

heard from the lips of the apostles and their companions. Thus he himself testifies that in the Epistles we may trace out the Gospel story, and that in his Letters he has no new teaching to give, but is only delivering that which he had received from others.

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IV.

THE LIMITS OF PRAYER.

THE leading modern objection to Prayer is based, as we have seen, on two assumptions, neither of which has been nor can be proved. The first assumption is that our lives must be ruled by laws which are invariable in their action and to which no exceptions can be allowed, or by a blind unintelligent Caprice on the action of which no man can securely calculate; that, in fact, we are shut up to this sole alternative, Law or Caprice. The answer to this assumption we found to be that, as there is much in *human* action and motive which is neither a mere observance of law nor a mere indulgence of caprice, so we may well believe that there is much in God which cannot be classed under either of these terms. A judge departs at times from the letter, and even from the clear intention of the law, not that he may follow the impulses of caprice, but that he may render a more exact justice. At times, when there is occasion and need, a master deviates from the rules he has laid down for the conduct of his business; but he may deviate from them only to shew a more considerate kindness for those whom he employs, or even to secure the very ends for which the rules were made. At times, too,

a father goes beyond the lines of the domestic order to which he commonly adheres, not from caprice, but simply that his love for his children may have free scope. Why, then, unless equity, kindness, love, be impossible to God, are we to conclude that the heavenly Father, Master, Judge, must be actuated by an irrational caprice if He should at any time, and whatever the need, transcend the laws by which He commonly abides?

The second assumption is, that if the world be ruled by law, and not by caprice, then there is no room for prayer; the law must take its course despite our supplications. And the answer to this assumption we found to be that the uniform operation of law, so far from proving the vanity of prayer, is the very ground on which we do and ought to pray. It is the very constancy and uniformity of the administration of justice, for example, which induces us to take our suits for redress before the judges. It is the very observance of law, order, rule, method, on the part of a master or a father, which encourages his children or workmen to make their requests known to him, and teaches them what sort of requests he will be likely to grant and what to refuse. In all our social relations, indeed, it is the men who walk by principle, the men who are wise, just, orderly, honourable, to whom we look for help and carry our prayers; while, on the other hand, it is the men who are capricious, uncertain, moved by every wind that blows, whom we cannot trust, and of whom we dislike to ask help, because we never know but that they will refuse it harshly and unreasonably. So far from being a fatal impediment to prayer, therefore, unifor-

mity of action, adherence to law, is an incentive to prayer—at least to the prayer which is reasonable and wise.

But prayer, if it is to be answered, if even we are to desire that it should be answered, *must* be reasonable and wise ; that is, it must accord with the will—with the equity, the kindness, the love—of God. The settled purpose of a good judge is to administer justice, to see that right is done ; and if the suit we bring before him accord with that purpose, we may be sure that he will decide it in our favour, either by some equitable application of the law or by equitably transcending the law. The constant purpose of a good father is to promote the welfare of his children ; and if our request accord with that purpose, we may be sure that he will grant it, either by adhering to the household rules or by so modifying and relaxing them as to meet our need : but if we are simply seeking a gratification or an indulgence, which will be inimical whether to our own or to the general welfare, we may be very sure that he will not grant our request, and ought to be very thankful that he will not. In short, that uniformity of action, that very constancy of purpose, which is the life of true or reasonable prayer, is the death of selfish and unreasonable prayer.

So that after all the great question we have to ask and to answer, if we would pray aright, is : What is the will, what the purpose, of God ? What is He aiming at for us, and for the universe at large ? What is the end which He has set before Him, and which He will very certainly reach, whether by adhering to law or by transcending it ?

And the Christian answer to this great question is most gracious and reassuring. The Everlasting Word, by whom all things were made and by whom all things subsist, came forth from the bosom of the Father to incarnate and teach the will of God; to shew us what it is like; to persuade and convince us that it is as good, as righteous and kind, as He affirmed it to be. According to Him, the will of God is our salvation—not simply nor mainly our deliverance from present or even from future punishment, but our deliverance from the evil from which all our miseries spring; a redemption which begins to take effect upon us the very moment we accept Christ's revelation of the good will of God, and which grows ever more perfect as we more fully commit ourselves to that Divine disclosure. According to Him, the infinite and eternal will of God is set on our welfare, is ever seeking it, and is satisfied only as that welfare is secured. According to Him, God is love, and love inspired by an infallible wisdom, and love using all the resources of omnipotence for our good. So that, if we may trust Christ, *the unchangeableness of God is an unchangeable Charity*; and the invariable purpose and law of his action is a loving intention and endeavour to redeem us from all the miseries of evil into all the blessedness of a sovereign and perfect goodness.

