

## ARTICLE II.

## SCIENCE AND PRAYER.

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## V.

I HAVE thus far endeavored to show—

1. How God may interfere whenever he chooses;
2. That there are incontestable evidences, and multitudes of them along down the centuries, that he has thus actually interfered;
3. That we are warranted in believing that we, each one of us, the humblest and most obscure, are of sufficient consequence to attract his attention and secure this his direct interference; and
4. That he will interfere because we ask him, doing for us what otherwise he would not have done.

There is left for me now but one other general affirmation to make. With its explanation and proof I believe I shall have presented the subject in all its essential phases. It is this: Every reasonable prayer offered in a right spirit is certain of favorable answer. This is the clear import of Christ's comprehensive promise to his disciples, as recorded in Matthew, "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive," or as Mark states it, "Whatsoever things ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." If we interpret these passages in the light of the context and of the general trend of Christ's teachings, we cannot but conclude that Christ premised in his promise that the prayers should be reasonable

and that they should be offered in the right spirit. No petitioner who complies with these two conditions need ever fear failure.

To have our prayers reasonable, we should, in the first place, guard against asking for anything which we can procure by our own exertions, making use of the resources of physical and mental strength, of social ties and general surroundings already in reach. God is a strict economist. If he has already made ample provisions in his general providence, and if we ourselves can by proper industry discover and utilize this provision, we ought not to expect from him any further help by special act. We must exhaust our own means first, and ask him simply to supplement our weakness and insufficiency. Otherwise we would be asking not only for what God has really already bestowed,—and bestowed in a way which he thought would do us the greatest and most lasting good,—but for what, if granted again in this more direct manner, would prove to us a positive bane, and not a blessing; and if such a course were continued, all incentive to industry and enterprise would thus be taken away, physical and mental sloth would succeed to healthful, growth-promoting activity, abject timidity and feeling of dependence would take the place of a manly spirit of self-reliance. No wise parent among us, however keen and quick his sympathies, would ever consent thus to shield his child from toil and care and battle test, for he knows he would by dandling him thus in the lap of ease and luxury be sure to unman him, weaken his body and invite disease, dull the edge of his faculties and rob him of every prospect of progress, of every trace of nobility, of everything that gives zest and incentive and joy to life and gilds the future with its pencilings of glory. Wise teachers refrain from helping their pupils so long as they can help themselves. Their office is not to relieve but to incite, not dwarf but draw out, not convert those under their charge into cowering weaklings but

into athletes and conquerors. Even the eagle, prompted by a divine wisdom, will push her timid fledglings out from their lofty eyrie-home, and watch them flutter and hear their cry of distress as they disappear down the sides of the gorges; keeping herself, however, meantime, in ready reach, and now and then darting under to save them from fatal fall, for God has taught this mother thus to throw her children on their own resources, that they may feel their wings and learn to use them. This is a rude awakening. It seems a cruel banishment. But otherwise they would never learn to poise and wheel in air, to dart like thunder-bolts, to breast the hurricane, or to climb the steep stairways of the sky.

God loves us too wisely and too well to heed any of our cries except in times of positive and pressing need. He will let us struggle alone until our strength and judgment fail. He will, however, always keep in call, and will in deepest sympathy watch the contest point by point, and we can rest assured that in the hour of our extremity, should such hour come, we shall be made gladly conscious of some answering heart-beat, shall hear some whispered word, shall feel the uplifting power of some helping hand of love. A prayer for God to convert our impenitent friends would be unreasonable if without conditions or provisos, as it might be utterly impossible for him to secure such a result. All we can sensibly ask for is that he will make use of all the instrumentalities at his command, arrest the attention, rouse the conscience, reveal the danger of delay, the consequences of continued rebellion as well as of loving obedience,—in a word, bring to bear all the persuasive influences possible and still leave their wills untrammelled, for without absolute freedom of choice being constantly maintained, no moral change can possibly be wrought.

