





THE MIRACLES OF PRAYER.

A

SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY,

IN THE

CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF CHRIST, IN OXFORD,

ON SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY, 1866.

BY THE REV.

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JOHN HENRY AND JAMES PARKER, OXFORD,

AND 377, STRAND, LONDON ;

RIVINGTONS, WATERLOO PLACE, LONDON,

41, HIGH STREET, OXFORD, AND 19, TRINITY STREET, CAMBRIDGE.

1866.

THE HISTORY OF PLYMOUTH

BY
W. H. STUBBS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
J. H. STUBBS

AND A HISTORY OF THE
PLANTATIONS IN THE WEST INDIES

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PRINTED AT THE PRINTING PRESS OF THE DEVONPORT SOCIETY.

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S. MATT. XXI. 22.

“All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.”

CAN man change the mind of God? Will God, on the prayer of man, change any part of that wondrous order which He has impressed upon His fair visible creation?

I seemed to myself to be but putting the questions, which perplex the minds (I must say) of those who do not pray; and see, I am at once plunged in the mysteries of man's free-will, and as to that course of mysterious tokens of God's presence which we call miracles. I did not mean it. Yet so are God's ways towards us interwoven together, even because He is our Father and our Creator and we are His children, that what is said of one effect of this our blessed relation necessarily has bearings upon others. Objectors meant only to touch upon one subject of prayer. Yet one could not formulise their objection, without being carried off into those other mysteries of man's free-will in the presence of God's absolute and eternal knowledge, and of God's wondrous doings in the material world, whether it comports with the wisdom

of God that He should change ought in His own creation. And so perhaps God would bring us back from hard and abstract questions to the gracious experience of every-day life, and would give us the solution of our difficulties, in what we may ourselves see, touch, handle, experience, know.

First then, in effect, God does through man's acts become other to him than He was before.

The voice of conscience echoes the voice of God's law, that we sinners, while we remain sinners, are the objects of God's displeasure. Conscience cries aloud, enforces it; she reiterates it, when silenced; she awakens in agony, when she has been stupefied; and, even when deadened and buried under accumulated sin, she lives anew by a spiritual resurrection. When our Lord's voice of power, "Lazarus come forth," has penetrated the dead soul, and with penitence for its own ingratitude, has infused love for its Redeemer, and He, by Himself or by His minister, has said, "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee," the soul knows and feels that its relation to God and God's relation to it are changed.

And for our second question, observe that this change itself cannot be without prayer. The first voice is of Jesus to the soul, "Come unto Me, thou weary and heavy laden, and I will give thee rest;" the second is of the soul to Jesus, "Lord, save me; I perish." Still the relation of the soul to God is changed. Had it perished in its sins it must have been shut out for ever from the presence of God, hating God and the object of His malediction; "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." Now, God is its Friend, its Counsellor, its Illuminer, its

Engracer, its Indweller. Plainly the fact that Jesus did first speak to the soul, shews that the soul, although at enmity with God, a desolator of His creation, a denier (perhaps in theory too, but in practice certainly) of Himself, too proud or too enslaved to endure the "perfect freedom" of His ennobling service, a destroyer,—through passions of the flesh, which bowed it in the mire, or by propagating in its pride lessons of rebellion against Himself—a murderer of souls for whom Christ died—that soul must still have been in some sense an object of God's love and care. For, had it finally rejected God and been rejected by God, it could not have received that converting grace, which at last overwhelmed its resistance and brought the Prodigal son back to the outstretched Arms of his Redeemer. Still the returned soul knows, that not only is its whole self changed towards God, but that the relations and actions of God towards it are also changed. That unknown calm which spreads over the soul, that inward sweetness of Divine consolations, what betoken they, but that his Father has beheld him and had compassion and fallen on his neck and kissed him? He has received the kiss of peace. Before, God, except in merciful dispensations of His displeasure or soon-rejected solicitations of His grace, or His common benefits towards His creation, which might from without bear witness to Himself, was, as if there were no God. Now, all the treasures of His love, His grace, are open to it. The soul is united to its indwelling God.

And this change has often been wrought by Jesus through the prayers of others. Such is the love of God towards us, such the dignity which He bestows

upon us, to be co-operators with Himself, that man's fervent cry for others who never pray for themselves, inspired by Himself, upheld by His own grace of "hope against hope," obtains that last first grace which won the hitherto obdurate rebel to Himself.

God's word guarantees this, when it bids us pray "for all men," because God "^a will have all men to be saved." God's word is justified in act by the known instances of those whose souls He has saved through prayers which He Himself inspired. Witness he, the great teacher of the Church till now, of whom, though unknown in the flesh and known only through the eminence of his rebellion, it was said; "^b it is not possible that the son of those tears should perish;" who himself, when converted, owned himself to be the fruit of those nine years' unbroken, unfaltering prayers of his mother St. Monnica ^c, who lived for his conversion and, when this object of her being was accomplished, yielded up her own soul to God ^d.

Which are greatest, the miracles of nature or the miracles of grace? which is the greatest interference (to use man's word), to change passive unresisting nature, or man's strong, energetic, resisting will, which God Himself so respects, that He will not force the will, which He has endowed with freedom, that it might have the bliss, freely to choose Himself? Which is the mightiest noblest work, to condense, if so be, the operations of nature, and change the water into wine, without the intervening process of its passing through the vine, or to change the wolf into

^a 1 Tim. ii. 1-4.

^b St. Aug. Confess. iii. end.

^c Conf. ix. 8. and other places quoted ib. p. 169. n. n. Oxf. Tr.

^d Ib. 10, 11. pp. 175, 6.

the lamb, the blasphemer and constringer to blaspheme into the Apostle, the persecutor of Jesus in His disciples, into him to whom to live was Christ and to be crucified with Christ, who became the servant of all, that he might win the more to Christ and to life? or again to change the slave of degrading passion, its fires yet unspent, into the saint; the spirit, entangled in the wild God-degrading fanaticism of the Manichees into the clear God-enlightened teacher and oracle of the Church, now for 1400 years?

