and Amen to the promises of the Lord, to His positive declaration that God hears prayer. He said: "*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened. For every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocks it shall be opened*" (Matt. vii. 7 f., comp. xxi. 22; Luke xi. 9 f.). When describing the woe falling on the whole Jewish nation at the destruction of Jerusalem, He says to His disciples: "And *pray* ye that your flight be not in the winter. For in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be" (Mark xiii. 18 f.; Matt. xxiv. 20 f.). Here, therefore, the Saviour charges His disciples to pray for a mitigation of impending calamities. Would He have so charged them if there were no answering of prayer? When He saw the people, and had compassion on them because they were faint and scattered, like sheep without a shepherd, He said

to the disciples: "The harvest is great, but the labourers are few. *Pray ye the Lord of the harvest, that He would send forth labourers into His harvest*" (Matt. ix. 36-38, comp. Luke x. 2). Would the Lord have made such a prayer binding on us if He had deemed it unmeaning? Finally, He assured His people that where two or three of them agree to ask anything, it shall be done for them of their heavenly Father, and then adds: "*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*" (Matt. xviii. 19 f.). Whoever believes in the Saviour at all, has along with faith in the truth of His sayings the pledge that God answers prayer.

On the other hand, where such faith, such confidence exists not, it is inevitable that all kinds of doubting thoughts should arise in regard to prayer being answered. While we cannot pass by the objections of unbelief in entire silence, faith need not be too sensitive in our days to the rough blasts of doubt. But it is said: "Let any one rightly consider who God is, and what a child of man is. Does it not seem puerile to believe that the prayer of a child of man can influence the determinations of God, the Almighty, All-loving, All-wise?" As if like things were not done times innumerable and every day! Do we not see that every wise yet loving-hearted mother allows a little ignorant child to influence her decisions—a child that is not even able to make known its requests by words, but only by tears, by stretching out its tiny hands, by those

tones so strangely endearing, or in any other way? Between mother and child there is *a secret of love*; and the same secret of mutual converse and communion exists between God and the soul that loves Him. On the ground and in virtue of this secret, we believe in the power of prayer.

But it is perhaps objected that between God and man is an immeasurable difference. If the mother knew the child's wish, and thought the thing wished would do it good, she would grant it without waiting to be asked. Therefore will the all-merciful God fulfil the longing of man's heart, without waiting to be asked. Prayer, then, is needless. But it is by no means certain that a wise mother would so act, at least not in all cases. She would most likely wait to see whether the little one put its request into words. By the act of asking we learn humility, we learn the fact of our dependence on others. Just so the Lord God may deem it best not to fulfil our desire before we draw nigh to Him in prayer; for He foresees a gain to our soul in its humbling itself before Him in prayer, and appealing to Him with the same confidence as a child to father or mother.

In another respect, also, it may be good for us to obtain blessing only on condition of our praying, not otherwise. We are unable to see God's hand dispensing to us every good gift, and on this very account are in danger of resting in our strength and skill, or in the communicative kindness of others, or even in chance, as the supposed giver. But when,

on the other hand, an earnest desire is fulfilled, after we have brought it in humble supplication before God, we take the good gift from the gracious hand of God now revealed to us; we learn *thankfulness*, and our love to God gains fresh impetus.

Far be it from us to suppose that we are able to penetrate into God's mysteries. Still, it seems to us that the foregoing simple considerations suffice to show how the fulfilment of a wish, which otherwise would be hurtful, may turn to blessing as the result of our childlike prayer, and that on this account it is consistent with God's love and wisdom to give when we pray, and not to give when we are unwilling to pray; in other words, that by divine appointment power dwells in prayer to call down from heaven what we pray for,—in short, that there is such a thing as an answering of prayer.

