

to be affected. The mouth is certainly connected with eating. Vinegar and hyssop, in the time of Christ, had no place in the ritual with the lamb at the time of death, and, as eaten, could have relation only to the paschal supper. When, therefore, we remember that we have the Paschal Lamb before us in Jesus as He hangs upon the cross, it seems impossible to doubt that we are invited to behold Him as that lamb, not in the instant of its death, but as placed upon the table for the paschal meal.

WILLIAM MILLIGAN.

III.

*THE REIGN OF LAW AN INCENTIVE TO
PRAYER.*

WE have seen that "the reign of law" by no means renders prayer unreasonable; that, in many ways, and without any violation of law, God may answer our petitions. We must now attempt a bolder flight, and try to shew that this very reign of law, so far from being, as we are told, a conclusive reason *against* prayer, is, in fact, a sufficient reason *for* it, a common and keen incentive to the habit of hopeful supplication.

No man who is at once thoughtful and devout can regret to see religious questions even of the gravest kind discussed by public men, in our public prints, provided always that the discussion is marked by sincerity and reverence, however much he may differ from the conclusions at which they arrive. Such discussions breed doubts, indeed; but these very doubts both deepen and confirm our faith in the end,

if at least we handle them wisely, and help us to correct what is erroneous and to enlarge what is narrow in our conceptions of religious truth, or in our modes of stating them.

This very discussion on the reasonableness and efficacy of prayer, for example, which has now been carried on for some years, and seems, for a while at least, to have drawn to a close, has been already of the greatest service to the Church. It has done much to banish from the popular mind the notion that, by due importunity, we may weary or constrain God into granting us whatever, or almost whatever, we ask of Him. True, this notion was always opposed to all that thoughtful men have acknowledged to be the true function of prayer, and even to what the unthoughtful have always *professed* to believe about it. For surely no man, who had in any measure possessed himself of the spirit of Christ, has ever failed to add to his most importunate petitions the saving clause, "if it be the will of God." At the same time it must be confessed that thousands of good men and women used to think it possible that almost anything might come to be the will of God, if only they asked for it often enough and urgently enough. *This* notion has, I say, been well nigh banished from the mind of the Church by the recent discussion. More and more, we are all coming to feel that the very best thing we can desire is that God's will for us should be done rather than our own, and that a chief function of prayer is to lift these weak erring wills of ours into a free and happy consent with his wise and holy Will. In short, that clause, "if it be thy will," is becoming an essential

and pervading element of our prayers, and no longer, as too often it used to be, a mere perfunctory courtesy appended to our prayers, of which we secretly hoped that God would take no notice.

To have our profession thus turned into a reality, to be made *sincere* in our intercourse with Heaven, is a very great gain; and for this gain we are mainly indebted to the sceptics who opened the discussion with a challenge on the efficacy of prayer.

But, surely, this gain would be attended by a loss to match were we to conclude that, because it is a chief function of prayer to draw our wills into harmony with God's will, therefore this is its *only* function: surely our loss would be even greater than our gain were we to conclude that the Divine Will can have no expression save in and through the laws by which the physical phenomena of the universe are shaped, and that therefore the will of God can in no way be affected by our petitions. Yet this is a loss to which we are assured we must submit by one of the philosophies of the day. The alternative it places before us is simply this: Either give up all claim to the exercise of reason, and believe that the universe is ruled by an infinite Caprice, capable of being bent in a thousand different ways by the flatteries and importunities of prayer; or, using discourse of reason, concede that your whole life is ruled by laws which cannot be broken, to the uniform action of which no exceptions can be allowed, and cease to importune God for violations of these laws. But is it, can it, be true that no single point of rest for our reason and heart can be found in the wide interval which separates Law from Caprice? Are *men* never act-

