

writer, at least, he is in the main wrong, still his opinions are always ably stated, and where, as is not seldom the case, he goes over to the other side, his accession is of great, if not decisive, importance. Indeed, it is just this inconsistency (which a work like this annotated Bible would shew very clearly) which proves the absence of definite scientific principle in a writer otherwise of marked ability. We miss, again, Dr. Vaughan on the Romans, in its later editions, a finished and valuable commentary, which might have been used with the more advantage, as it is particularly happy in translations. But the strangest omission, and one for which we find it most difficult to account, is Dr. Lightfoot's Commentary on the Galatians—one of the very classics, not only of English but of all theology—which has now been several years before the public. On the other hand, the Commentary on the Colossians, though so recent, is included. We have also to be thankful for the collation of several commentaries which are less well known in England, such as Bouman, Kern, Holtzmann, Züllig, not to speak of names like those of Fritzsche, Rückert, Wiesinger, Harless, &c. On the Old Testament, much of the matter will be entirely new to the English reader.

W. SANDAY.

## II.

### *THE REASONABLENESS OF PRAYER.*

“EVERY one that asketh, receiveth,” affirms the Son of God. “Nay,” reply certain of our modern teachers, “no one who asks, receives.” If we inquire on what the first affirmation is based, the Lord Jesus virtually

replies, "On what I know of our Father who is in heaven, your Father and mine." If we ask on what the second affirmation is based, our modern teachers reply, either, "On what we have learned of God by the researches and discoveries of Science;" or, "On the fact we have discovered, that there is no God to hear and answer prayer." As we think of God, then, so we think of prayer. And yet even those who think truly and nobly of God, who believe that they have seen all the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, are often troubled with doubts and misgivings: as they listen to the confident, the too confident and dogmatic, assertions of men whom they honour for their generous ardour and unselfish devotion in the service of scientific truth, their faith in prayer is often weakened and overcast, even though it be not destroyed. Is there, then, any real and adequate cause for their secret uneasiness? Has modern thought any arguments to urge of such a force that we do well to question, or distrust, the efficacy of prayer?

The great modern argument against prayer is this:—We everywhere find the reign of law; *i. e.*, God, if there be a God, rules the universe and the affairs of men in certain fixed and invariable modes: how then can we hope, or wish, that He should violate these laws, which ensure the general welfare, in order to shew special favour to this man or that, to supply his want, or to gratify his desire? Time was when it was pardonable that men should pray for rain or for fair weather, for health or abundant harvests; but it is no longer rational of them now that the scientific idea of law has been proclaimed.

We know that rain is the product of atmospheric laws which, under certain conditions, render it inevitable. We know that health and disease are the results of physiological laws, which absolutely determine that one man shall live and another die. The idea that rain and death are dependent on the will of a Being who can avert or precipitate them at his pleasure, is, therefore, utterly unscientific and irrational; it belongs to the days when broad margins of human life and thought lay in a gross darkness, peopled, by the popular imagination, with the caprices of an omnipotent Will; just as in the ancient maps large unknown tracts of the earth were depicted as the haunts of chimeras dire and monstrous forms of life. But now, darkness has given place to life, the monstrous to the natural, caprice to law, confusion to order; and we can no longer believe that, by our prayers, we change that perfect Will which works out the welfare of the universe by methods as fixed and invariable as Itself.

This, I believe, is a fair and candid statement of the chief modern objection to prayer. And it is very obvious to remark that it goes upon a very limited, a very unphilosophical and unbiblical, conception of what prayer is. It assumes prayer to be mainly, if not solely, an asking for certain personal and temporal gifts which can only be granted by suspending or violating the ascertained laws of the universe, by disturbing the physical sequences which Science pronounces to be unalterable. But such a conception of prayer is as unscriptural as it is inadequate. If we study the prayers recorded in the Old and New Testaments we find, as we have seen, that

prayer is by no means only an asking for what we have not got ; it is also, it is rather, a spiritual communion with the Father of our spirits, a tender, sustained, devout meditation on Him, on his works, his providence, on our relations to Him and his purposes concerning us : it is a meditation surcharged with emotion, and which tends therefore to run into the most impassioned moods of thought and utterance. And, moreover, from the whole Biblical teaching on prayer we may infer that, so far from being an endeavour to change the Divine Will, and to adjust it to our personal and varying desires, it is rather a sincere and strenuous endeavour to adopt that Will, and to bring our actions, aims, desires, into a free and happy accord with its volitions.

