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from the New Testament with a pair of scissors. It is rooted in all the Gospels, and I thank God for it. A day may be coming in which much that now seems supernatural will prove to be part of nature. I do not fight for the word, but for the thing. Christ was not only before the world, but above it, and exercised that sway over nature which belongs to Him as the Son of God. We cannot solve the perplexities raised by our advanced knowledge; but He has the key, and we may trust Him absolutely.

We bless God for the four Gospels. St. Matthew was one of the Twelve. St. Mark was the interpreter of another of the Twelve. St. Luke—we see what he says about himself in the introduction to his Gospel. St. John was “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” Their memoirs have been read in the home and in the Church for eighteen centuries. They are like the four rivers which started from the watershed of Eden, and are constantly bringing life to all nations and tribes and languages.



### The Efficacy of Prayer.

BY THE REV. W. H. DUNDAS, B.D.

**P**RAYER has been described as the “pulse of the soul.” It is a means by which the spiritual condition of the Christian can be gauged. If prayer be frequent and earnest, then the spiritual life is vigorous, and there must be a growth in grace. But if it be seldom resorted to and only formally uttered, then it is a certain sign that such a one is not living in the realization of God’s Presence, and not drawing strength from Him for the work of life.

It must be conceded that the use of the privilege of prayer is not what it should be. The difficulty of drawing people to Divine service is a constant problem. Given an attractive, well-advertised speaker, and a sufficient amount of excitement, crowds in thousands can be brought together to hear preaching

and singing. But this is not worship. Some would even say that such meetings unfit those who frequent them for taking part in sober devotional worship. Again, it can hardly be denied that the high pressure at which men of the present day live has made the good old custom of family prayer a thing unknown in many Christian households, and has deprived the father of the right which belongs to him of acting as priest in his own family. The practice of private prayer has also suffered from the same cause. We read with wonder of such men as Luther, who said : " I have so much to do that I cannot get on without three hours a day of praying," and of Cardinal Borromeo and Bishop Andrewes, who were in the habit of spending five hours each day in meditation and prayer. *Ora et labora* is the rule which Christians should follow.

The monks of old were too often content with prayer unaccompanied by any practical effort, and ended by leading idle, useless lives, in which prayer was a mere form. Now, on the other hand, the servants of Christ are tempted to labour only, and neglect to give sufficient time to prayer ; yet, if they do, their work is bound to suffer. In the words of the Bishop of Liverpool, " By an error of judgment, or perhaps by the subtle force of inclination, which we mistake for necessity, we work when we ought to pray, because to an active mind work is far easier than prayer. Then God cannot bless us, because we have weakened our capacity to receive. We grow feeble and shallow and distracted. Our work is done superficially, and will not stand ; the ring goes out of our message, and our life loses its power. The servant whom the Holy Spirit is to use must resist the tyranny of overwork. He must resolve to be alone with God, even if he appear to rob his fellow-men of his services. It is said of that mighty spirit of the middle ages, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, that he found on the days when he spent most time in prayer and in study of the Bible his letters were most rapidly written and most persuasive, and his own schemes were widened or lost in the greater purpose of God ; anxiety was allayed, and the power of the Holy Spirit to which he had

opened his heart was felt in every word he spake, and in his very presence and look. Prayer is indeed work ; and there are times when it is the only work in which men should engage. For it is calling on God to put forth His mighty power, and to use us as willing and efficient instruments in His hands.

It is very probable that the neglect of prayer is connected with an undefined or openly-expressed opinion that prayer is of no effect, and therefore useless, a mere waste of time, if nothing worse. Those who accept the Bible as a Divinely-appointed guide can have no such opinion ; for it abounds in precepts directing the use of prayer, and examples of those who have proved its efficacy. It was prescribed by our Lord Jesus for His disciples when He gave them a form including petitions for temporal and spiritual blessings. And His example, surely, is all-sufficient, when one reads how often He prayed, spending at times whole nights in communion with His Father. What clearer command could be given than that which He gave when He said, "Ask, and ye shall receive ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" ? How could He declare more forcibly that prayer is no mere utterance which brings relief to the petitioner, but the condition of obtaining what is for our good ?