Now, as we have seen, all constancy of purpose, all uniformity of law and action, warrants expectation and hope, if only we are in harmony with it. The farmer reckons on his harvest precisely because the laws of Nature are uniform, and he is working with them, not against them. The suitor looks confi-

dently for a favourable verdict only when the administration of justice is uniform, not capricious, and he is persuaded that his claim is just. The child calculates on receiving what he asks only when the father is ruled by reason and kindness, and he knows that his request is a reasonable one, and falls in with his father's purposes and methods and aims. But *God's* aim, *God's will*, is our welfare, our true and highest welfare; and hence we may be sure that *the limits of our welfare are the only limits of his will concerning us*; the only limits, therefore, within which our prayers must be confined. And who wants to go beyond *those* limits? Who really desires God to give him what it would injure him to have? Whatever consists with the ends of love, we may ask with confidence, for God is love: and who would ask what Love must deny? Assuredly not the man who prays; for he of all men longs for welfare—his own welfare and that of the world—and desires in all things to submit his will to the larger wiser will of God.

But here it may naturally be asked: If God's will be our welfare, must not his will take effect upon us whether we do or do not pray that it may take effect? Must we *ask* Him to do his will before He will do it? And if we must, *why* must we?

The reason is plain. If we were machines, lay figures, automata, as we could not pray, so also there would be no need that we should pray: all that was requisite for us and all the good ends of which we were capable might be secured by the administration of forces and laws we could not resist. But we are *men*, men with wills of our own, wills which are our

own that we may make them God's. True, He is ever seeking our welfare; but even our welfare, since it depends on our voluntary and steadfast pursuit of righteousness, cannot be secured apart from ourselves, apart from our own actions and determinations. Our welfare depends on the character we form; and character must be freely formed: the nobler and more complete the character, the larger must be the scope of its freedom. In moral and theological discussions we too often speak of ourselves as if no free and reasonable spirit had been breathed into us; but the moment we reflect we see that as God has chosen to surround Himself with children possessed of intelligence, will, affection, even He cannot *make* us good, and so secure our welfare, by mere mechanical pressure, or even by a moral pressure which should force our wills. Were He to compel us to goodness, the goodness, such as it was, would be his, not ours. If we, we ourselves, are to be good, it can only be as we voluntarily make his will our will, and his aim for us our aim for ourselves. You can't make a child wise by performing a surgical operation on him and inserting a book into his brain; nor can you make him good by *compelling* him to do what you hold to be right. You try to make him wise by teaching him, by inducing him to learn, what you know; you try to make him good, *i. e.*, to train him for a free and manly goodness, by bringing good influences persuasively to bear on him, by trusting him, by throwing him gradually on his own resources, by your grief and displeasure when he does ill, by your approval and joy when he does well. And thus God acts, and must

act, with us now that He has made us what we are. If He were to lay his finger on our wills, and to compel us to do right, *that* would not be to make us good, nor would it be, in the highest sense, to shew Himself good. He can only make us good by winning us of our own will to do that which is right, to form the character which He approves, and to work together with Him for our own welfare and blessedness. And, therefore, He shews us what his will is, shews us how He loves us, shews us that, in his unchangeable love, He is ever seeking our welfare, and invites and persuades us to join with Him in seeking it. He unveils the beauties of holiness to us, and the miseries and degradations of sin; and when we endeavour to cease from doing evil and to follow after goodness, He offers us his help; He bids us tell Him freely of our failures and lapses and of the difficulties we encounter in our endeavours after righteousness, and assures that, if we seek them, we shall receive the succours of his grace.