It is because we, we of the Church, have not risen to the large, generous, spiritual conception of prayer which the Bible teaches and implies, that at least one of the many modern schools of thought has, first, misconceived the very idea of prayer ; then challenged us to put it to an inappropriate test ; and has, last of all, defied us to prove that it is capable of producing the results we expect from it. Our first duty and endeavour, therefore, should be to revise, to raise, and enlarge our conception of prayer, until it squares with that of the Sacred Volume from which we profess to derive it.

But when we have reached this point, it will surely be said :—“ Granting that the common conception of prayer is too limited, too colourless, too unspiritual ; granting that prayer is *much more* than a mere asking for what we wish to have and have not got ; still does it not *include* asking and receiving, asking even

for personal and temporal gifts, and much more for "the gifts of the Spirit"? Does not the very Bible itself bid us ask that we may have, and seek that we may find, and knock that the door of the Divine bounty may be opened to us?

Assuredly it does. If I say that a woman is not only pretty, but also good and kind, and imply that it is better to be kind and good than to be pretty, I do not thereby deny that she is pretty; I affirm it. And, in like manner, when I say that prayer is not a mere asking, but also a communion with God, and a meditation on his works and ways, and imply that to meditate on Him and to commune with Him is even better than to ask Him for gifts, I do not thereby deny, I rather affirm, that prayer includes petition for such things as we have need of. "Well, but under this modern scientific conception of the invariable and universal reign of law, of God as ruling according to certain unalterable methods and sequences, what scope is left for such prayers as these? Is it not, as we are told, irrational to believe that God will depart from his established modes of action in order to shew us a special kindness or minister to our individual needs?"

It is by no means irrational, I reply; nay, it is irrational, rather, *not* to bring even our personal and temporal wants before God by prayer and supplication. Prayer is entirely reasonable, if only it be rightly understood. But if any man ask me still further, "Can you *prove* the reasonableness of prayer?" I can only answer, "I will try."

1. Consider, then, that quite apart from any suspension or infraction of law, *God may answer many*

*of our prayers by the influence He exerts on our own wills.* Of the two, we are far more dependent on that which is within us than on that which is without us. Character tells more profoundly on our happiness and well-being than our external conditions. It is better to be wise than to be rich, and better to be good than to be wise.

Kind hearts are more than coronets,  
And simple faith than Norman blood.

A change wrought upon our disposition does more for us than a change of circumstance. To raise and sweeten our mood is better than to put money in our purse.\* A happy lover meets fate and change in an armour of proof which a loveless millionaire might well envy him, and still more those unhappy persons who are too great to be loved. That sincere trust in God which really saves a man from care for the morrow is worth more than the most ample and sumptuous provision for to-morrow, since that very provision is quite capable of becoming only a new care to us. Every one must have observed that the very same words, the very same tasks, the very same set of circumstances and events, produce the most different and opposite effects on different men, nay, even on the same man in different moods; and every thoughtful and experienced person must have discovered that there is a sunshine of the soul far more capable of irradiating and transfiguring the world than the meridian light of the sun, and an inner darkness to which that of night is bright as day. And in these common facts of human life and experience we have a wide scope for answers to prayer—above all, for answers to those prayers on which, if we are

wise, we lay the keenest emphasis, the prayers which relate to character, to inner well-being. If God touch the springs of thought and emotion within us, He may often give us all we need and ask, without so much as putting a new accent over a single iota of our outward lot. Let Him but shed a new or an intenser light into the secret recesses of our nature, the light of a truthful, a patient, or a cheerful spirit, and the whole world is effectually changed for us, though to all but us it remain unchanged. Take the familiar example of St. Paul. He was smitten with an infirmity which, as he thought, made him despicable in the eyes of men. He loathed it, for he assumed that it impaired his usefulness, impeded the work of his apostleship.<sup>1</sup> It kept him in an agony so sharp that he compares it to that of a miserable wretch impaled on a stake. Again and again he prayed that he might be delivered from it; and the only answer to his prayer was an inward assurance that, so far from impeding him, his infirmity should aid him in his work, by letting the Divine strength shine the more manifestly through him. No physical change is wrought upon him. It is only his spirit that is touched and changed. And yet his whole world instantly grows bright to him; he glories in that whereof he was once ashamed, and is "glad" to bear the very infirmity which had seemed to him an agony not to be borne.