A consideration of mankind in general shows that the desire to pray is an intuitive instinct, so thoroughly implanted in man's nature that it appears in every part of the world. It is at the root of all those rites and sacrifices, oftentimes cruel and superstitious, by which the favour of the highest powers is sought. Wherever men believe in a God, they also believe that this Divine being can and will hear petitions presented to Him. The force of this instinct is seen even where, strictly speaking, prayer is irrational. The Buddhists are a case in point. "Their religion rests on the notion that individual existence is an evil, and that the great object is to attain Nirvana, to be absorbed in the great ocean of universal impersonal being. Prayer in such a system is an evident absurdity, for what is

there to pray to? Yet even by Buddhists prayer is practised extensively and devoutly."<sup>1</sup>

Again, the historian Sismondi has made a very remarkable admission that prayer is a very necessity of the soul which will assert itself in spite of philosophy. "After sending my last sheet to the press," he says, "I prayed with fervency and tears. This was a very unusual thing with me, and perhaps was not logically consistent, for I deny any immediate action of Providence which can for one moment interrupt the course of affairs. But my heart was full, and I felt a need of prayer."<sup>2</sup>

How true is the old line of Horace,

"Naturam expellas furca, tamen usque recurret"!

And how aptly the old Greek maxim applies to this subject,

οὐδὲν μάρτην ἢ φύσις ποιεῖ  
(Nature makes nothing in vain)!

If man has this universal instinct of prayer, it must have a use, and must be a means of bringing down blessings from God.

Objections to the efficacy of prayer fall into three main classes, which may be generally described as (1) those from the character of God; (2) those from the principle of all-pervading law; (3) those derived from experiment and observation.

Of these, the first class is by far the most ancient, some forms of it appearing as early as the time of Origen. The following referred to by him has quite a modern sound: "If it be right that we should have the blessing for which we pray, God will grant it to us without prayer, and if it be not right, He will not grant it at all." The objection may take another form: "If God be all-wise and all-loving, He knows all our wants, and will give us what we need; why, then, should we pray?" Or again, "We read that 'with Him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.' But if He answers prayer, does not this imply that He does vary?" Or again: "Since He foresees all things and orders them for the best, are we not in prayer asking Him to modify and change for the worse?"

<sup>1</sup> Reichel.

<sup>2</sup> Hesse, "Moral Difficulties," vol. iii., p. 3.

Somewhat akin to this is the difficulty arising from contradictory prayers, when different persons are praying for opposite things at the same time. An amusing instance is given by Sir Charles Lyell.<sup>1</sup> Two processions of peasants had climbed to the top of the Peter's Berg at Bonn, one composed of vinedressers, who were intending to return thanks for sunshine and pray for its continuance, the other from a corn district, wanting the drought to cease and the rain to fall. Each party was eager to get possession of the shrine of St. Peter's Chapel before the other and secure the saint's good offices, so they came to blows with fists and sticks.

Now, under all these objections there seems to lie a wrong idea of the true nature of prayer, taking it for the purpose of this paper, in the narrower sense of petition. Prayer is not a means of informing God of what otherwise He would not know. Such a statement is self-evident. Nor is it a means of making God do just as men wish, or otherwise than He intends to do. Is prayer unnecessary, then, since God knows all and will give what is good without asking? In truth, here lies a kind of difficulty similar to that presented by the seemingly opposed facts of God's sovereignty and man's freewill; and it seems wisest to confess that the antinomy is beyond the power of our limited minds to solve. Attempts have been made to solve it, and it has been urged that our prayers enter into God's foreknowledge and form a factor in the plans of Him who sees the end from the beginning, and to whom all time is present. Concerning such attempts the words of a recent writer may be quoted: "Some theologians have an easy way out of the difficulty. In the language of one leading divine (McCosh), 'Both the prayer and its answer were in the very counsel of God, and if there had not been the one there would not have been the other.'" But the solution is only too perfect. The dogmatic scheme on which it is built makes theology too easy and life too difficult. It explains without

<sup>1</sup> See a letter quoted in "Charles Kingsley, Letters and Memories of His Life."

satisfying, for it is a species of explanation from which modern thought, justly or unjustly, turns away with an impatience which almost amounts to disgust.

Coleridge once held that prayer was irrational, and wrote in 1794 of God as Him

“Of whose omniscient and all-spreading love  
Aught to implore were impotence of mind.”

But nine years later he said : “ I utterly recant the sentiment contained in these lines . . . it being written in Scripture, ‘ Ask, and it shall be given you,’ and my human reason being, moreover, convinced of the propriety of offering petitions as well as thanksgivings to Deity.”