Now when, through the life and teaching of Christ, we know the will of God to be our welfare and the welfare of all men; when we are assured that He is ever seeking to secure it, that nothing can divert Him from this gracious aim and endeavour: what is the natural effect of this conviction on our minds? The natural and reasonable effect of it is to persuade us that whatever we ask which will contribute either to our own good or that of the world, He will grant. We feel that we may ask Him to do us good or do our neighbours good with as confident an expectation, as reasonable a hope, as that with which the farmer, relying on the constancy of Nature, sows

his seed ; or that of the suitor who, relying on the equal administration of law, takes a just claim into a court of justice ; or that of a child who, relying on the constancy of paternal love, makes a request which he knows to be in accordance with his father's purpose concerning him. We know that what we ask accords with the will of God, and therefore we are sure that He will listen to our prayer.

But we could not be sure if we did not pray ; for God's will is our welfare : and whether or not this or that gift will contribute to our welfare may wholly depend on whether we do or do not pray for it. Prayer is not the mere utterance of any form of words, however " noble and incomparable ;" it is the kindled emotions and desires of the soul reaching out after its own true welfare or the welfare of others : that is to say, it is the longing and aspiration of the soul after that which God is ever seeking to secure for it. And when this longing is once kindled, or kindled to new activity, much may be given to us which must otherwise have been withheld.

A sick man, for example, pining under the wasting pressure of disease, asks that he may be recovered to health. But if he desire health only that he may go on living to himself, for his own selfish or base ends, it may be more for his ultimate and enduring welfare, or more for the welfare of the world around him, that his request should be denied. His prayer is not true prayer at all ; for all true prayer is based on a desire that the good will of God may be done : and therefore he may ask in vain. But, on the other hand, if his thoughts upon his bed have convinced him of the folly and baseness of his previous



course of life, and he desires health mainly that he may devote himself to the pursuit of righteousness and lead a new and higher life, then it may be for his welfare, or for the welfare of the world around him, that health should be restored to him. His prayer is now true prayer; for now it has respect to the will of God, which is ever bent on the moral culture and welfare of men: and therefore it may be well that his petition should be granted.

So, again, with that "prayer for fair weather" which has, naturally enough, since it has often been terribly abused, excited no little ridicule and contempt. If, at the prompting of public authority, a nation merely recites an appointed form of words in which fair weather is asked for, without rousing itself to any moral emotion or intention, it might as well mutter a charm or an incantation. Up to this point there has been no pretence of prayer even; for prayer is the utterance of religious emotion, and as yet no religious emotion has been generated. And there may be much more than this before true prayer is reached. A nation may be moved to genuine emotion and desire; a long succession of adverse years may have brought it to the verge of famine and bankruptcy: the whole nation may long with one heart for relief, and, despairing of earthly succour, may cry to Heaven with one voice for help. But if their prayer have no respect to the will of God, to his purpose and intention for them and for all men; if they are not resolving that, should bounteous harvests and prosperous days return, they will use God's gifts in his service, *i.e.*, for good and noble ends; if they are only longing for relief, for the power to

gratify their selfish appetencies and baser desires, their prayer, however sincere, is not true prayer: it may be for their welfare that God should refuse it, that He should compel them, by the pressure of a growing misery, to reflect on the true ends and aims of human life. But if, under this pressure, a nation should lie all broken down under a sense of its sins; if it should ask succour of God with an earnest and settled intention of rising to a higher form of life, should life be spared, and of using for worthy ends whatever gifts it may please Him to bestow—then surely their prayer has become a true prayer, and it may be both for their good and for the good of the world at large that it should be answered.<sup>1</sup> The fair weather, the abundant harvest, the bright prosperous days may be good for them now, though, before they would not have been good.

So that the spiritual emotions and intentions which find expression in all true prayer may, even in the eye of reason, affect the action of God and the course of events; they may fit us to receive, and therefore they may enable Him to bestow, gifts which, apart from these emotions and intentions, would not subserve the welfare of the world. Our main care, therefore, when we take our requests before God, should be to assure ourselves that the ends we have in view are in accordance with his Will. We should redouble our care when we ask for temporal gifts—for health, wealth, success, prosperity and the like—since in seeking *these* gifts we run a greater hazard of seeking them for selfish or unworthy ends, than when we crave moral or spiritual gifts. God's will

<sup>1</sup> See 2 Chron. vi. 26, 27.

is our welfare in subordination to, and as part of, the welfare of the entire race. And as we are very apt to crave temporal gifts, to desire exemption from poverty, pain, detection, ignominy, without much thought as to whether or not these gifts will, we being what we are at the time, promote our real and lasting welfare, we ought to be the more careful, we ought to examine our motives with the more searching inquest, when we bring to God such requests as these. Only as our motives are pure, only as we have respect to the true ends of life, only as we ask what will really contribute to that welfare which is the will and aim of God, can we reasonably hope, or even reasonably desire, that He will give us that which we ask of Him.