uated by ought but these two motives—a rigorous and uniform observance of law, and a blind submission to irrational caprice? From the tone taken by the fashionable and confident philosophy of the hour one would infer that, in the whole circle of human and Divine motives, there were only these two points! That I may not be suspected of misrepresenting the argument of this school of thought—for the sake of brevity and clearness, and to avoid odious and disparaging nicknames, we may call it the *Uniformitarian* School, since it lays so much stress on the uniform action of the laws under which we live—let me quote a few words from a well-known disciple of it.¹ “*That* doctrine,” he says, “is destitute of reasonable foundation” which affirms it to be either possible or desirable “to persuade God to arrest or modify what are called the great natural laws, or to act upon his will so as to alter his intentions in regard either of men or things, souls or bodies.” According to him, prayer intended to affect the course of God’s actions, either as to our physical or our moral and spiritual life, assumes a caprice at the centre of things which would be quite intolerable to us if we could in any way conceive it in the region of our every-day experience. “No greater misfortune,” he maintains, “could befall the human race than that some day it should discover with positive assurance that the successions of phenomena were rendered uncertain by an Unseen Will. Once ascertain that these perturbations by prayer existed to an appreciable extent, and such a discovery would not only unhinge the in-

¹ The citation is from a letter published some two years ago by the Hon. Auberon Herbert, a letter quoted and discussed in “The Spectator.”

dustry of the world, would not only make calculation useless and science foolish, but in its moral effect it would bury all activity of thought in the gloom of an abject religion ; it would discourage what there is of most manly and generous in the human race ; it would change us from a nation of workers into a congregation of monks ; and it would involve heaven and earth in a common corruption of flattery on the one side and favour on the other. The degradation of such a system can be felt at once by asking ourselves the question under which *régime* we would elect to live—that of fixed laws, in absolute dependence on which all might regulate their energies and efforts, or a *régime* of asking and receiving, the quantity of the one being regulated by the quantity of the other.”

This is a heavy indictment to bring against Prayer and those who believe in it ; yet it is only a fair and honest exposition of the view taken by the Uniformitarians. They assume as axioms which need no proof, (1) that the only alternative open to us is that we must live either under the rule of uniform and invariable Laws, or under the rule of a blind and unintelligible Caprice ; and (2) that, if we are ruled by Law, and not by Caprice, prayer is utterly irrational and absurd, since the law must take its course, despite our supplications. How are we to meet these assumptions ? Let us be bold, and meet them right in the teeth. Let us, not assume, but affirm and try to prove, (1) that the uniform operation of Law, so far from rendering prayer unreasonable and absurd, is the very ground on which we do and ought to pray ; and (2) that, as there is much in human motive

and action which is neither a mere observance of Law nor an indulgence of Caprice, so we may well believe, since we are in the image of God, that there is much in Him which cannot be classed under either of these terms.

1. Consider for a moment what is the effect really produced on us by the uniform action of Law in the natural world. We know that the seasons—summer and winter, seed time and harvest—though they may vary within certain limits, will not altogether fail us. Knowing this, we expect them to return upon us in their familiar sequence; we prepare for them, avail ourselves of them, and compel each in turn to minister to our use and welfare. The farmer can sow his seed in winter precisely because he believes that, in the uniform course of Nature, spring will come with its softening rains, summer with its ripening heat, and autumn with its golden sheaves. If there were no uniformity in Nature, if he could not reckon on an unchangeable order and sequence, he would hardly venture to risk his seed-corn in the earth, since he could not be sure that he would receive any return for his expenditure of grain and toil. So that, as indeed Coleridge long since pointed out, the effect of the uniformity of Nature is this; it excites expectation; it inspires a sense of security; it quickens hope: that is to say, it causes the very emotions in us which find expression in Prayer—*hope, expectation, desire*.