Or again, to take the greatest miracle in the province of nature, which is greatest,—to recall into the body the departed soul, to re-animate it again for some few years and then again (except in the case of our Lord) to depart from it until the Resurrection at the Great Day, or to transform the soul, dead in its sins, into the life of God, to gain for it a life which shall never die, a brightness and brilliancy of Divine life which shall never fade, an union with God which the dissolution of the body from the soul shall not dissolve nor interrupt, but which shall live on for ever, to be perfected in the beatific vision of Himself and the never-ending ever-unfolding communication of Himself throughout eternity?

And therefore it probably was, that our Lord promised to His Apostles, “^eHe that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto My Father.” He reserved to Himself after His Atoning Death a greater work than He accomplished in life; not the imperfect impression upon a multitude among the Jews who were to the end like “reeds shaken by the

wind," crying now "Hosanna," then "Crucify Him," but the solid conversion, regeneration, sanctification of souls among all nations to God. Truly they are greater works. For deeper-seated is spiritual blindness than bodily, more malignant and more inveterate are the diseases of the soul than those of the body. A small thing were it to restore the hearing of the outward ear, compared with the healing of that inward deafness, whereby a person is, by man incurably, deaf to the Voice of God. A small thing is it, to make one lame from his mother's womb to walk (notable as the miracle was), compared to that infusion of Divine strength which, running through the whole moral frame, heals the paralysis of the sin-stricken soul, empowers the enthralled will, enables it to trample on the sin which held it fast motionless to good, and gladly and freely, self-sacrificing, to run the way of the all-holy law of the love of God.

And yet these stupendous spiritual miracles are daily renewed. The love of the Church, of the Pastor, the mother, the combined prayers of those whom God has inspired with the love of souls, draw down on the prodigal soul many a wasted or half-wasted grace, until at last God in His Providence has laid the soul open to the influence of His grace, and the soul, obstructing no more the access to Divine grace, is converted to God, and lives. These are certain spiritual facts; facts, as certain in the history of souls as any other facts are in the province of science. In appealing to them, I have appealed to what is now acknowledged to be the basis of all true physical philosophy, the induction of facts. Men speak of physical miracles or unusual interventions in nature, as incredible, being

(it is thought), in this our age, contrary to experience ; and I have appealed to our experience of what, I believe, our Lord calls yet greater miracles, the miracles of Divine Grace, called forth by that to which God has given such guaranteed power with Himself, prayer in the Name of Jesus. And these facts as to the soul establish these things. First, (what every one in the grace of God may know as to himself) a very minute superintending Providence as to the well-being and course of life of the creatures whom God has made. Secondly, a direct intervention of God, freely acting upon the free soul, which, freely but responsibly, responds or does not respond to that intervention. Thirdly, the widely-established truth, that that intervention of God has been granted to prayer, which God had inspired and had pledged Himself to hear. Men seem to think, as to some outskirts of His ways with us (such as these His temporal visitations under which many are now suffering), that prayer is presumptuous, as interfering with relations which He has given to His inanimate creation, and I have pointed to that interference (to use men's word) with the relation of the soul to Himself, which He has allowed to the invested omnipotence of prayer through our Almighty Intercessor.

But, it is said, that “^f we do not pray, when we know that God has assigned fixed laws to His creation (as that the sun should not rise to-morrow), and that therefore, it being assumed that all creation is under fixed laws, our prayers are only the result of our ignorance.”

^f Although I have, in this Sermon, noticed Prof. Tyndall's arguments, nothing which I say is to be misconstrued as implying

True, that we do not pray that the sun should not rise to-morrow; yet not merely on account of the fixed laws, but because unvarying laws, unless we have some distinct indication to the contrary, betoken that such is the mind of God. “^g They abide this day according to Thine ordinance, for all things serve Thee.” We know too, in this instance, that it is not yet the will of God, that this birth-place of souls, redeemed by the Blood of Christ, should come to an end. But when the time shall come of the “great tribulation” at the end, in which our Lord has foretold to us that “^h for the elects’ sake, the days shall be shortened,” and the day shall draw nigh, when “ⁱ the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works therein shall be burned up,” then doubtless if (as it seems) the close of that trial-time is to be the close of the earth itself, those elect, of whom God speaks, *will* pray that the sun shall rise no more upon this earth, such as it now is, so soon as His wisdom shall see good; and that prayer, God, Who shall shorten the days, He tells us, for their sake, shall hear.

But it is said further, “It is agreed on both sides, that we do not in these days ask for physical miracles,” and “these,” it is said, “are miracles.” If, by miracles, men mean such interpositions as involve a new creative power (such as the multiplying of the loaves), without entering into special cases, they do not ordinarily fall under our Lord’s promise, “^k believe that ye receive them and ye shall have them.” If God

any opinion whatsoever as to his personal faith as to prayer, of which I can know nothing.

^g Ps. cxix. 91.

^h St. Matt. xxiv. 22.

ⁱ 2 Pet. iii. 10.

^k St. Mark xi. 24.

willed to grant them, He would first give the gift of faith. But if by miracles be meant such interpositions, as exceed or modify the ordinary operations of nature, then one cannot doubt that God does, when it seems good to Him, inspire the prayer of faith which He wills to hear. For it is certain that many of those interpositions, which are popularly called “answers to prayer,” have wrought what no skill of the skilful physician could effect.