Indeed, there seems little more difficulty in believing that God intends to give us good things, but only on condition of our asking, than in believing that He means us to profit by the natural forces and treasures stored up in the earth, but only if we develop and use them.

There is another point that is often overlooked, but which throws a considerable light upon some of the difficulties. True prayer must always be qualified, and limitations are understood, even if not expressed. We may be asking in our ignorance for what would be injurious. Juvenal puts it well in one of his Satires : “ You pray for money and children and long life, forgetting that you may unknowingly be praying for curses instead of blessings. Why do you not pray to the gods to give you what they see to be best ?” Yes, true prayer must always be conditioned ; if it seem good to God ; if it be for my good ; if it may be granted without any real injury to others. And such prayer will be answered, not, perhaps, as the suppliant expects, but certainly with an answer of peace making for his highest welfare.

The second class of objections consists of those which are based on the idea of law and the supposed invariability of the course of Nature. These first appear early in the eighteenth century, and have been more and more urged as the reign of law is shown to extend more widely through the universe. Some

speak of the universe as a vast piece of machinery which God called into existence ages ago, and put under a system of law with the workings of which even He cannot interfere. It is, in fact, as much out of His power to do so as it is out of the power of a workman to interfere with a clock which he has made and exported to some distant country. Here is what one writer says : " Prayer has come into contact with scientific discovery, and I express the problem in theological terms when I say that the unchangeability of God as Lord of the physical world is expressed in modern science by the law of the conservation of force, and that that law denies the power of prayer to alter any natural sequence. . . . If the doctrine of the conservation of force be true, when we pray for the fall of a single shower of five minutes in length, or the change of the direction of the wind by a single point, by the independent will of God, we are asking for a miracle, and for as real and tremendous a disturbance of natural laws as if we had asked the sudden removal of the moon from the sky. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

Such a view puts God in the position of the king long ago who found himself helpless because the law of the Medes and Persians laid down by himself could not be altered. But it leaves out of sight completely the fact that man, God's creature, does constantly interfere with the laws of Nature. Freewill is as real as law, and no one can believe that he is not free to do this or that, to turn to the right or left. Man does not, indeed, violate or suspend or annul any laws, but he often interferes with them by bringing in other laws, and neutralizes or combines or modifies them as suits his pleasure. The cutting down of forests has made great changes in the climate of some countries. Sanitary laws have stamped out the plague in our islands. The ravages of small-pox have been prevented. By natural law lightning will shatter a tower if it strikes it, but a suitable conductor makes that impossible. An article falls from the table ; it is quickly caught in its descent, and so the law of gravity is counteracted. Such force of freewill has man. If God, then,

<sup>1</sup> Stopford Brooke, quoted in Jellett's " Efficacy of Prayer," pp. 152, 153.

cannot interfere with law, He must be inferior to man whom He has created. But this no one who believes in a God can admit. To quote the words of a late prince of scientists: "Does our physical knowledge authorize us in saying that the course of the weather is as much fixed as that of the planets in their orbits? I doubt it. There is much tending to show that the state of the atmosphere depends a good deal upon a condition of unstable equilibrium. . . . Now, the character of unstable equilibrium is that it is a condition in which the very slightest disturbing cause will suffice to start a movement which goes on accumulating till it produces a complete alteration of position. It is perfectly conceivable that a child, by lighting a bonfire, might produce an ascending current of air which, in peculiar cases, might suffice to initiate a movement which would go on accumulating till it caused the condition of the atmosphere to be widely different from what it would have been had the child not acted as I have supposed. It is not, therefore, by any means certain that the condition of the weather is solely determined by physical conditions, the effect of which could even be conceivably calculated beforehand. Hence it is conceivable that a change in the future of the weather might be made without any interference with the physical laws actually in operation."<sup>1</sup>

The opinion of Huxley on this much-disputed point is worth giving. Writing to a friend, he denied that he meant for a moment to say that prayer is illogical. He says: "If the whole universe is ruled by fixed laws, it is just as logically absurd for me to ask you to answer this letter as to ask the Almighty to alter the weather."<sup>2</sup> And, again, writing in the *Nineteenth Century*, he says: "The supposition that there is any inconsistency between the acceptance of the constancy of natural order and a belief in the efficacy of prayer is the more unaccountable, as it is obviously contradicted by analogies furnished by everyday experience. The belief in the efficacy

<sup>1</sup> Sir G. G. Stokes, "Gifford Lectures."