Again, our prayers to be reasonable must be consistent in all their parts, must be free from contradictory requests. To answer such prayers in their entirety would be impossi-

ble even to God. To illustrate: It would be inconsistent for us to ask only for the agreeable things of this life,—for freedom from care, sorrow, and pain—from disappointment, privation, calumny—from all the vexations, perplexities, and disasters of life,—and at the same time that he would develop in us that glorious Christ-likeness for which in our nobler inspired moments we so intently long; as well ask for the knit sinews of an athlete, while nestling in undisturbed repose in the padded sleepy hollows of a rocking chair. The ignoble fate of a soul set free from life's carking care and environed with all that the most cultured civilization could suggest, Tennyson in his "Palace of Art" has pictured with a master hand. If we would be like Christ, we must pass through Christ's school of experience. He needed the discipline of suffering and struggle, as well as we. He began where we begin—in perfect innocence yet characterless, possessing simply the possibilities of virtue totally undeveloped. It is because he afterward became a hero, battle-taught, battle-tested, battle-scarred, and yet never knew defeat; it is because he through faith wrought righteousness, out of weakness was made strong, endured the cross, despising the shame, suffered long and was kind, sought not his own, was not easily provoked, thought no evil, rejoiced not in iniquity but rejoiced in the truth, bore all things, believed all things, endured all things, loved us with a love that never failed and loved us to the end,—it is because of this, Christ has stood before the ages, and will stand, as the Peerless One, the Revelator of the Divine Heart, the Liberator and Saviour of mankind, the Prince of peace. We must bear Christ's cross, would we wear his crown.

We fall into these contradictions in our prayers, through a total misconception of the design of this life. Evolution, not unalloyed present pleasure, is the purpose now. We have been housed in perishable bodies full of quivering nerves; have been environed with antagonistic forces that

threaten and thwart us at every turn; our paths have been left rough, and full of dangerous pitfalls; poisons pervade much of the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we take to repair these weak clay tenements. To millions, life is a heavy care-burden, a fierce contest, and how frequently is it one long catastrophe, made up of broken hopes and baffled purposes, of weariness and scalding tears and sighs for rest! Why is it? Is this life a stupendous failure? If there is no beyond for which it is preparing, it most certainly is. Could not God have shielded his children from suffering and struggle? Yes: but not without hopelessly excluding them from all prospect of spiritual progress, leaving them forever on the low plane of ignoble, irresponsible brute life. The error is widely prevalent, that God has by some arbitrary decision established the great underlying principles that determine moral character, and can at will change the conditions of spiritual growth. No more mischievous confusion of thought can possibly be entertained. These principles and conditions must reach back infinitely, can of necessity have had no beginning, and cannot be susceptible of the slightest change; for otherwise before their establishment God could not have been possessed of any moral attribute, or have had for his own governance any standard of moral life. He cannot change them or set them aside; for a moment's reflection will disclose that not even he can convert selfishness into a virtue, or place heartless cruelty on a par with a spirit of self-forgetting love.

What he has done for us in this regard is to give power of free choice, and capacity for moral discernment, and to place us in moral relations with himself and with our fellows, and to establish us amid such surroundings as are fitted by their disciplinary processes to develop into glorious fact what are at the first but bare possibilities of virtue. We may, if we choose, stand true to these eternal principles of obligation, live in loving harmony with these many-sided

relationships of life, and thereby grow into divine likeness, or we may persistently refuse to conform, and shut against our souls forever this only open door to hope, miss forever this only opportunity to win eternal life. Simply these possibilities are or can be of divine gift. Virtues God cannot bestow: they must be born of battle. Dark as were Christ's forebodings of the coming afflictions of his disciples, deeply as he longed to save them from the imprisonments and scourgings and cruel deaths which awaited them, he, in that last prayer so memorable for its deep, pathetic tenderness, prayed not that his Father would take them out of the world and save them from its sufferings and from its spiritual exposures, but only that he would keep them from the evil, from being finally overmastered and borne down by the terrible power of the tempter. God could not save even his Son, his best beloved. He could by his creative word speak a universe into being, but he could not set aside or render less exacting a single one of the laws of spiritual unfolding, even for Christ himself, though through those long night-watches in Gethsemane his shrinking human soul pled for relief with an agony so intense as to cause his body to sweat great drops of blood. Christ, with his human limitations of knowledge, seemed to hope that God might in some way avert the impending doom and still accomplish the objects of his mission, and so he prayed, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." Yet while God could not save him from that hour, he no doubt whispered words of comfort, gave assurances of his deep-felt sympathy, promised his loving presence and sustaining grace through it all, and, once his mission ended, a glad and honored welcome to the skies.