2. But if God may answer many of our prayers by influencing our own wills, *He may answer many more by influencing the wills of our neighbours.* Consider how dependent we are on one another, and

<sup>1</sup> Gal. iv. 14.

especially on those who stand nearest to us, for the dignity, the sweetness, the comfort, and the purity of our lives. Our peace of mind, the whole comfort of our life, may hang on their tempers and moods. Their disposition towards us may seriously affect our very circumstances, and must still more seriously affect our happiness. Few questions are of graver moment to us than how they stand affected towards us. We see ourselves in our neighbours' eyes, and are elated or depressed as they think well or ill of us. In our dealings with a man of business, it may make little difference to our profits whether or not he be of a frank, honourable, kindly nature; but what a difference it makes to *us*! In our social intercourse, our relations to our families, our servants, our neighbours and friends, how much our welfare and happiness depend on their moral character, their truthfulness or untruthfulness, their reliableness or unreliableness, their good or ill will toward us! The substance of our prayers for ourselves is, I suppose, that we may become wise, good, useful, tranquil, happy; and who does not see how largely these prayers may be answered, quite apart from miracle, simply by a Divine influence on the hearts of our kinsfolk and acquaintance?

There is a capital illustration of the extent to which the lot and fortune of men are affected, simply by impressions produced on their minds, and on the minds of those with whom they have to do, in the story of Gideon.<sup>1</sup> God comes to him in the night, according to the ancient chronicler, and bids him go down with "the three hundred" against the vast

<sup>1</sup> Judges vii.



camp of Midian. But the brave Judge hesitates ; the crisis is great, the summons sudden and unexpected. As he hangs in poise God says to him, " If thou fear to attack them, go down secretly to the outskirts of the camp, and mark what thou shalt hear." Gideon steals down the hill under cover of the darkness, and approaches the nearest tent of the alien host. As he crouches by it and listens, he hears two soldiers talking. One of them is telling a dream to his comrade. " I dreamed," he says, " that a thin round barley-cake rolled down the hill, and tumbled against tent after tent of the camp — tent after tent falling before its onset, till the whole camp lay prostrate on the earth. What do you make of that, comrade ?" His fellow answered him : " What I make of it is this. The barley-cake which came rolling down the hill, and upset the tents, stands for Gideon the Hebrew and his half-starved band. The gods have forewarned you that, sooner or later, they will smite and destroy our host." As he listens to the dream, and the interpretation thereof, Gideon takes fire. He returns to his camp, rouses the three hundred, and proves the poor visionary Midianite a true prophet. Now if Gideon had prayed, as perhaps he did, that the host of Midian should be given into his hand, one of our modern teachers, could he have been there, might have stepped up to him and said, " Pooh, nonsense, man ; you are asking a miracle of Him who acts only by fixed laws ! God is always on the side of the bigger battalions. Get a larger army, drill it better, arm it better, command it better, and then indeed you may hope to conquer the host of Midian." Yet, simply by influencing the mind of one man through the dream

related by another, God as truly gave the host of Midian into the hand of Gideon as though He had wrought a thousand miracles.

In the influence of the Divine Will, then, on the wills of men, there is scope, there is large and free scope, for prayer and for answers to prayer.

To this conclusion, however, it will be objected by those whose argument I am trying to meet: "But God acts and rules by law *in the spiritual* as well as in the natural *world*; his methods are as fixed and invariable in morals as in physics. He influences the minds and wills of men, not in response to their wishes or supposed needs, but in accordance with the eternal counsels of his perfect Will."

I reply: "You have not *proved* that yet. You have tried, indeed, to deduce moral laws from the facts of human life; but God's action on the wills of men is so much more immediate, flexible, various, and recondite than his action in the physical universe, that you have not been able to discover and formulate the laws by which it is governed."