The spirit of doubt raises special difficulty in regard to the efficacy ascribed to *intercession*. Here the one who prays, and the one who is to gain something by the divine answer, are not one and the same person. Is it right, then, for a man's destiny, God's counsel and government, so to depend on my prayer, that some one will either share in a blessing, or not, according as I do or do not pray for him? For although we do not directly ascribe the result to intercession,—this rests in God's hand,—at all events we do ascribe some influence to it, if intercession is to retain any meaning. But if we consider the objection further, we shall see that it by no means

affects intercession only, but has a far wider bearing. It affects withal human freedom in general, and all free activity. If God is really almighty, the universal Ruler, and everything is determined by His will, how can man's will retain its freedom? how can there be such things as human responsibility, sin, and guilt? We do not believe that any one has hitherto succeeded in solving satisfactorily this problem of our being, or in fully clearing up the great, apparently inexplicable contradiction that here confronts our thoughts, and we shall not venture to make a new attempt of this kind here. But both lie peacefully side by side in universal consciousness, in our conscience,—on one side the conviction of God's absolute omnipotence, on the other that of man's freedom; for as prayer rests on the certainty that we have in heaven an almighty Father, so, too, the indestructible voice of conscience testifies that man's will is free. God's existence and man's freedom of will are the two great, immoveable facts of human consciousness. The full sense of this freedom and the inner consciousness of it no doubt become enfeebled directly one gives himself up to the domination of sin. The certainty of God's presence and existence dies away in proportion as one cuts off his soul from the sacred world of prayer. But a man also makes shipwreck of the truth by giving license to the understanding—in order by the exercise of his understanding to solve the contradiction mentioned—to deny one or other of those fundamental truths,

truths which are alone able to shed a clear light upon our own nature and the origin of all existence. But although the solution of the contradiction transcends our *understanding*, we are not on this account to despair of such a solution, but remit it to our *will*. The more we train our will to obedience and subjection to God's will, the more His will becomes ours; the more His life by means of the power of love passes into our life, so much the nearer we come to a solution of the paradox, although not primarily for the mere understanding, yet certainly for the whole of our inner life. The actual solution of the contradiction between divine determination and human freedom is not the task of the grovelling understanding, but the *end and aim of the divine government itself*; and for this end He sent His only-begotten Son. Hell remains as the remnant of the unsolved contradiction; for although even hell is subject to God's almighty power, His will is not the governing power in the souls of its inhabitants.

Accordingly there is no greater difficulty in supposing that intercession may exercise an influence on the destiny of a man, than in conceding the significance belonging to all man's free acts in this respect. On thee it depends whether a man shall receive such and such deeds of kindness. Thou art free master of thy decisions. According as thy will leans to one side or the other, this man's lot will probably be different. In the same way, by our intercession also we are able to influence another's condition, although the

way and mode in which this is done is of course to us veiled in darkness.

Through *command* and *prayer* a mutual intercourse of two lines of will takes place between God and man. God's will addresses itself to us in the form of command, because He is the Creator. Our will addresses itself to Him in the form of prayer, because we are His creatures. And yet, despite this difference, vaster than the difference between heaven and earth, there is similarity between the two, namely, as regards the character and impress borne by the manifestations of will on both sides; for the command springs from *His love*, just as prayer does from *our love*.

Wherefore, O man, dost thou really pray for one dear to thee? Supposest thou that of you both, God loves only thee? that He has such a special love to thee, that on this account thy prayers will avail to procure from Him what His fatherly love alone was not disposed to give? Supposest thou that His love needs to be first softened by thy intercessions? or, still more, that His wisdom stands in need of thy counsel and advice? To such questions I answer, "No!" But I know that just as the Lord God has so ordered it on earth, that we one need the other in order to the reciprocal sweetness of life, so He has ordained as a condition of a richer effusion of blessing, that we *pray* one for another. The amount of blessing upon earth is lessened, both by our being found wanting in mutual love, and still more by our neglecting intercession; for God's will is that all