What God did for Christ and for his disciples he will do for us, and for this we may most confidently pray, that he will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able to bear, but will with the temptation provide some way of es-

cape, some way to glorious and final victory. His purpose is to supplement, not supplant. He will send angels to minister, will grant moments of respite, and glimpses of glory.

Our prayers must thus, not only be reasonable, but they must also be offered in the right spirit. The want must be deeply felt, and there must be a whole-soul earnestness in the plea, accompanied with a willingness to make any exertion, and undergo any sacrifice, for the attainment of the end. Until this be our attitude, we are not yet worthy of the help, are not in the mood to appreciate it, and have not the capacity to appropriate its blessings: neither have we prepared the way for God's interference, as we have not fully exhausted our own resources, and thus disclosed the fact, the amount, and the nature of our need. Our prayers should therefore be premeditated, should embody only what we intently long for, what we are convinced we truly require, what after repeated trial we find otherwise beyond our reach, and what in order to obtain we are willing to sacrifice any lower pleasures that stand in their way.

Having thus, after most careful reflection, determined the nature of our requests, being willing to pay the cost involved in the grant, we should come boldly to our Father, and in full faith plead our cause, and then set about life's duties perfectly confident of a favorable answer.

There must be this childlike faith; for Christ's words of promise were, "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." Christ demanded it of those upon whom he wrought miracles of healing: "Stretch forth thy hand," "Take up thy bed," "Go wash." In the command to make the effort, there was clearly implied the promise to add the strength; but the effort must be made in most trustful confidence before the divine re-enforcement would come. We with good reason rely implicitly upon the trustworthiness of nature's divinely derived physical forces. We are

willing to stake, and in fact do stake again and again, our very lives and fortunes on our belief in their promptly answering to our call the very moment certain conditions are fulfilled, and in the surety we feel in their honoring to the letter the terms of their commission. Why not as confidently rely on that more direct divine force for whose help we pray, for it is in as true a sense conditional, with conditions as exact, and it is as prompt and ready to render service the instant those conditions are complied with? Rest assured, not until we throw ourselves as unreservedly on the arm of the Almighty as we do on the operations of these lower delegated forces, and this faith is inwrought into the very texture of our lives, can the blessing come.

To have the right spirit when we pray, we must also have our thoughts purged thoroughly from all forms of selfishness. It would seem that so patent a truth requires not even a statement; but this element presents such protean forms, it is so subtle, assumes so many disguises, borrowing the very livery of heaven, that even the elect are many times self-deceived.

Every reasonable prayer offered thus in a right spirit is certain of favorable answer. The blessings bestowed will be either specifically or substantially what we ask; specifically when the objects sought prove to be or to embody what they seem. This is not always, and perhaps not often, the case; and because of that, the blessings are substantially rather than specifically granted. To illustrate: I remember some years since noticing in a show-window what appeared to be a basket of most luscious fruit. The forms and the delicate shadings were remarkable fac-similes of nature's handiwork. The bloom was on the peach and the plum and the purple cluster. On the cheek of the apple glowed those brilliant sunset tints we so admire. The rich, juicy look of the sliced melon was brought out most marvellously. It was a master-piece of art. I have often thought how dif-



ferently my little boy, had he been with me, would have looked on this overflowing basket. To him it would have been a complete deception, and he no doubt would have pled with me to make him the happy possessor of it,—not that he might feast his eyes, but his palate. The cool flavors, not the colorings and curves of beauty, would have filled his fancy. A specific answer to his plea would have been a downright disappointment, a disillusion, which he would not at all have relished, for he would have found it but a cunning device of paint and plaster. To have obtained for him the fruit itself, of which he saw only a skilful imitation, would have been to have answered his prayer substantially and to have satisfied his real longings.