But consider also that, while there is much in Nature which speaks of law and uniformity, there is much that suggests the action of a Free Will which is not in bondage to Law. As yet, at least,

we cannot reduce *all* the natural facts and phenomena to laws that we can formulate, and on which we may act with certainty. Great as are the advances of science, no man can predict what the weather will be to-morrow, nor whether this year's harvest will be as abundant as the last. And the true test of science is prediction. We *can* predict that two and two will in all cases make four, unless indeed the laws of human thought should ever be radically altered, and that the angles of every triangle will always be equal to two right angles. But who can predict the changes in the atmosphere of the sun, or even in that of the earth? And wherever *life* enters into and complicates the phenomena which science sets itself to investigate and reduce to law, it is at fault. Thus, for example, as Sir George Cornewall Lewis has observed, although men have so profound an interest in all that relates to health, medical science is an important exception to the rule that "the physical are better ascertained than the moral sciences." So little faith indeed have the ablest physicians in their own art, that it is a question whether anything worthy of the name of medical *science* really exists. And in proportion as the form of life rises—from physical to intellectual, from intellectual to moral, from moral to spiritual life—the power and scope of science are still more limited and imperfect. Men of science, indeed, constantly assume that, since we are able to classify and arrange many of the facts of Nature under certain laws, so, as our knowledge grows from less to more, all the facts will fall either under the laws already formulated or under some still wider generalizations. And probably they are right, in so far

as the *physical* universe is concerned. All that I now wish to point out is, that this assumption is only an assumption for the present, and that therefore they have no right to speak as if they carried the key of the whole universe in their private pocket. They are very ready to charge us with anthropomorphism, with making a god in our own likeness ; but, if it were worth while, it would be easy to retort the charge, and to shew that, simply because *they* can see nothing but Law in the universe, they assume that God must be made after *their* image, and that He must be just as incapable of rising to any higher conception as they are themselves. If, indeed, men were crystals, or trees, or even stars ; if, in short, they were merely material creatures without intelligence and will, it might be that the whole round of their motives and actions should be ruled by law. But as men have intelligence and will and affection ; as God, if He be good, must desire to see them good ; as they can only become good by the free action of their own will—compulsory goodness being no goodness—it may be that we should look to the *human* world rather than to the natural world for hints as to the methods by which God rules and shapes our lives. And this human world, the world of thought, emotion, volition, is infinitely more complex and subtle than the physical world, and does not lend itself so easily to the rigid conceptions and stingy alternatives of the Uniformitarian school. Indeed, we see how ill it fares with them when they attempt to deal, on their own principles merely, with even a single human soul. Critics of this school have taken Shakespeare in hand, for instance. They have as-

sumed that *his* creations are all governed by laws which they have discovered and formulated; and that when you have ascertained the leading motive of any one of his works, or *worlds* as we might rather call them, and know how to apply their laws to it, you have the key to all that it contains. Each drama, according to them, has its ruling motive, and every action and incident in it—*i.e.*, all the inhabitants and events of this lesser world—contribute to work it out. And so they come, with their laws of Shakespeare, and apply them to this drama and to that, authoritatively pronounce that this passage is not from his hand nor that, that this part and that must have been interpolated by a foreign pen:—dealing with our great poet, in fact, very much as their kindred critics have dealt with the books of Scripture, contradicting one another at every step, and involving themselves in the most admired confusion. Mean time the empire of Shakespeare standeth sure; and what his critics most clearly prove, is that they and their laws are far too petty to comprehend him.

But if one man is not to be thus brought under laws that we can trace and tabulate, how is the whole world of men? That the Uniformitarians have failed, utterly and completely failed, in dealing with this larger world, only grows the more apparent the longer we consider them and their works. They have assumed, as I have said, that the reign of law is fatal to prayer, and that we must choose between Law and Caprice, no other alternative being open to us. But if it be impossible for God to answer prayer, must it not be equally impossible for man to answer it, since man is at least more clearly the subject of

Law than He who made and rules the universe?
And yet is it impossible for man?