the conditions ever ordained by Him shall find their satisfaction. And why may the Lord have established such conditions?—In order that, when our soul draws nigh to God for its own needs, we may never forget our obligation of mutual love, and that this love may be consecrated and purified by prayer. So close did intercession lie to His heart, that He even made it impossible for us to repeat the Lord's Prayer without praying for others. And behold how high the gifts and prerogatives God has bestowed on love! Even the most helpless of creatures, by its prayer, by its sympathizing intercession, is able to help others; for it is not God's will that love shall be ineffectual anywhere and ever, in any of its manifestations. I pray for another, not because I deem myself better, or suppose that God loves me more than him, but because this child of man is dear and precious to me, and I wish him God's blessing. And it will be an unspeakable comfort to my heart to know that brother or sister does the same for me. It is true that I know not how and in what way my intercession will be of advantage and prove a blessing to another. God is acquainted with the secret ways, and to Him the mode even of this form of help is known. Would Christ the Lord have called upon us by word and example to pray for others if intercession were nought? See we not the God of heaven and earth yielding to an Abraham, when he prays for Sodom and Gomorrah, though his prayer becomes bolder and bolder, rises higher and higher? The Canaanitish

woman intercedes for her daughter, and she is healed. The centurion prays for his servant, and is heard. These facts demonstrate the power of intercession. They are and remain examples of what might and ought to take place every day.

To the facts adduced we add, further, two remarkable statements of Scripture. James, in his epistle, writes: "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him" (v. 14 f.). The Greek Church reads in these verses a command universally binding, and carries it out literally in cases of sickness. The Romish Church even founds upon it its doctrine of the indispensableness of extreme unction. We Protestants find in the passage, indeed, a reference to special circumstances of those times. Still, our public prayer for the sick may be regarded as a carrying out of this injunction. The apostle John writes in his first epistle: "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death" (v. 16 f.). It is self-evident that if we *knew* of any soul that it is lost, we should not pray for it; for if the final sentence had notoriously been passed, our prayer would avail

nothing. In opposition to God's final decree we could not pray; we should then assume to be wiser than God. But that any one is lost for ever, we can never infer from any of his visible acts. Can we conceive a greater sin than the crucifixion of Jesus? And yet Jesus prayed for those who crucified Him. Without doubt the apostle John and those contemporary with him possessed such discernment, such clearness of spiritual vision, that they were able to see whether any particular sin stamped the death-brand on a soul. Such discernment scarcely exists in our days; and we may be assured that God will forgive us, if, out of compassion, we should pray for a soul whose inevitable condemnation His eye foresees. Thus, without losing ourselves in subtleties, we are able, from the two Scripture passages just quoted, directly to gather the truth that our believing, loving intercession for our neighbour has its significance and effect, both as respects his temporal and his spiritual needs.

Experience certainly teaches us that all our prayers and intercessions are by no means fulfilled. Sometimes our supplication seems altogether fruitless; sometimes it is granted, but in quite a different shape from what we had conceived. But afterwards it comes about, often in a short time, that we heartily rejoice at the non-success of our petition; for we see subsequently how God had far wiser purposes than we in our desires and petitions, and that He directed our life into far better channels than we ourselves

had imagined and thought best. Were God always to answer us, He would many a time give us a stone for bread, and a serpent for fish; for we know not how to pray as we ought, and often in our shortsightedness take a stone for bread, a serpent for fish (Matt. vii. 9-11). Certainly we do not attain this insight in all cases, and then we think of our unfulfilled wishes with a sigh. But, summing up all our experiences in one view, we reach the conviction, first, that by our prayers—intercession included—we have obtained much that otherwise we should not have obtained; and again, that even unfulfilled petitions have been a blessing to us. How refreshing and comforting merely to be permitted to speak to the Lord our God! And if we do not gain exactly the blessing we ask, we yet gain what in reality we prayed for,—good things, and what tends to our peace; instead of the coveted temporal blessings, we gain far better,—spiritual and heavenly blessings, and nearly always the best and greatest of all blessings, joy in our heavenly Father and the peace of God, through which we are conquerors in all things, even in the sorest want. We never retire from prayer with empty hands, even in those darkest hours of conflict, when we seem forsaken of everything and every one, even of God, and are therefore unable to pray aright.

Is there, then, no prayer on whose fulfilment we can reckon with perfect certainty? Yes, every prayer on which we can truthfully inscribe *the name of Jesus* shall be fulfilled. With this mediatorial name is

linked the assurance that we are heard. Jesus said : “ And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, *Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you.* Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name : ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs; but the time cometh, when I shall speak to you no more in proverbs, but I shall show you plainly of the Father. At that day 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, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God ” (John xvi. 23–27). “ And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it. If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever ; even the Spirit of truth ; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him : but ye know Him ; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you ” (John xiv. 13–17). “ Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain ; that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, He may give it to you ” (John xv. 16).