Many point to the case of President Garfield as a notable instance of the failure of the prayer test. Countless petitions went up from loving and anxious hearts for his recovery, and yet he died. Because God did not answer these prayers specifically, it is strenuously contended that he did not answer them at all. But how can we, with our extremely limited knowledge, pronounce intelligently on a matter so complicate, involving so many interests, personal, domestic, and national? Is it not possible that God conferred substantially the blessings sought, and that the profits and pleasures which we supposed would flow from Garfield's continuance in the private home circle and in his exalted post of public service were absolutely insignificant compared with what his martyrdom could under divine guidance be made to yield? God very easily could have thwarted the fell purpose of the assassin, and that vast volume of agonizing prayer would never have ascended to his throne from this stricken people. But do you not remember how that event melted into most loving sympathy the hearts, not only of all sections of this great nation, but of all the civilized countries on the globe? Garfield's suffering and death gave to this generation, under God's beneficent overruling, a spir-

itual impetus and exaltation which this eminent statesman, through a life however long and prosperous, might never have secured. That prayerful and nobly sympathetic attitude of all good people unquestionably made it possible, as nothing else could, for God to thus convert this seeming catastrophe into a most blessed benefaction.

Perhaps he saw such combination of qualities in Garfield's character and in the character of his counsellors as to him seemed ominous of evil. There is many a danger-signal which we do not detect, or even suspect to exist. It may be, too, God thus sought to impress upon us again one of those lessons taught in President Lincoln's sudden death, just as the terrible war-clouds were lifting, that a nation's strength and safety depend not upon any frail human life, but upon the cherishing of right principles and the continuance of the divine care. For our earthly bereavements and losses we may, if we will, secure priceless compensations, "for our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

What deep peace has come, and will come still as the years go by, to that once weeping home circle, through the ever sacred memories of the dead! What fondly cherished hopes have been awakened of glad reunions in that golden by-and-by!

The results to President Garfield himself of his weeks of suffering, and final exchange of worlds, while right at the very zenith of his power and his popularity, we have very inadequate means of measuring; for directly behind him, as he answered the summons, there fell an impenetrable veil of mystery. Perhaps, when we too have crossed the river, we shall find that those prayers for life were answered by the gift of larger, grander life than he in his loftiest moods had ever dreamed of getting.

It frequently occurs that most earnest prayers are offered to promote what appear to be directly antagonistic

interests. This fact came out very prominently during our late civil war. For each of the fiercely contending armies, victory was passionately pled for by most devout believers. Who would question the sterling integrity or religious fervor of Stonewall Jackson? and, as we well know, he fought as he prayed. He imperilled his life and finally gave it as a noble sacrifice to the Southern cause. Were his prayers unavailing? Did God turn a deaf ear to the pleadings of this earnest, self-sacrificing disciple? Most assuredly not, though specifically his prayer was denied. Those who fought with him side by side, and shared his local loves and aspirations, but who have been spared to see this day and to enjoy the phenomenal prosperity of the New South,—its quickened pulse, the development of its inexhaustible mineral resources, the birth of its gigantic manufacturing enterprises, its improved agriculture, its rapidly growing cities, its business boom everywhere, and, more than all, its intellectual and moral renaissance, and the ushering in of a new era of permanent peace, of genuine fraternal feeling, binding it in indissoluble union with those whom it once faced as foes on stricken fields,—those who have thus lived to see this day, with its rich blessings already realized and with its assured prophecies of vastly multiplied prosperities, recognize now that God, while he swept away their cherished institution of slavery and denied them Southern autonomy, suffered their land to be overrun with devastating war, their homes to be left desolate, and their once proud banners to be torn by cannon shot and trailed in the dust, not only granted them the real blessings which they sought, but multiplied them ten thousand-fold. They lamentably erred, as they are now free to confess, as to the channels through which those blessings could come, and they have lived to thank God that he, in his deeper wisdom and in his larger love, himself chose the means through which he should bestow his gifts.