Consider our human relations; reflect on what we know of human action and motive: and then say whether these assumptions can be sustained. Does uniformity of action drive us from prayer? Is it not, rather, an indispensable condition of prayer and a direct encouragement to it? In the administration of public justice, for example, what is it that makes every man bold to bring his suit into court, and to seek redress for any wrong that has been done him? It is simply that he believes the administration of justice to be tolerably uniform, inflexible, invariable. If the judges were notoriously open to bribes, if they were at the beck of the sovereign, if they courted the favour of the mob, we should no longer be able to calculate on them; we should be afraid to carry to them our prayers for redress. It is the very uniformity and steadfastness of the administration of justice which impresses and invites us to appeal to it. So far from hindering us, it is this very superiority to change and caprice which begets confidence and moves us to carry our suits before the public magistrate. If our judges were Turks, instead of Englishmen, could we possibly appeal to them with the same confidence? And yet in the face of all this our Uniformitarian friends assume, without any attempt at proof, that if we confess that God rules the world by laws which are uniform in their action and regular and invariable, we must also confess that it is unreasonable to pray to Him, that we can only take our suits to Him so long as we conceive of Him as actuated by Caprice, and capable of being moved

to favouritism by bribes, by flatteries, by importunities and tears! In short, they quietly assume that in our intercourse with God we shall be actuated by motives the very opposite of those which govern us in our dealings with men!

2. But if uniformity, instead of being fatal to it, is the very life of prayer, is their second assumption any truer than the first? They assume, as we have seen, that the world *must* be ruled either by Law or by Caprice, that no other alternative is open to us. But is that true? A judge, who would be equitable, cannot always observe the strict letter of the law. Human actions and motives are too subtle and complex to be brought fairly under the operation of inflexible rules. But when a judge departs from the mere letter, or the exact requirements, of the law, is he necessarily moved to it by mere caprice? On the contrary he may be, and commonly is, moved by equity, by the desire to do a higher justice than he could do were he to abide by the mere letter of the law. A man *can* answer prayer, then, simply by a wise and just administration of law; and yet we are required to believe that God *cannot*! A man is *not* shut up to the choice between Law and Caprice; and yet we are required to believe that God *is*! A man, so far from indulging an unreasonable caprice, may be moved by equity, by an honourable desire that the real ends of law should be reached, to break through the restraints of law; and yet, without an atom of proof, we are required to believe that God can only be moved by caprice should He act in any but a strictly legal way! Is, then, equity impossible to God, or love?

Take another illustration. A master who employs a great number of workmen, if he be wise and kind, will have certain definite modes or rules of action, rules which he will expect all in his employ to observe, and which he himself will be forward both to observe and to maintain. No large business, indeed, can be carried on successfully except by regular and uniform methods of procedure. But does this uniformity of action and rule prove fatal to any reasonable request? On the contrary, the men who serve such a master as this soon "know where to have him;" *i.e.*, they learn what they may ask of him with a good hope of having their request granted, and what it will be utterly in vain for them to ask. If he were the mere fool of caprice and passion, they could have no such reasonable and assured expectation. They would hardly care to prefer any request, however reasonable it might be, simply because, as he did not act on reason and principle, they could never be sure that it would not be met with an irrational and arbitrary refusal. So that here, again, uniformity is the very life of prayer, the very ground of that confident "anticipation which is both wind and sails to the movements of the mind."¹ Why, then, should *God's* adherence to rule, to principle, to law, prove

¹ The phrase is from Edward Irving, who, like myself, uses the idea of Coleridge, and, alas,—for I hold Irving to have been the greatest religious orator of modern times, with most of prophetic insight and spirit and style—*spoils* it, by substituting "the constancy of God's promises" for "the uniformity of Nature's operation," as "giving aim and calculation and certainty to events" in the domain of the intellect and will and spirit. Despite this substitution of the promises for the character of God—as if He were bound only by his word—no man can read Irving's magnificent discourses on Prayer, in vol. iii. of his "Collected Writings," without learning much from them, and being afresh impressed with the wonderful power of his eloquence. His speech is like "the large utterance" of the gods.

fatal to our prayers, to any reasonable request which we may carry to his feet ?