To this reply, however, they will probably respond: "Still, if we admit *that*, must not you admit that the whole set of modern thought and discovery runs in the direction of law, order, development, and renders it probable that God does act by law, even where we cannot formulate and prove the laws on which He acts? Must you not at least admit that we rise to a loftier conception of the Divine Nature if we conceive of God as ruling the spirits of men, as He rules physical sequences, by laws so wise that He need never depart from them? And if this conception of God, as ruling in all regions of the universe

by law be the loftier, must it not be the truer also? Are we not sure that our greatest thoughts of the infinite and eternal Ruler of the universe must be the truest and the best?"

And to this I reply, Assuredly we are. And *if* your conception of God be the highest possible to man, doubtless it is also the truest. But I have a still higher conception of Him to suggest.

3. For *even in the province of physical sequences*, in the region which is confessedly under the reign of law, *there may be answers to prayer which yet are not miraculous*. Here are two conceptions of God—the scientific and the religious—and we have to determine which is the greater of the two. According to the teachings of Science, God is the first great Cause, *Causa causans*; his power extends throughout the universe: and because He is of a perfect wisdom and a perfect goodness, He acts on impartial and invariable laws in every province of his activity, thus securing the universal welfare. Now this conception is so noble and so true, that no thoughtful man can well reject it, or seek to impair its force. And yet, if it be held alone, does it not present God before us in the unlovely aspect of a pedant or a Pharisee, as the slave of his own methods; a willing slave indeed, keeping within self-imposed limits for a beneficent and noble end, but yet the slave of his own methods, the creature of his own habits? Is *this* the ultimate bound, the highest summit, of thought? Can we frame no loftier, and therefore truer, conception of the Most High, since we have agreed that the loftiest must also be the truest? Consider what I have called the religious conception of Him. Conceive a Being of boundless power, wisdom, goodness,

who has indeed, and who freely uses, his own fixed and invariable methods of action, on the one hand; and who, on the other hand, has the fluctuating, various, and conflicting wills of his innumerable creatures to train and purify. Conceive of Him as so adjusting the one to the other that by his use and observance of invariable laws He works out the highest possible good of each of his creatures through all the ages of time, that He meets their ever-varying and to us incalculable needs, and either satisfies or denies the very desires of their hearts as may be best for them. Is not this a still nobler and loftier conception of God than the other? Some man may say, "Perhaps it is; but still it is an impossible conception." "Impossible!" I reply; "why you and I have conceived it. Is it impossible, then, that God should be as great as we can think Him to be? Must He not be indefinitely greater? Have we not agreed that our loftiest conception of God must be the truest, simply because it is the loftiest?"

To say that God cannot so administer his laws, moral and physical, as to answer our prayers, as to give or withhold what we ask of Him as may be best for us, is virtually to set limits to his power, or his wisdom, or his goodness, which we have granted to be illimitable. Once admit that God *is*, and that He is infinitely wise and good and strong, and from this single premise we may logically infer the efficacy of Christian prayer. If God be, and be what we hold Him to be, He *can* answer prayer, without a miraculous interference, simply by administering the laws of his eternal wisdom and grace.

4. But we may reasonably contend still further, that *occasions may rise when, for the greater good of his suppliant creatures, God will even work miracles in answer to prayer.* Why should it be thought a thing incredible that the invisible Cause of that manifold effect we call Nature should become visible? why should we deem it impossible for Him to shine through the veil of cosmical forces behind which He is commonly concealed, and compel men to say, "This is He who is always working in all"? If the laws by which He rules in earth and heaven be not external forces within which He sits imprisoned, but simply the methods by which He commonly acts for the good of the universe, why should He not, if there be a sufficient cause, if He can thus promote the greater good of the universe, come forth from his hidden sanctuary to shew Himself to men, to let them *see* Him doing what He is for ever doing unseen? To say that He cannot, on the ground that to work a miracle He must suspend the laws which He had before enacted, is to fall into two errors, of which it is hard to say which is the more unscientific. The first error is that we limit the Inhabitant of eternity by that law of succession by which our thoughts are bound, and make Him a creature of time. If *I* determine to spend every day of the next year in a certain invariable order, and then, six months hence, resolve to spend one day in a different way, no doubt I traverse my original determination, I change my mind. But with God no such self-contradiction is possible, since with Him there is no succession of thoughts and resolves. He is the "I AM," the Eternal, and sits high above all

time and change. All things are always present to his mind—the exception as well as the rule, the miracle as well as the law; one is not before the other, nor against the other.