In order to pray in Jesus' name, certainly it is not enough merely to take this all-prevailing name on the

lips when we say our prayers. It remains but a hollow sound, if in the soul of the worshipper there is no condition corresponding with the name that we confess. This it is which the Saviour Himself emphasizes when He says: "*If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you*" (John xv. 7). Of this, too, the apostle John says: "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment, That we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment. And he that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him. *And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us*" (1 John iii. 21-24).

When, therefore, do we really present our prayer in Jesu's name? When we abide in God, when prayer wells from a soul permeated by love, faith, and hope; for such prayer is *the work of the Holy Spirit*. "We have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but we have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Rom. viii. 15 f.). When the Holy Spirit can bear witness, say Amen to our petitions, then are we heard. This truth may perhaps be still

more simply set forth as follows. What is it really to say: *We pray in Jesu's name?* We ask in Jesu's name, when we come as His messengers, with His commission, in His cause, He Himself having given us full authority to utter the requests, and opened the way of access to the throne to which we draw near. When our petition comes as a message, a greeting from Jesus Himself, we are able to utter it in prayer before our heavenly Father, and we are justified in the confidence that almighty God will be propitious to our prayer. This confidence of ours rests not on ourselves and our merits, but alone upon the grace of Jesus Christ and the atonement accomplished through Him. But then, when we begin to make known our hearts' desires before God, are there not very many of them of which we can by no means assert that they are distinct messages, mandates, greetings from Jesus Himself? Are we justified in bringing such petitions in Jesu's name before God? Yes, if only we pray in simplicity and sincerity. In our prayers, a "change of water into wine" is perpetually going on, and our desires are so consecrated and regenerated that they acquire a new form. Burning, passionate desires learn to bow their stiff necks before God, and give place to His holy will. If to all our requests we add in heart, "*Not my will but Thine be done,*" then can we pray in Jesu's name, then comes our request as a messenger from the Saviour; it comes in very deed in childlike submission to God's will. Such a prayer is always

granted, whether the desire in its original meaning and form receive on high a Yea or a Nay.

“Thou hast prayed,” says some one to the Christian, “and received nothing. I have not prayed, and also have received nothing. Tell me then, *what* good has thy praying done thee? Is not our condition the same? What difference is there between us?” An immeasurable difference, though it may not be perceptible without! I have received the solid spiritual gain and saving results of prayer, God’s secret Amen, His answer: of all this thou knowest nothing. Thou tracest the shipwreck of thy wishes and plans back to dark, iron, implacable destiny, or to capricious chance: I accept my lot from God’s gentle father-hand. What comes from Him is all sweet, even the refusal of an ardent wish, provided we receive this kindly-meant fatherly Nay in a simple, childlike spirit.

There is but one prayer whose fulfilment remains sure, certain beyond all doubt, even if we do not expressly add this assurance or the final Amen. That is the Lord’s Prayer. But in this prayer it is said in so many words: “*Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven.*” This sentence rules all our petitions, and brings them into obedience to God. If we offer the Lord’s Prayer in harmony with its entire purport and spirit, praying for the glorifying of His name, the coming of His kingdom, the accomplishment of His holy counsel and will,—if, further, in “*us*” we include the entire race of our brethren,—in

other words, so pray that our prayer embraces heaven and earth, then may we rest secure in the assurance that our prayer is answered, and that even our prayer, poor and feeble as it is, co-operates in God's great work. But we may also so say the Lord's Prayer, that in it we keep in view chiefly ourselves or a particular person. In this case the fulfilment of our prayer depends on the degree in which we ourselves—or these others, every one according to his ability—acquiesce, and so far co-operate therein. God's grace is forced upon no one. It must be accepted and welcomed freely. Jesus once said to the apostles: "If the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you" (Matt. x. 13). Our intercession, too, with its blessing, returns to us, if he for whom we pray declines to share and co-operate therein.