“Still,” it may be objected, “if we grant all this, if we grant that God may reasonably answer prayers the answers to which will promote the well-being of men; if, moreover, we grant that it might be well were God to answer such prayers even when to answer them He must vary, or modify, or transcend the operation of natural laws, have we any reason to think that He does thus vary, or modify, or transcend them? Have we not, rather, many and conclusive reasons to believe that He invariably abides by them? The analogies you have taken from human life break down when we apply them to God. A judge, a master, a father may rightly deviate from domestic or business or legal rules; for no rules devised by human wit can be perfect, and perfectly applicable to all cases and occasions. But God is of an absolute wisdom. May not his laws, then, be so perfect that no deviation from them can ever become

necessary, so comprehensive and flexible that they fit themselves smoothly and infallibly to every contingency? And in point of fact do we not find that He never does depart from them?"

The answer to this grave and difficult objection, briefly put, I take to be as follows. Those who look to the material universe alone for hints on the character and rule of God sometimes forget what at other times they proudly assert, that man is the crown of created things, the paragon of the world. They forget that as the highest thing they know is life, so the highest and noblest forms of life are found in the reason, will, conscience, and affections of man. They forget that we must therefore see more of God in life, and above all in the highest forms of human life, than in whatever else the universe contains. *We* must not forget, we must constantly remember that, since we are more likely to find some faint resemblance of the Most High in the highest things we know, we must look to man, and above all to that which is highest and noblest in man, that is, his spiritual faculties and affections, for the most accurate indications of the character and ways of God. But if, as we are bound, we go to Man rather than to Nature for our conception of God, and to determine whether or not He is likely to answer prayer—do we find that in proportion as men grow good and wise it becomes vain for us to carry to them any, even the most reasonable, requests? On the contrary, as our whole argument implies, it is precisely the wise and good to whom we take our reasonable requests with the most confident expectation and hope. Do we even find that

as men grow good and wise that they are more and more bound by law, that they adhere more and more strictly to any set of rules or to any prescribed methods of action? Rather we find (1) that the wiser and abler and better they are, the more can they so obey all laws as to produce greater results from and through them than when they stood on a lower stage of culture; and (2) that they can the more easily, if there be need, graciously dispense with and transcend all laws, in order to reach a higher end than a mere observance of law and rule would enable them to reach. Think, for example, how the great and practised artist both obeys the rules of his art until he masters them and they are no longer bonds or restraints to him, but feet and hands and wings; and how he also rises above them, so that in his finest work there is always much which cannot be brought under any law, or at least any known law. Think with what effect a great poet, a Shakespeare, observes all the ascertained laws of dramatic art, and with what still greater effect he transcends them, so that we have to make new laws for him, and even then find that that which is most divine in his work is irreducible to law and rule. Think what noble and gracious courtesy a gentleman may shew while observing all the rules of social intercourse; and yet how many a plain man, without observing those rules, with nothing but a gentle and a Christian heart to guide him, may shew a still finer and more generous courtesy than he. Think how all the great examples of moral excellence, even up to Christ Himself, have shewn a righteousness beyond that of law—this supra-legal

righteousness being their sovereign charm and power. Genius, indeed, whether it be mental or moral genius, is always law-less; *i.e.*, there is always much in it that cannot be brought under rule: and that in it which cannot be brought under rule and law is precisely that in it which all the world admires as most rare, most exquisite, most excellent. If, then, we are to frame our conception of God, not on the hints supplied by the material universe alone, but rather on the nature of Man, who is the crowning glory of the universe, and whom the Scriptures declare to be the very "image of God," and on that which is highest and rarest and best in him, we shall at least hesitate before admitting that there is nothing in God which may not be reduced under terms of law.