But is it so certain that there are any such absolutely fixed laws for all those other lesser variations of the physical conditions of the atmosphere, which are the ordinary channels of God’s temporal mercies or of His visitations? There is no apparent contradiction in supposing, that God should have fixed, once for all, those relations which by their magnificent regularity, or by the unchangeableness of their properties, attest that their Author is a God of order, the Fountain of all order; and yet that He who loves us with such a tender love, and counts nothing too minute for His care which bears on the well-being of the creatures which He has made, should, in those things, which in merciful discipline or in His free bounty direct men’s thoughts to Him, the Author of our being and its End, have assigned to them no unvarying rules; that their law should be a moral rather than a physical law; that He should so adapt them as by them too to teach His rational creatures the blissful lesson of dependence on Himself. It may be, that the variableness of the one set of phænomena is as much intended by God to teach us that they are distributed by a moral law of adaptation to our moral being or necessities, as the invariableness of His fixed laws are

to shadow to us His unchangeableness. Certainly men seem to me to have made an idol of fixed laws or rather of their own discovery of those laws, when they would leave nothing to God free in His own creation. Their claim involves nothing less than this, that not the proximate causes only, but the sequence of all these natural phænomena, in each of their all-but-infinite multiplicity of variations and combinations, has, since man was placed upon this earth, followed in as fixed and prescribed a course, as the rising and setting of the sun has upon the law to which God has subjected the motions of this earth. To me it seems more philosophical in itself, to conceive of a Will (in this case that of God) governing, directing, adapting, dispensing freely, that which is variable, and an unchanging Will, establishing and upholding that which abideth. Any how science can come to no certainty as to this, which some allege, in its name, as rendering prayer as to outward things a contradiction to science. For science relates to things wherein the relations of causes and effects are known; but human intelligence can decypher,—not the whole but—only certain proximate causes in that vast system of an all-but-infinite variety of phænomena which probably only its Infinite Author can know perfectly. And since science cannot know the whole, it can but guess, or infer more or less probably to itself, that all the most variable phænomena proceed on laws, fixed from the creation of the world, inasmuch as human science cannot know, cannot grasp, that which bears the image of the infinity of their Author¹.

Yet whether or no God have ordained, in all the

¹ See further Note A at the end.

variety of their combinations, all the ultimate causes of the unceasing changes in this our atmosphere—changes so unceasing that, probably, since the creation no two years have been exactly alike; whether or no He have left nothing free to His own agency without interfering with that series of laws, which He has Himself prescribed; in another sense all is certain. For God, the Author of all, without Whom not a sparrow falleth to the ground, knows perfectly in His own serene Omniscience all which He shall ever do. What follows then? What but this, that no fixity of physical laws would aggravate in the least that original difficulty, insoluble by us here below, which meets us at every step when we reflect on God and on ourselves, how man's free agency, which we know and feel, is compatible with the certain knowledge of God? For we who believe the moral Government of God must believe, that, if God have ordained any such fixed laws at all, He Who in all eternity knew all alike, both that vast system of His physical creation before it was, and the ill and good deserts of His rational creature, man, so adjusted beforehand the exact laws of those physical phænomena to the moral conduct of His creatures, that, in all the series of their history everywhere, the good or evil, the chastisement or free mercy, should coincide with the condition and conduct of His intelligent creature, whom He had placed here, amid all these fleeting things, to be prepared by all their varied discipline for His own blessed-making Presence.

Whether the whole sequence of natural phænomena follow a fixed order of Divine law, impressed once for all upon His creation by the Almighty *fiat* of God, or

whether the proximate causes of which we are cognisant, are the result of the ever-present action of the Divine will, independently of any such system, these are but the ways of acting of the Omniscient. *The difficulty lies in the Omniscience itself, which knew all things which were not as though they were. He knew, in all eternity, the sins of Ahab and his people and the prayer of Elijah, upon which He for three years withheld and then gave the rain; or that David would leave in His hands the choice of the seven years of famine, or the three days of pestilence. In all eternity He knew the sins of Pharaoh and his evanescent repentance, upon which He brought the locusts with the East wind, and, at Moses' prayer, carried them away with the West wind. In all eternity He knew that discriminating dispensation, by which He "m caused it to rain upon one city and caused it not to rain upon another city; one piece was rained upon and the piece which was not rained upon, withered."* In that eternity He knew the varying obedience or disobedience of His people, to which He annexed the gift or the denial of fruitful seasons. The continued belief of His people during all those centuries attests the fulfilment of His promises or threats. ⁿ In that eternity He knew, whether His creatures would or would not pray to Him in their needs, and, if He fixed the laws at all, appointed them, as should

^m Am. iv. 7.

ⁿ I have not been afraid to remove the difficulty as to *one* subject of prayer, (viz. as to God's natural dispensations), to *all* prayer. 1) because it is true; 2) because it is always right to own truth, and the difficulty, although insoluble to reason, which has not the data here below whereby to solve it, is none in the face of God's Word, which affirms so manifoldly that God does hear prayer, and the facts which bear witness to ourselves, that He does.

befit the foreseen conduct of His creatures. The fact (if it be such), that God has fixed, in the laws of the Universe, that course of things, which shall correspond, in His justice or mercy, to our use or neglect of prayer, our humiliation before Him or our contempt of Him, no more interferes with our free-agency in praying or not praying, than any other event of His Providence precludes our freedom. Who doubts but that God knew beforehand that awful winter, which cut off half a million of the flower of French chivalry? But whether that winter, which stood alone in the history of Russian climate, came only in the natural sequel of some fixed laws, or whether it was owing to the immediate *fiat* of God, directing the proximate causes of that terrible catastrophe, the adaptation of those natural phænomena to the chastisement of that suffering host was alike exact, the free-agency of its leader was alike unimpaired.

This, as I said, is no question as to human science, but as to the truth of God's word and His moral government of His creatures. The Word of God says nothing as to the questions of human science, whether or no He have assigned fixed laws to the atmospheric changes, upon which the fruitfulness of the earth and the health of man so much depend. Scripture lifts us up to a higher region. It answers not the Jewish question, "How can these things be?" but it raises us to a nearness to the eternal Throne and shews us God, dispensing these accidents of our being, according to His own all-wise laws of attempered justice and mercy. By these laws, Scripture tells us, He gave witness of Himself to the heathen world which had forgotten Him. "He left not Himself without wit-

ness, in that He did good and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness^o." This witness of Himself He pointed yet more distinctly to that former people; "pIf ye keep My commandments and do them, then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall give her increase," or contrariwise He would make the heaven above them brass and the earth beneath them iron^q. To their own experience as to this, Jeremiah appeals; "rAre there among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain? or can the heavens give showers?" Neither physical nature of itself, nor man's idols could give rain, when asked. "Art not Thou He, O Lord our God? Therefore we will wait upon Thee; for Thou hast made all these things." He Who had made them could alone dispense them. It was an Evangelic prophet, whose soul lived in Gospel times, who, after describing an Evangelic repentance^s, said, "tThe Lord will answer and say unto His people, Behold I will send you corn and wine and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith." It is a prophet after the captivity, by whom God says, after calling to repentance in deed; "vConsider now, is the seed yet in the barn? Yea, as yet the vine and the fig-tree, the pomegranate and the olive-tree hath not brought forth. From this time will I bless you." It is the Prophet in whom Old Testament "wprophecy expired with the Gospel on its tongue," by whom God said, "xProve Me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour

^o Acts xiv. 17.
xxviii. 11, 12.