If, moreover, the master, the head of a great establishment, be sincerely bent on promoting the welfare of those whom he employs, will he not willingly modify the operations of his rules in order to meet their varying wants and conditions ? Will he not at times go beyond the scope of his own rules in order to shew a considerate kindness to those who serve him, and who need that this or that rule should be relaxed ? Is the only alternative with *him*, Law or Caprice ? If, for the good of any of those who depend upon him, he does relax or modify the operation of rule, are we to charge him with a capricious lawlessness fatal to the welfare of the rest ? May not his motive be a virtuous one ? May it not be a sincere regard for the welfare of his servants ? Why, then, are we to assume that God has no alternative but the observance of rule or the indulgence of caprice ? May not He also shew a kindness above and beyond that of law ?

Take a final illustration from family life. A wise and good father, that he may have an orderly and happy household, frames methods of household action and order by which for the most part he steadfastly abides. But does his regular observance of rule, his demand that his children should also observe it, hinder them from ever coming to him with a request, or prevent him from ever granting it ? On the contrary it begets in them a confident expectation that he will listen to their reasonable requests. They feel the wisdom and goodness of his laws ; but they also feel that, because he is wise and good, he will modify,

or transcend, his laws in order to meet any emergency that may arise, to supply their wants, to promote their welfare. It is only in those ill-guided and unhappy households in which the parents are actuated, not by rule and principle, but by passion and impulse, that the children feel it is no use to ask anything, however reasonable, and form the habit of acting for themselves. So that here, again, the regular operation of law, so far from proving fatal to prayer, guides and inspires it. The children know what to ask for; and if, in answer to their requests, the father modifies or transcends the household rules, they do not dream of charging him with caprice: they recognize the love which prompts him now to abide by his rules and now to suspend or to depart from them on touch of need.

And what I want to know, what I think the Uniformitarians are bound to tell us, is: Why, if in all provinces of human action, uniformity, what we call an invariable adherence to law, begets that confident expectation and hope which find expression in prayer, *God's* uniform administration of law should push us from his feet, and close the lips which we had opened in supplication before Him? To me it seems that his steadfast adherence to law should rather be the very ground and life and inspiration of prayer. Because He is not changeable, we should know, if in such a connection I may use the colloquialism, "where to have Him;" we should know what to ask that He will be sure to grant, and what it will be wholly in vain for us to ask. Because He is of an inflexible justice, we should confidently bring our suits to Him, assured that He will do us right. Because He is a wise and

considerate Master and a most righteous tender Father, we should lay our needs and wishes before Him, with a sure and certain hope that through the operation of law or by transcending law, by granting or by refusing our requests, He will give us all that we really need.

And, finally, I think we have a right to ask this question: If in all departments of human life we find that men can depart from the strict observance of law without sinking into caprice, nay, may thus rise to an exhibition of equity, of kindness, of love; why are we to concede the assumption that God's sole alternative is Law or Caprice? On what ground are we asked to admit that *He* can never suspend, or modify, or transcend the operation of his laws except at the prompting of a blind and unreasonable impulse? Surely equity, kindness, love, are not impossible to Him. And if they are not, we *must* traverse the fundamental assumption of the Uniformitarian School; we must affirm that God is neither the slave of his laws nor the sport of an arbitrary caprice; but a Judge who loves righteousness, a Master who rules by serving, and a Father who loves us with a pure and all-transcending affection. CARPUS.

THE GOSPEL OF THE UNCIRCUMCISION.

CHRISTIANITY was introduced into the world, not as an absolutely new religion, but as the development and fulfilment of Judaism. Its Founder was initiated into the Jewish covenant by circumcision; He was baptized by John the Baptist on the ground that it was becoming that He should fulfil all the outward