And when we more attentively consider the material world itself, and how and to what extent the operation of natural laws is modified by human intelligence and will, we shall even deny that there is nothing in it except the laws and forces which science has discovered and tabulated. It is not easy so much as to imagine what a vastly different world this planet would have been had man never been born into it, or to what an enormous extent he has reshaped it by modifying and contracting the action of the laws of Nature upon it. But those who hold that there is no room for the play of Intelligence and Free-will among the laws by which the universe is governed, will do well to consider what changes man has wrought upon the face of Nature. Who has not seen these changes taking place in the immediate vicinity of his own town within the last twenty or thirty years? Who does not find that practically the little world in

which he dwells has become a changed world? And how shall we calculate the immense changes wrought upon the surface of the globe through the historic ages by the art and industry of man? By making roads, felling forests, draining the fields, embanking streams and flinging bridges over them; by building cities, digging harbours and piling up sea walls, and by a thousand similar processes he has, as it were, remade the earth and even reached up a hand to the clouds of heaven and driven the rainfall from land to land. And if the will of man finds such free and ample scope among the laws and forces of Nature, so that, in a myriad ways, he can bend them to his purpose, must not the Will of God find room and verge enough to play freely among them, and to bend them to his purposes with a subtlety and potency infinitely beyond the reach of man?

Nor is it only by these large and intentional processes that men affect and control the course of Nature. The most trivial and careless action of even the least capable and influential of men may have consequences which Science itself can hardly calculate. Some of the consequences of such an action were traced in the "Quarterly Journal of Science" for January, 1875. In effect it ran thus: Here is a gardener who may dig twenty more spadefuls before dinner, or only nineteen. That surely is a point which he is free to determine, a point which is determined for him by no physical force or law. But how much may depend on even this trivial determination of his will. On whether or not he digs that twentieth spadeful it may depend whether a slug is turned up or not; on the slug may depend the dinner of a young swallow

who is feeble on the wing; on this single meal may depend whether the bird shall join the migratory flock and reach Africa in safety: but on this fledgling's arrival or non-arrival may depend whether a certain insect shall be snapped up by him, or left to lay a million eggs, which, in that case, will next month be each a locust laying a million more; and on this billion of locusts and their progeny it may depend whether by Christmas a vast tract of country shall be green as Eden or a leafless wilderness, and its mean temperature  $100^{\circ}$  or only  $70^{\circ}$ ; and on whether such an area be the hottest or coolest portion of the tropics may well depend the winds, and the drought or rain of a season over half, or the whole, of Europe. All these events, and many more, may depend on the single, unstudied, momentary act of a man who is quite free to do that act or to leave it undone! And when we reflect how many such acts must be done every day, and how wide and momentous and complex their consequences are, we cannot but admit that the will of man counts for much even in the physical universe. Why, then, should the will of God count for nothing? If the laws of the physical universe leave room and scope for the free play of our wills, if the results they produce are so largely and constantly modified by human action, who will contend that they leave no room for the volition of God, and that He can only act as they prompt or permit Him to act? If by accident, and by design, men can change the natural order of events, and turn it into currents in which it would not otherwise have run, we may be very sure that God can so vary and modify it as to promote our welfare and to grant



us whatever it may be for our good to receive. Just as Carlyle<sup>1</sup> declares it to be flatly inconceivable that intellect, conscience, will, affection, could have been put into man "by an Entity that had none of its own;" so we may affirm it to be flatly inconceivable that God should have given men so great a power over the laws and forces of the material world and yet be incapable of exerting any such power Himself.

CARPUS.

ST. JOHN'S VIEW OF JESUS ON THE CROSS.

ST. JOHN xix. 28-37.

II.—BEFORE speaking of an important point in *Verse* 30, we turn to *Verses* 36 and 37, to the passages of Scripture quoted there, and to the circumstances in which it is said that these Scriptures were fulfilled. The two passages quoted are introduced with the words, "For these things took place that the Scriptures might be fulfilled;" and we may take for granted, what is admitted by most commentators, that in "these things" we have a reference to the two circumstances mentioned in *Verses* 32-34, that the bones of Jesus were not broken, and that a soldier pierced his side with his spear. The question with which we are concerned is that which has occupied us hitherto, What is the point in the history of the paschal lamb to which these things refer?

The first text quoted in *Verse* 36 is, "A bone of him shall not be broken." It is taken, if not from Psalm xxxiv. 20, either from Exodus xii. 46, or from Numbers ix. 12, where, in connection with the ritual

<sup>1</sup> "History of Frederick the Great." Book xxi. chap. 9.