^p Lev. xxvi. 3, 4. add Deut. xi. 13-15,

^q Deut. xxviii. 23.

^r Jer. xiv. 22.

^s Joel ii. 12, 13.

^t Ib. 18, 19.

^v Hagg. ii. 18, 19.

^w Davison on Prophecy, Disc. vi. P. iv. p. 457.

^x Mal. iii. 10.

you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”

Why should this seem strange? Which was made for the other, the material for the immaterial, or the immaterial for the material? Doubtless the material world too, in its magnificent variety of beauty, shadows out something of that eternal Beauty which is in God; but man alone was formed in the Image of God. What were all physical creation and material laws, compared to the dignity of man, to whom angels are “^y ministering spirits;” into the course of whose salvation “^z Angels desire to look;” who, at least in God’s own servants, are “^a a spectacle to Angels;” through whom “^b unto principalities and powers in heavenly places” is “made known the Manifold Wisdom of God;” for whom and for whose salvation God became Man; for whom, being God and Man, Jesus died?

But it is said, “the argument of the Divine Free-Will would apply equally well to the beliefs of ancient Heathen and modern savages, who saw and see in almost every change of the aspects of nature the hand of an arbitrary deity.” To conceive of any act of God as arbitrary, would be, of course, to deny His justice or wisdom or love. To thank God for each successive gift of His beneficence, is the simple act of the Christian’s child-like heart. But whatever error there was or may be in the belief of persons, superstitious because not religious, the admixture of accidental error overlays but does not destroy the underlying essential truth. Contrariwise, I doubt much,

^y Heb. i. 14.

^z 1 Pet. i. 12.

^a 1 Cor. iv. 9.

^b Eph. iii. 10.

whether any wide-spread belief was ever destitute of some basis of sustaining truth. "The true, the beautiful, the good, every object of philosophy," says a striking writer^c, "reveal themselves continually, readily, but obscurely to mankind. Hence those vague notions; those beliefs, confused but deep; those sentiments, indistinct but powerful, on the highest subjects, which ferment silently in all classes of society, and govern it at all times." "d Great philosopher as a man may be, the odds are that he will be in the wrong, if opposed to the spontaneous affirmation of the human race."

Once more, the availableness of prayer has been contrasted with the availableness of human remedies, its unavailableness has been insisted upon, if combined with human sloth^e. Who bade separate trust in God from the exertions of duty? Certainly not He Who, even in our highest concerns, the salvation

^c M. Jouffroy, quoted in M. Caro, *l' idée de Dieu et ses nouveaux critiques*, p. 473.

^d M. Caro, p. 474.

^e "But you will at all events admit that the [hypothetic] prayer [against small-pox], as a preservative or remedial agent, proved no match for vaccination. Would the suppliant voice of a whole nation have atoned for the bad engineering, or caused a suspension of the laws of hydraulic pressure, in the case of the Bradfield reservoir?" Prof. Tyndall. To the first, it has been answered, that, very possibly, the discovery of vaccination was itself God's gift on prayer. It is most natural (and the belief is impressed on systems outside of Christianity), to think that good and wise thoughts of all sorts, and the discoveries of science too, are the result of God's illumining action on the mind. To the objection as to the "Bradfield reservoir," it has been answered (*Pall Mall Gazette* Oct. 28.), "the suppliant voice of a whole nation, or even of a single man, might have made all the difference in the thoroughness of the original construction, or of the subsequent inspection of the Bradfield reservoir and so prevented the calamity." But besides this, all the

of our souls, bade us “^fwork out our salvation with fear and trembling; *for* it is God, Which worketh in us to will and to do of His Good Pleasure.” God, in His wondrous condescension, willeth the free co-

instances given relate to the proximate cause and effect, which does not come into the question as to prayer, which might be answered while God preserved that relation between the proximate cause and effect. E. g. it was observed, some years ago, that the cholera advanced from India in a certain zig-zag course, which seemed to imply electric agency. Now, whatever physical agency brought the cholera, to pray God to check the cholera, while that agent was at work, would be to ask Him to interpose between the proximate cause and its effect; but it would not be, if any prayed Him simply to remove it, because this would be only to ask Him to do what might be done by altering those electric currents (if such were the cause), or the wind, or whatever it was, which brought the infection from East to West. Or to take a case, where cause and effect are certain, an East wind brought locusts into Egypt or a South wind would bring them into Palestine, if they were already winged in those countries, whence those winds would bring them. Contrariwise a Westerly wind would carry them back from Egypt to the Red Sea, or a North wind from Palestine to the Dead sea or the Arabian desert, or an East wind into the Mediterranean. The objection presupposes that the blowing of each wind on a given day, is subject to laws as fixed, as the wind’s carrying the locusts, *if there*. We should not pray that the equinoctials should not blow in any year, because their uniform occurrence is a token, that it is part of God’s Will that they should blow twice in the year; but this does not show, that we might not in Palestine have prayed that God should take away the locusts, though they could only be taken away by a change of wind, because, as to these winds, we have no reason to think that it is against the mind of God, to change them as we may need. See remarkable instances of such a change, from S. Jerome, and Alvarez (do Preste Joan, das Indias c. 32.) as to what they had themselves seen (in Pusey on Joel p. 123.). As to this present visitation, the prayer would be heard, if either God should discover to us the cause, so that we might ourselves find its remedy, or should remove the agent (if so be) by any atmospheric change.