<sup>2</sup> "Life," vol. i., p. 147.

of prayer depends upon the assumption that there is somebody somewhere who is strong enough to deal with the earth and its contents as men deal with the things and events which they are strong enough to modify or control, and who is capable of being moved by appeals such as men make to one another."<sup>1</sup>

Here he recognises the great fact which must rule in this question. If we deny that God has any power to interfere with the working of the laws which govern the universe, we must also deny that man, His creature, has any such power, else the created would be able to do what the Creator would not. And such denial must be logically followed by the denial of moral responsibility which depends on a power of choice, and of any such distinction as that of right or wrong.

The third class of objections consists of those derived from supposed experience and observation. In the controversy carried on during 1872-1873 in the *Fortnightly*, *Contemporary Review*, *Spectator*, and other papers, these were prominently put forward. Tyndall sent in a paper purporting to be written by a doctor, suggesting what is called the "hospital test." Two wards of a hospital were to be selected, and an equal number of patients placed in each whose chances of life were as nearly as possible the same. Then prayer was to be offered for those in one ward, while the others were not to be prayed for. The result would show, the writer considered, whether prayer were of any avail, and, consequently, whether it should not be prescribed by a physician as well as medicines.

Now, in the first place, these conditions could never be fulfilled. It would be quite impossible to find two cases of patients exactly alike in all respects, much less enough to fill two wards. And how could those of one ward be excluded from the benefits of prayer? Would none of the patients be likely—nay, certain—to pray for himself? Would they not benefit, supposing prayer is efficacious, from the intercessions which are constantly going up for all those who are in trouble,

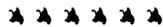
<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Robinson's "Personal Life of the Clergy," p. 62.

sorrow, need, sickness, or any other adversity? Would not God's people redouble their prayers on behalf of those very persons, if it were known that a number were being shut out from sympathy? And suppose it were tried, and no more recovered of those who were prayed for than of those who were not prayed for, what would that prove? Not that prayer was unavailing, but that prayer as an experiment failed. On the other hand, if God were to answer such prayers as the effort of those who were seeking to know the truth, He would be permitting them to be deceived—viz., in thinking that prayer without faith, prayer demanding a certain result, is efficacious. And who could say that recovery of health would be best for all those in one of the wards?

Then there are such objections as that the desired results are not seen in the case of special classes prayed for. Kings have not a longer average of life, the nobility are no wiser, than other men. If another class is brought forward, the clergy, and it is said, "Here are men who presumably pray more than others, and for whom prayer is more often offered, and statistics show they have a longer average of life than other classes," these objectors will soon point out special circumstances which must be taken into account.

And in this, indeed, lies the answer to all such objections. It is quite impossible to be aware of all the factors which make life long or short, and therefore no satisfactory argument can be based on observation. Neither long life nor outward prosperity is the *summum bonum* of existence. For this reason the efficacy of prayer can never be demonstrated so as to satisfy others. But those who are in the habit of praying to God in the way He has appointed are certain for themselves that their prayer is heard and answered. The answer may or may not be in the exact form they desired. The teaching of Holy Scripture does not lead us to suppose we shall always obtain what we ask. Certain well-known words of St. Paul put the practice and result of prayer very clearly: "In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with

thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." And what will follow? The obtaining of all these things? No, not necessarily, but something far grander. "And the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus." Those who have ever prayed earnestly have experienced that peace—not a mere reflex action, though there is this also, but a peace resulting from sure confidence that God hears and answers prayer, and that "to them that love God all things work together for good."



## Expository Preaching.

BY THE REV. W. EDWARD CHADWICK, M.A.

SERMONS are usually divided into two classes — the "expository" and the "topical." I have no wish to exalt either class to the depreciation of the other. Both kinds of sermons have their place, and both may be of the highest usefulness. Both have long been employed in the Christian Church, though probably the expository form is the older. The sermons or speeches of the Apostles preserved for us in the Acts make much use of the Old Testament, and explain and apply passages from it. Hence these may be called expository. Still the topical, or "thematic" method is of great antiquity. As Professor Christlieb says, "the first beginnings of the thematic mode of preaching reach back to the time when homiletics was in its bloom in the early Greek Church, and to Augustine, when, instead of expounding a book of Scripture continuously in homilies in the older method of Origen, they undertook to speak on a definite doctrinal or ethical point." Again, the same author states "Melanchthon is usually regarded as the originator of the now prevalent form of sermon, and it is certainly true that he contributed largely to bring it into force. But the roots of this plant reach much further back. Whereas