We have discovered in the physical universe multitudes of deadly poisons, hidden under various disguises, bearing remarkably close resemblance to substances that are useful and life-giving. Many of them elude our senses altogether. We fail even with our microscopes and our most careful chemical tests to tear off their masks. We learn of their presence only by their alarming mischief-making. How many of our serious diseases are traceable to these inimical forces, that lurk in the air and water, in the vegetable and animal foods, which we take into our systems unsuspectingly! We are also exposed to intellectual and moral poisons as subtle, as concealed, as deadly, as these which threaten us in the world of matter. How true it is, we are "but children crying in the night, crying for the light, and with no language but a cry," so little certain knowledge have we of what will do us good! and yet, with what unseemly haste we let go our faith, and think our prayers unheard, so soon as any of these hidden poisons are denied!

I remember reading in my early school-days, in one of the text-books, of a nobleman, who, while on his return from a long hunt with his favorite hawk on a hot summer's day, filled his cup from a sparkling rivulet that was leaping down the sides of the mountain. As he was lifting it to his parched lips, his hawk with sudden sweep of wings dashed it from his hand, and then, with a strange, anxious call, flew along the bank of the stream toward its source. The nobleman, no little annoyed, again essayed to drink; but the bird the second time upset the cup, and fluttered and called along up the mountain side the same as before. A third time the cup was lifted, and a third time its coveted contents were spilled. The hunter, tired and thirsty, his patience gone, with quick resentment struck his bird a fatal blow. Then, as he looked on his favorite, dead at his feet, it occurred to him to follow up the stream, for the strange conduct of the bird and his strange call had at last impressed him. In

the spring, at the very fountain head, he found, to his utter horror, the half-decayed carcass of a huge serpent, and it flashed upon him that it was deadly poison he had been lifting to his lips, that the faithful bird had saved his master's life, and that this same master in a fit of blind passion had ruthlessly destroyed his. Full of remorse, he dug a grave, laid the bird tenderly in it, and afterward, to mark the spot and tell of his gratitude and his grief, he raised a marble shaft above this his humble benefactor. Is there not a lesson here for us? When we are baffled and beaten back in some of our cherished purposes, when the cups of sparkling pleasure which we are eagerly raising to our parched lips are dashed from us, let us not in our haste conclude that our prayers are unblessed, that God has either turned away in deaf indifference, and left us to our fate, or become our covert foe. The seemingly hostile forces may be the very angels of his kindest providence, commissioned to smite from our lips by the beating of their strong pinions sparkling drafts which have come from poisoned springs.

With these explanations I reaffirm with added emphasis that every reasonable prayer offered in a right spirit is certain of favorable answer. To this, as we have seen, science can urge no valid objection. It is in consonance with the soundest philosophy; it is in fulfilment of divine promise; it responds to the deepest intuitions of human hearts.

The first effect of modern scientific inquiry has been to weaken faith, and make God seem simply an impersonal, great First Cause, rather than a present loving Father, and ourselves but processes in a vast evolution, parts in an unchangeable order, wheels and pinions, merely, in a mechanism whose movements reach from motes to sun-clusters. A reaction from this paralyzing scepticism has already set in. A faith fervent as that felt before science had birth, seems destined again to prevail, and to be the outcome of this very spirit of inquiry which for the past few decades has threat-

ened to relegate it forever to the limbo of the world's outgrown and discarded thought. Reappearing this time as the ripe result of this nineteenth century's tireless and fearless research into time's deepest mysteries, I cannot see how ever again it can lose its hold on the hearts of men.