^f Phil. ii. 12, 13.

operation of man. He willeth, in human things as in Divine, that we should use to the utmost the powers and capacities which He has lodged in us, yet not as if we were lords, not He, but in blessed dependence upon Himself. “^gAct and pray, pray and act; expect all of God, yet neglect neither care, nor desires, nor efforts. This order is wise, is grand, is beautiful. It comprises the economy of Providence, the very condition of His government, the covenant of God with man.”

But “we have prayed and have not been heard, at least as to the present visitation.” Have we deserved to be heard? In former visitations, it was observed commonly, how the cholera lessened from the day of the public humiliation. When we dreaded famine from long-continued drought, on the morning of our prayers, the heaven over our head was as brass; the clear burning sky shewed no token of change; men looked with awe at its unmitigated clearness^h. In the evening, was the cloud like a man’s hand; the relief was come.

And now what have we done? what are we doing? When the Ninevites were threatened; they did not take the cheap way of saying a prayer, twice, it may be, in a week. They fasted as well as prayed, bore hardness, shewed their repentance by self-affliction, and, withal, they put away their Heathen besetting sin; “ⁱThey turned from their evil way,” “and from the violence that was in their hands.” “And God,” it is said, “repented of the evil that He said He

^g Ravignan, 38^{me} conférence, T. ii. p. 594.

^h This describes what I myself saw on the Sunday morning in Oxford, on returning from the early Communion at St. Mary’s at 8. There was no visible change till the evening. ⁱ Jon. iii. 8-10.

would do unto them, and did it not." What of this repentance, which our Lord praised^j, has there been among us? No one can deny our reigning national sins, the sins of prosperity,—pride, idolatry of wealth, neglect of God's poor, varied, hideous, cruel, degrading fruits of sensuality, and (what might be the basis of a grace, if ensouled by the Spirit of God) strong self-confidence. What in our week-day life is more in harmony with our Sunday prayers? To pray for the removal of God's fatherly chastisement, without amendment, is to pray Him to abandon us to ourselves,—to perish.

Of His impenitent people, when the sin is come to the uttermost, God said to Jeremiah, "^k Pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to Me; for I will not hear thee." God hears such prayers, by refusing them.

Prayers for temporal mercies or for the averting of temporal ills must needs be conditional, because we know not whether what we ask is for our good, and then indeed, to grant them would be to give us "stone for bread."

But such being the arms, with which God's Omnipotence has entrusted us, such being the power with which He has invested prayer over Himself, are we, who believe, without blame, not only as to the unbelief in the efficacy of prayer^l, but as to all the desolating miseries of the varied assaults upon faith? To what end did God give us this power of prayer? For

^j St. Matt. xii. 41.

^k Jer. vii. 16.

^l "Both your correspondents seem to think, that scientific discovery may be the result of a prayer. If this be believed, I will

ourselves alone? The God of love, He Whose nature it is to communicate Himself, He Who, being Good, doeth good, will that we should be saved alone! Impossible. He Who has bidden us pray for all, wills that we, for each of whom He died as though there were none besides, yet for whom He died as one, should each gain our own salvation, aiding in the salvation of our brethren. He who prays not for others, shuts himself out from the prayers of others. To mistrust the success of prayer for others, is want of faith; to believe in prayer for others, yet not use so costless yet so vast a charity, is want of love. How can we be saved without faith or love, and enter, selfish and alone, into the Bosom of the love of God?

Faith, if not love, has probably been weak, in the

only say, the bearing of Theology towards science at the present day is as unpardonable as it is unaccountable." Prof. Tyndall's 2nd letter. I do not know what bearing of Theology towards science, Prof. Tyndall meant. But, looking on all knowledge as the gift of God, knowing too how a discovery and indeed all the wisest thoughts of any, come by a sort of inspiration (i. e. they flash on the mind without any effort of its own, or any conscious agency of the mind except that of receiving them); knowing too how much a person's whole habit of mind has to do with the theories which he forms, and (quite apart from details as to the interpretation of Holy Scripture on subjects connected with physics) how much effect a man's belief in God must have upon his whole intellectual being; knowing lastly, what power prayer for others may have upon their minds and how it may obtain for others the gift of faith;—I cannot but confess, that any cold looking-on upon the progress of science, or any mere suspicion of scientific men whom we may fear to have lost their faith, without prayer for them, is contrary to our principles, and belongs to fatalism rather than to faith. Their real discoveries are, of course, matter of thanksgiving, as disclosing, each, some portion of the wisdom of God.

presence of that strong tide of half-belief, mis-belief, unbelief, which has so largely occupied every sort of literature. We have disputed, more or less, the intermediate battle-field. We have set array against array. We have trusted to truth to win its own victories. Have we used the arms of Omnipotence to turn the assailants of truth into its defenders?

And yet two sort of prayers are absolutely infallible; prayers for one's own spiritual good in the Name of Jesus, and prayers for the spiritual good of others. It is not only a promise. It is a prophecy, fulfilled and to be fulfilled to the end. He, our Redeemer, 1800 years ago, He Who was, in outward form, the carpenter's Son and the Carpenter, but Who claimed the love, the adoration, the fealty of the whole world to the end of time, staked His own infallibility upon it. So it had been prophesied of Him^m, "all kings shall fall down before Him, all nations shall serve Him; *for* He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper." So He Himself prophesied to His own to the end, "ⁿWhatsoever ye shall ask in My Name, that will I do. "If ye shall ask anything in My Name, I will do it." "^oAsk, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

He gave that pledge of His truth to those millions upon millions, and million millions upon million millions, that no one should ever ask Him, or in His Name, in vain. Had He not had power and Will to fulfil it, any *one*, who prayed and failed, would have falsified His prophecy. But it could not be falsified; for He was Almighty God. "This," said one of His

^m Ps. lxxii. 11, 12. ⁿ St. John xiv. 13, 14. ^o St. Matt. vii. 7.