Why do we pray to our God? Well, why are we glad to converse with one dear to us? I suppose, just because he is dear to us. And we pray to God because we love Him. Prayer is a natural outflow of this love. If love declines, prayer withers and dies. The more fervent our love, the more earnest our prayer, and we are then no longer able to compress it into few words. "When the heart is full, the mouth runs over." But is it also a *duty* to pray? If it is a duty to love God, and we love Him, then we pray to Him, and withal regard our prayer as the dearest blessing of our life, which we would not be without for all the glory of the world. But *how*

often or *how long* any one should pray, as to this we lay down no law. Better pray less and from a sincere heart, than often and long with secret self-deception. But of this there can be no doubt, that at least once a day we ought to pray so fervently and earnestly to God as to lay bare our whole soul in His holy presence; nor of this, that we should begin and close our day with the Lord's Prayer. But if, as right-minded Christians, we live a real life of prayer, prayer will often emerge in the course of the day, and that spontaneously, without set purpose, without fixed rule. Amid our busy toil, in the disquietude of the day, the thought of God will rise in the soul, and ascend to Him as a silent sigh and petition. Just as the image of those we love presents itself unbidden, even while we are engaged with altogether different things, and as it were, fleeting past, casts on us a kindly, benevolent glance, so frequently the love of God is realized in our hearts, and reminds us that it is ever near, that in it we live and move and have our being. Blessed be the day that is visited by these hasty, spontaneous prayers, elevating the soul in an instant, that, refreshed and invigorated by these greetings of Heaven, it may carry on its daily work in a more joyous spirit; that this daily work itself, however humble the name it bears, may be illumined by the gentle light of God's love. Genuine prayer will never withdraw us from appointed tasks, but, on the contrary, impel us to the conscientious discharge of all particular duties, small and great alike.

Such days of blessing and peace, however, come not by chance and as matter of course. They are the fruit of faithful, earnest toil in our calling *in* and *with* prayer. If our life moved along through an unbroken series of such days, how it would be sustained by the power of prayer ! how that great saying, "*Pray without ceasing*" (1 Thess. v. 17), would be more and more completely fulfilled by a walk in the abiding presence of God ! In this the Lord Jesus is our Lord and Master, our example and model, the Author and Finisher of faith and a life of prayer. As the heavens arch over the earth, so ought prayer to rule our whole life and illuminate all we do, penetrating even into the darkest recesses of our heart. And as the heaven encompasses the great waters and is reflected in them, so over the soul of the suppliant will God's eternal heaven stretch on every side, so that the soul will receive into itself impressions of eternal truth, and reflect them again in clear and faithful outline. "If ye then be risen with Christ," writes Paul in the Epistle to the Colossians (iii. 1-4), "seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." The healthy soul yearns after its true life, yea, its source of life ; but this is hid with Christ in God. Therefore does the soul reach forth to God in prayer. And if we

are one day to appear in glory, when Christ, our life, shall appear, in prayer this glory already gleams upon us, and a reflection of it is seen in the calm peace of soul which accompanies our earthly wandering. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" (John i. 51),—a promise that is fulfilled in the life of every true follower of the Son of man. Therefore the apostle is able to exhort Christians: "*Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice*" (Phil. iv. 4).

In the world above, also, prayer will not be dumb. The still contemplation of the face of God and His glory will break out into psalms of thanksgiving and anthems of praise. If, then, we have nothing more to desire for ourselves, our intercessions will ascend for the poor children of men still suffering and struggling upon earth, especially for those who have personally stood in near and dear relations to ourselves. In the Revelation of John it is written: "And when He (the Lamb) had taken the book, the four beasts and four-and-twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, *which are the prayers of the saints*. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests; and we shall reign on the

earth. And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four-and-twenty elders fell down and worshipped Him that liveth for ever and ever" (v. 8-14). "And another angel 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 hands" (viii. 3 f.). "And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye His servants, and ye that fear Him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth" (xix. 5 f.).

Grant, merciful God, that our voices may one day help to swell this heavenly anthem!

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