And the second error of this conception is that it holds the free activity of God to be limited by his laws, as though they were independent of his will, instead of expressions of his will—an error best refuted by our own daily experience. A wise and good father has rules by which he guides his own life and his intercourse with his household; but can he not, without violating these rules, listen to his children's requests; *show* them what he is doing for them always, and why he cannot give them what they ask; •infuse a cheerful courage into their breasts when they have to do without what they wished to have; and at times both grant them what they desire and enhance the value of his gift by the thoughtful and tender kindness with which it is bestowed? And shall not our Father in heaven be at least as free as the father of our flesh, and yet as observant of order and rule? *How* God should be both free and yet bound by law, is indeed a mystery which as yet transcends our thoughts. But the blending of free will and necessity in the nature of man, the fact that he is always free and yet never free, is a mystery equally insoluble. Because of this mystery which our reason cannot grasp, this paradox which we cannot resolve and reconcile, we do not deny either that man is free to choose his own path, or that his path is necessarily determined for him. We admit both as facts, and wait till we are wiser for the large truth which is to reconcile them. Why,

then, should we deny either that God is free to listen to and answer our requests, or that, in all He does, He acts according to the law of his eternal wisdom? The mystery is simply the old *true* paradox of Free Will and Necessity, which no man has solved or is at all likely to solve. We see an earthly father moving with free and kindly step within and beneath the laws which he has prescribed for himself, stopping to comfort this child and to correct that, stepping aside to lift up the fallen or bring back the erring; and we best conceive of God when we think of Him as our Father in heaven, observant of law and rule indeed, yet not bound by them, able so to administer them as to secure the general good, able also so to vary their operation or so to transcend it as that He may carry comfort, pardon, and the gifts of his bounty to every seeking and prepared heart.

It is on this conception of Him that our Saviour insists, and especially insists when He teaches and encourages us to pray. To meet the doubts and fears of the weak or the sceptical, or to rebuke the insolence of the scornful, it may be necessary at times to shew that Science has nothing to allege against the efficacy of prayer; that by his influence on our own wills or the wills of our neighbours, by his perfect administration of perfect laws, or by miracles which transcend the laws they illustrate and emphasize, God may grant us our requests. But, after all, if we believe in God, our best wisdom will be to speak to Him for ourselves, to speak to Him as to our Father in heaven, assured that He will listen to us, and that, by giving or by withholding what we ask, He will correct and renew our wills,

and purge them of all that now makes it hard to say, "Thy will, not ours, be done." Only, let us ever remember that, when we pray aright, we do not attempt to dictate, to prescribe, to change the perfect Divine Will, and, still less, to whine and wheedle till we get our own way: we rather endeavour to lift our imperfect wills into harmony with God's perfect Will, whether it say "Ay" or "No" to our passing desires, whether it be revealed in miracle or in law.

CARPUS.

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A CHAPTER OF GOSPEL HISTORY.

6.—THE SAGES AND THE BABES. (*St. Matt.* xi. 25, 26.)

THESE verses exhibit the Lord Jesus giving devotional expression to his feelings of joy and sorrow amid the encouragements and discouragements of his ministry. The words are found also in the Third Gospel, there in a somewhat different historical connection. In Matthew, Jesus utters the prayer amid discouraging circumstances, as if consoling himself, under the disappointments of life, by the thought that a man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven; and that whatever lot it pleases God to appoint, it is one's duty and wisdom to acquiesce in as the best, however contrary to human wishes. He finds Himself despised, rejected, deserted, doubted, on every side. The great world of culture, fashion, and religious profession disregards Him; the common people, as represented by the inhabitants of the towns wherein most of his mighty works were done, vex and grieve Him by their fickleness. Even John the Baptist makes Him