first disciples who had lived towards one hundred years, of his own knowledge and by inspiration of God, “^p This is the confidence which we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His Will, He heareth us.” But His Will is, that “all men should be saved, and should come to the knowledge of the Truth.” One only thing God will not do. He will not violate the sacredness of the free-will of man. He will not drag him, like a stock or a stone. But, if prayed, He will solicit his free-will; He will secretly draw Him; He will dispose him by His grace; He will all-but force him. And if one interpose, of his own free-will, a bar to His grace, the prayer will not return void. It will persevere till the end, and if he, for whom it is prayed, place not the hindrance of his own refusing will unto the end, it will be heard and will save. This is thought to be the meaning of those words, “^q If any man see his brother sin a sin not unto death,” i. e. it is thought, a sin in which a man does not will to persevere unto death, “he shall ask, and He shall give him life for them that sin not unto death.” For all, except the obstinate will to persevere in sin unto death, the promise is absolute. We pray that God “^r will bring into the way of truth all such as have erred and are deceived;” pray we earnestly, fervently, perseveringly; we pray, not with our own feeble prayers alone, but with Him, our Almighty Intercessor, Whose claims for us are not of mercy but of justice; Who, when yet in the Flesh, said to His Father, “^s I know that Thou hearest Me always.” We pray, with prayer given us by God the

^p 1 John v. 14.

^q Ib. 16.

^r Litany.

^s St. John xi. 42.

Holy Ghost, Who “^tmaketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered;” and the face of things may soon be changed. God the Holy Ghost, Who knoweth the hearts of men, will light in tongues of fire, if not, as in the day of Pentecost, on the whole multitude at once, yet on those whose hearts are most open to the truth, now on this, now on that, as He did some thirty years ago, and you may see the meridian of that day of His glory and of faith of Him, of which, after this recent night, we now see but the dawn. Pray our Lord’s own prayer for us, that we “^vall may be one,” and He will present anew His own prayer to the Father; He Himself will fulfil it. “Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My Name, I will do it.” And the once-more-united Church shall have a power in witnessing for the truth, which, in its partial severance, is weakened. But nothing will return void. It is not according to the Mind of God, that we, to whom He has given the glorious light of His Gospel, should sink back into the ignorance or scepticism of pagan reason before it was ennobled with the gifts from on high. Men’s hearts are with the truth. Truth is of God. God, Who is the Primæval Truth, made the soul in His own image, and so she must needs long for Him in Whose image she was made, and must in her inmost depths yearn for that truth, which is an effluence from Himself. “^wThou madest us for Thyself, O God, and our heart” must needs be “restless, until it repose in Thee.”

But, one soul there is, for which thy prayers are absolutely infallible; for which God has bound Him-

^t Rom. viii. 26.

^v St. John xvii. 21.

^w St. Aug. Conf. i. 1.

self to hear thee, as He is God; of which thou mayest be sure, that, God-enabled through thy prayer, it will, if thou willest, oppose no obstacle to grace; for which thou mayest be heard according to the eternal counsels of thy God, in love for thee;—thine own. Prayer is in itself almighty, infallible. Before thou hast uttered it, so soon as, through the grace of God, it is conceived in thy heart and embraced by thy will, it has ascended to the Eternal Throne. Already has it been presented to Him Who in all eternity loved thee and formed thee for His love. It has been presented by Him, Man with thee, Who, as Man, died for thee, Who, in His precious Death, prayed for thee, Man with thee, but also God with God. How should it fail? Thy prayer cannot fail, if thou, through thine own will, fail not thy prayer.

Whatever then thy trial be, whether in faith or in life, sit not thou down in despair either at the violence of thy temptations, or thine own self-chosen slavery to thine evil customs, or the weakness of thine own self-enervated will, or for perplexities as to the faith, or the plausibility of contradictions to it, or thine own inability to solve them, or, if it be so, thine own inured unbelief or scepticism, or the confidence of those who contradict and pronounce all certainty as to truth dogmatism, or the despair of those who treat all truth as matter of opinion, and tell you, in effect, that God has revealed nothing for man certainly to believe and know.

Pray, and God has heard. "Before they call," God says^x, "I will answer." "I said," says David^y, "I will confess mine iniquities unto the Lord, and

^x Is. lxv. 24.

^y Ps. xxxii. 5.

Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.” God saw the purpose to confess, and, before it was done in act, He forgave. Whatever thy stage of faith or trial be, there begin. If thou hast not faith in prayer, ask God to give it thee. Think not, that it is to prejudge as to the efficacy of prayer, to pray. It is to prejudge, not to pray. If, (which is impossible) prayer were a delusion, thou wouldest be but where thou wert, when thou hadst prayed. For there would be none to hear, or to give thee faith in it. But, apart even from God’s Word, whom wouldest thou trust as to any bodily medicine, millions who had tried it, or those who had not tried it? So do as to thy soul. No one, who tried prayer with an honest and true heart, failed to be heard. *They* only doubt its might for good or misdoubt it, who have not tried or have disused it.

Only set thy will at one with the Will of God. If thy temptation be as to life, say to God, Thine All, “^zGive what Thou commandest and command what Thou willest,” and pray. If it be as to faith, say, “Lord, I believe whatsoever Thou hast revealed. Teach Thou me.” Coudest thou only say, “If Thou hast revealed any certain truth, and teachest Thy creature man, teach me,” God would hear thee.

O that men knew the might, the majesty of prayer! They think it a small thing to bend the knee to an earthly sovereign, to ask some favour, or to one whom the soul deeply loves, to ask herself. Prayer to God asks for Himself, to be the soul’s own. “O God, Thou art my God; early will I seek Thee.”

This is an office of prayer, beyond any thing or all,

^z S. Aug. Conf. x. 29.

which, besides, it seeks and obtains. Prayer obtains grace, wisdom, strength, self-mastery, peace, all which the soul dares wish for, for time or eternity ; but it obtains more ; it gains God. Man cannot be God ; he cannot, as the tempter taught him with that wondrous knowledge, wherewith he has tempted him ever since, be “as God ;” he cannot be a god unto himself ; but he may be, he is more (so God says), “^a a partaker of the Divine Nature.” No ! This magnificent capacity of man’s intellect, this comprehensive insatiable largeness of man’s heart, was not made to fail just there, where is the sole adequate complement of its being. What to it is it, to grasp the laws of the universe, the whole range of cause and effect, the mastering of inanimate nature, the decyphering (if so it were) of millions upon millions of years backwards ; what were it to grasp all knowledge, and, with the conqueror of old, thirst for new worlds to conquer, if for itself, amid all this, nothing were found to fill it, an orphan in an “^b orphan world ?” The material, about which men are so busy, can never satisfy the immaterial

^a 2 Pet. i. 4.

^b “ Reason, if it deserves the name, if it fulfills its mission, ought then, above all, to preside over the establishment of those relations between the soul and its Divine End, which are as glorious as they are necessary. Reason is set by its very nature over that eminent and regular order, which unites the ray to its focus, the thought of man with the thought of God, our love to His goodness, in a word, the creature to its Author.

Without this, we shall have nothing before our eyes, or within ourselves, but that orphan world, the very hypothesis of which saddened the genius of Leibnitz, and disinherited in his estimation that philosophy, which does not seek, before all, the kingdom of God, His righteousness and His intimate alliance with the soul.” Ravignan l. c. p. 582.

soul. All nature is beneath it, because nature is material. Strange distortion of man's being, to seek its satisfaction in that which must needs be below it, instead of finding all which it would have, all knowledge, all wisdom, where it exists infinitely, in God! O glorious prerogative of the faith of the simple peasant, ignorant of this world's knowledge, but having access to Divine! O glorious compendium of Divine illumining, whereby, not as in a mirror nor by laborious process, the soul shall have all knowledge, and shall see the secret cause of all created things, in the light of God, in God! Even gifts of God could not satisfy that vast soul of man; no wisdom, no intelligence, nothing which has any bound or end.

Prayer fills this void, which all creation, out of God, could not fill. Prayer is "the ascent of the soul to God;" it is the beginning of that blessed converse, which shall be the exhaustless fulness of eternal bliss; it is the continuance or renewal of union with God. The pleasure is but in the search; when it is attained, its interest is gone. O what a dry, cold, lifeless heartless eternity it were, to have only an unspiritual knowledge of all creation, or all possible creations! What were there for the heart? Blessed dissatisfaction of man's craving soul; glorious restlessness, the token of its Divine birth, its Divine end; that nothing can satisfy it, except what is the bliss of its God, Infinite, Divine love. Imperfect, faltering, unsatisfactory as are our prayers, their defects but shew the more the goodness of our God, Who is never weary of those who are so soon wearied of Him, Who lets not fall a single earnest cry to Him for Himself. Not one prayer, from the yearning of the penitent, "would,

O God, for love of Thee, I had never offended Thee!" to the love-enkindled longing of the Saint, "My God, and my All!" but will have enlarged thy capacity for the Infinite love of God, and will have drawn down to thee the Indwelling of God the Holy Ghost, Who is Love Infinite, the Bond of the love of the Father and the Son. It will guard thee from all evil in the perilous passage through this world; it will sanctify to thee all thy joys; it will be to thee a calm above nature in all thy sorrows; it will give a supernatural value to all thy acts; it will heal all thine infirmities; it will illumine all thy knowledge; and, when thy flesh and thy heart shall fail, thy last prayer upon earth in the Name of Jesus shall melt into thy first Halleluiah in heaven, where too doubtless prayer shall never cease, but the soul shall endlessly desire of God, what God shall unintermittingly supply, more and yet more of the exhaustless, ever-filling fulness of Divine Beauty and Wisdom and Love, yea of Himself Who is Love.

Note A.

I have endeavoured in the Sermon briefly to suggest, that, even if atmospheric changes, upon which our health and well-being so much depend, were ever so much subject to fixed laws, this would in no way interfere with prayer, as Prof. Tyndall suggested that it would. And that, on the ground that those fixed laws might, in all eternity, have been adapted to our foreseen prayer or neglect of prayer. I know not whether Prof. Tyndall founds his belief of the absolute fixity of all those minuter changes, as being, in his mind, scientifically proveable, or whether he infer the fixedness of laws, regulating them, from the analogy of other law in God's creation. Still such is his scientific belief. Our faith is, that God hears His creatures' prayers, as to every thing which concerns their well-being, and specifically as to these changes, upon which even life so often depends, as it is good for us. Now neither science nor Theology have any right to set these two beliefs in contradiction to each other. They can be harmonised. Prof. Tyndall's argument, that the fixity of laws precludes God's hearing our prayers in this respect, would, if pressed (as he doubtless would not press it) equally militate against any belief in God's Providence. For those who believe in God's Providence, must believe that those fixed laws (if they exist) were adapted in their marvellous variations, or at least in some of their more striking coincidences, to the moral condition of moral agents. All Europe was electrified by the shock of that terrific Russian winter, which destroyed the great army of Napoleon I. If the laws, upon which that extreme cold depended, were laws fixed (as Prof. Tyndall must hold) in all eternity, then, if we believe in God's Providence, we must believe that God, in all eternity, adapted them to that end in His moral government, which they subserved, whatever that end was. And if those fixed laws (supposing them to exist) could be adapted to that act of Napoleon I, which they served to chasten, although Napoleon was free to invade Russia or not to invade it, then equally the same fixed laws, (if they exist) may be so adapted in all eternity to our foreseen moral condition, that any other scourges, which (like the cholera,

plague, locusts) are brought upon man for his moral discipline, without violation of those laws, may equally, without violation of those laws, be, on man's repentant prayer, removed. The adaptation of the supposed fixed laws, to our praying or not praying, our repenting or not repenting, has no other difficulty than their adaptation to any other part of our moral character, which is equally free.

A physical system, proceeding, in all its details, upon laws immutably fixed, and yet adapted beforehand to the moral condition of free moral agents, would only imply an even yet more wonderfully intricate adaptation of this physical world to ourselves, its moral and responsible inhabitants. Great, and surpassing human thought, as are the mutual dependences and adaptations of the vast but minute system of physical creation, the adaptation of that system, in its (supposed) fixed laws, to another, a moral, system, ordering, with tempered justice and mercy, what is best for free and moral agents upon this earth, would have a yet more stupendous magnificence.

I have admitted the possibility of fixed laws, ruling those lesser and minute atmospheric changes, upon which our well-being depends, both out of respect for some who advocate it, and because it is a duty not to assume the truth of any theory, on which Scripture is silent, so as to set Theology in contradiction with any possible results of science. Still, I may say freely, that I do not see that any thing more has been discovered than certain proximate causes and effects, or some larger physical laws, which, although they minister in their different ways to our well-being, yet, in their incalculable compass of variation, do not, in the least, account for those changes that most affect us. Thus, believing, as scientific men inform us, that the average quantity of rain, which falls in the year in a given place, does not much vary, and that the winds, from the different quarters, in each year blow in much the same proportions, yet they are not these general laws, which affect those things, upon which plenty or famine, health or disease, depend. A concentration of rain or its absence, uninjurious at other times, would ruin seed-time or harvest. Locusts, or perhaps cholera, may be brought at one time by winds, which, in other parts of the year or in successive years, might be even beneficial. The growth of Spring-corn in our climate depends, we are told, upon a nice adjustment of fine weather and showers. And yet some of us remember a Spring, when, scarcely any autumn-corn having been sown, (on account of

the wetness of the season which was continued or renewed in the Spring) just at the very last we had exactly that succession of dry weather and rain, which was needed. This was one only of several successive seasons, in which, at the moment of extreme necessity, God gave us the weather which we needed. And yet they are, most of all, these minute variations, which are, as yet, perfectly unaccountable by science. All the proximate causes and effects of conditions of the atmosphere are no more interrupted, if, as most of us believe, they are regulated by the immediate Will of God, directing and dispensing them, than the inherent forces, upon whose combination the going of a watch, or the motion of a Steam Engine, or the discharge of cannon, depends, are by the interposition of human will, regulating those forces, so that the watch or the steam engine should go faster or slower, or the direction of the steam engine or the range of the cannon should be changed.

Another argument has been suggested by the acute mind of Prof. Mansel, which he has kindly set down for me in his own words. The discovery of new laws naturally suggests the hope of discovering other laws for that, for which no law can be discovered at present, so that people speak, as if all the laws of creation might one day be open to them. Doubtless, there will be great progress. Prof. Mansel's thought is this, none of these discoveries have brought science any the nearer to discovering any law as to the *time*, when *any* of these phenomena should occur; therefore, there is, as yet, no indication of any likelihood of any such discovery; nay, the very accumulation of discoveries of a different kind, and the entire absence of any discovery as to any period of recurrence, even makes it probable, that science will continue its discoveries in the line, upon which it has travelled so long and so successfully.

With Prof. Mansel's permission, I insert his letter.

“Dear Dr Pusey,

The following is a very rough statement of the matter on which I spoke to you this morning. I have not had time to think it over carefully, and I am by no means confident that my view will stand a critical examination.

The assumption, that the existence of fixed laws of nature is incompatible with the intervention of special acts of God's Providence, and that science, in so far as it establishes the former, tends to overthrow our belief in the latter, appears to me to rest on a confusion between two very different kinds of natural law.

There are some sciences, such as astronomy, whose laws are to a great extent expressed in the form of statements of the *periodical recurrence* of certain Phænomena. But there are other sciences, having also their fixed laws, in which the law involves no statement of *time*. Thus, it is a law of Optics that, for the same medium, the sines of the angles of incidence and refraction are in an invariable ratio to each other; and it is a law of Chemistry that elements combine in definite proportions; but these laws say nothing about the *time* when any given refraction or combination will take place.

Now it is reasonable to infer, when a science has accumulated a certain number of laws of a given kind, that further progress in the science will discover more laws of the same kind: *e. g.* that when Astronomy has discovered regular periods for the orbits of Planets, similar discoveries may be made for Comets; but it is illogical to go *per saltum* from one science to another, unless the laws already discovered in the latter science are of the same kind with those of the former. Chemistry or Optics might be advanced by the discovery of new laws similar to the above, without any approach to a fixing of the time of phænomena, such as exists in Astronomy. It is even conceivable that the progress of a science might disturb the regularity of occurrence. If men were to acquire vast powers of producing atmospheric phænomena, the periodical recurrence of such phænomena would become more irregular, being producible at the will of this or that man. There is a remarkable note in Darwin's *Botanic Garden*, (Canto iv. l. 320.) in which the Author conjectures that changes of wind may depend on some minute chemical cause, which, if it were discovered, might probably, like other chemical causes, be governed by human agency. Whatever may be thought of the probability of this anticipation being realised, it is at least sufficient to suggest one reflection. If atmospheric changes may conceivably, without any violation of natural law, be brought under the control of man, may they not now, equally without violation of natural law, be under the control of God? And are we so fully informed of the manner of God's working with regard to these contingent phænomena of nature, as to know for certain that He can never exercise such a control for purposes connected with His Moral government?

Is then our knowledge of the external conditions, say of health or disease, likely to make a progress analogous to that of astronomy, or to that of chemistry? We may discover that certain condi-

tions of the atmosphere are regularly followed by certain states of health, as that certain chemical elements will produce certain results; but we do not thereby discover that those conditions must take place at a given time. Unless we have evidence that the law which manifests God's will is a law of *periodical recurrence*, as in the case of the sun's rising, there is no more incongruity in praying for the removal of a pestilence than in asking a chemist to perform a particular operation. We do not ask the chemist to violate the laws of Chemistry, but to produce a particular result in accordance with those laws. Do we necessarily do more than this, when we pray that God will remove from us a disease?

If some changes of weather, or of health, had already become matter of certain prediction, like eclipses, we might reasonably presume that others would hereafter become equally certain. If we knew for certain the periodic times of fever, we might hereafter discover those of cholera: if we could now predict how many showers of rain will fall in the course of the present year, we might hereafter be able to make a similar prediction as regards thunderstorms. But has the progress of science in these matters hitherto been of *this kind*? If not, may not science advance indefinitely without in any way interfering with the duty of prayer? And has not the progress of the majority of sciences actually been of this kind?

Believe me

yours very truly

H. L. Mansel."

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