

BIBLE HISTORY OF PRAYER

by Charles Goodrich

Goodrich's historical study tracing the practice of prayer as recorded throughout Scripture, beginning with Old Testament examples and drawing lessons about the nature, power, and patterns of prayer from the biblical record.

105 Chapters

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000.3. Preface

Preface On the eve of the departure of a missionary to a distant Eastern island (Rev. Samuel G. Whittlesey, to Ceylon), a few years since, a manuscript was presented to him by a young lady, (Now Mrs. S. G. Ashton, Newburyport, Mass.) a relative of his, accompanied by a wish that it might prove, daring his voyage, and, indeed, through his toils and trials as a missionary of the Cross, a source of instruction and consolation. A copy of the manuscript was retained by the young lady, who some time after placed it at the disposal of the author. It contains all the passages in the Bible pertaining to prayer. The perusal of this manuscript suggested the present volume. It was originally the intention of the author to remark upon every passage it contains; but, in passing the sheets through the press, he has been compelled, in order to keep the volume within proper dimensions, to abandon this design. This explanation seems due, in order to account for a noticeable omission of several passages in the latter part of the New Testament. The omission, however, is the less to be regretted, as the truths involved in them will be found in a great measure to have been anticipated. The author has not aimed to write a treatise on prayer. His object is less formal and less repulsive; being an endeavor to impart all possible interest to an important, but neglected subject. Intercourse with heaven might to be a pleasant theme. Prayer ought to be a delightful and profitable exercise. It is, indeed, a solemn service; and, while standing in the presence of the King of kings, the soul is naturally filled with awe; and, moreover, Guilt holds us back, and fear alarms. But why should they? Why should we shrink to come near to Him whose nature is "Love?"—who styles himself our "Father?"—and who invites our confidence? Why reluctant to hold intercourse with a world to which, if we are true disciples of Jesus, we are rapidly hastening? With the hope of adding to the interest of the volume, the author has indulged a good deal in narrative—opening and explaining the circumstances which gave birth to the several prayers. This will render the work more attractive to the young; and, with the same object in view, he has interspersed it with occasional anecdotes. The author has not hesitated to avail himself of such labors of others as were within his reach, having reference to the topics under consideration. He is indebted to the Commentaries of Doddridge, Scott, Henry, Barnes, and Bush; besides numerous other authors, to whom acknowledgments are made in the progress of the work.

One difficulty has particularly pressed upon him:—a tendency, growing out of a similarity of subjects, to repeat the same thought, or the same argument. Such repetitions it has been impossible, in all cases, entirely to avoid. But as in general different language has been used, and a somewhat different phase of the subject presented, it will not be deemed, it is believed, a serious defect. The author has little expectation of again appearing before the public in any extended work; and he is willing, at length, to lay down his pen at the end of a volume, which embodies an account of the delightful and successful intercourse of believers with heaven for some four thousand years. Should it prove as profitable to others as it has been to his own soul, his reward will be indeed great. He casts it upon the "waters," with the fervent wish that, amidst the fluctuating tides of providential influence, it may find its way to many children of God, prompting them to far more "earnest energetic prayer;" and inspiring in the bosom of many a wandering prodigal the wish

to look up, and call God "Father!"

001. Old Testament.

Old Testament.

002. Genesis.

Genesis.

003. The Public Worship Of God Begun

The Public Worship Of God Begun

Genesis 4:26. This is the first passage in the Inspired Volume, in which prayer is mentioned. But, was it the design of the sacred historian to teach us, that now, in the 235th year of the world, the date of the birth of Enos, men began for the first time since the fall, to worship God by prayer and other acts of devotion? This is incredible. The worship of the Supreme Being commenced, we must believe, in the garden of Eden. The “morning stars” were not alone in their songs of praise in view of the new born world. Adam and Eve would naturally and instinctively lift their voices, in expressions of homage and praise to their Creator. Did their fall obliterate the remembrance of that homage and praise? Did their expulsion from that happy abode efface their sense of dependence upon Him, who had given them being? As They hand in hand, with wand’ring steps and slow, Through Eden took their solitary way— Had they no desire to ask pardoning mercy at the hand of the Lord? Whatever may be the proper answer to these particular questions, it cannot be doubted, that the fallen and now unhappy pair were taught, where and in what manner to worship their displeased, but forgiving Sovereign. They might not, indeed, again enter that beautiful temple of nature, where first they inhaled the breath of life; a flaming sword guarded its entrance; but, if the oriental writers be credited, a Shekinah, or visible manifestation of the Divine Being, revived their expiring hopes, and from that glory, softened by rays of mercy, they received instructions adapted to their circumstances of dependence and guilt. Learned Jews have affected to give us the several forms of prayer, which Adam addressed to God, for pardon. To the same purpose, Milton introduces Adam, after a melancholy soliloquy, proposing to Eve this appropriate advice:

What better can we do, than to the place Repairing, where he judged us, prostrate fall Before him reverent; and there confess Humbly our faults, and pardon beg; with tears Watering the ground, and with our sighs the air Frequenting?

I cannot say, that either Milton, or the oriental writers have given us the precise truth; but it were most unreasonable to conclude, that the parents of our race did not early and habitually pray. If circumstances of dependence and anxiety ever rendered prayer appropriate, and prompted to it, Adam and Eve must early have become praying persons. That they offered divine worship is apparent from the sacred narrative, which records a memorable instance, in which Cain and Abel presented an offering to Jehovah. This was no other than an act of worship, and an expression of dependence and obligation. Whether they were thus taught by their parents directly, or received instruction from God, is immaterial. Surely, the parents would not neglect a service, which had been enjoined, either by God, or by themselves, upon the sons.

Surprise, however, has been expressed by some, that a duty, thought to be so clear and important as that of prayer, should not have been enjoined in the earliest pages of the Divine Oracles. No such passage of injunction or institution, it is well known, is to be found in the Pentateuch. And why should there be, if from the beginning of the world, men were accustomed to pray, having been so taught, either from their sense of want and dependence, which continued after their

apostasy, or by express revelation from God? A late eminent divine confirms these views. "It was not the intention of the scriptures," he observes, "to institute this duty anew, in any passage whatever; there being no passage in which it is thus instituted. They took up the subject, in the only way, which was natural or proper. Men had always prayed from the beginning, and on all occasions confessed prayer to be a duty. Nothing more, therefore, was necessary, natural, or proper, than to regulate it as a duty already begun, acknowledged, and practiced by mankind."

"Particular directions," he adds, "concerning the three divisions of this duty, customarily made in modern times, namely secret, family, and public prayer ought never to have been expected. The question, whether prayer in secret, in the family, or in public, is a duty of man, was probably never asked, nor the obligation to perform it in either case doubted, during the whole period from the beginning of the world to the completion of the Scripture Canon. Men always prayed on every solemn and proper occasion; in public, in private, and in secret." (Dwight's Theology, Vol. V. p. 29.)

If the preceding views be correct, we must look for some other interpretation of the passage, "Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord," than that which here dates the commencement of the practice, or the institution of prayer. What then is the import of the passage?

Jewish interpreters, for the most part, understand the words as indicating the origin, or commencement of idolatry. The Hebrew term for "began," will admit of being rendered profaned, or profanely began to worship God, 1:e., they worshiped him by means of idols; and thus began that degeneracy which finally led to the destruction of the earth, and its guilty inhabitants by the flood. It cannot be denied that this interpretation has respectable advocates. And it must be conceded, that the heavenly bodies were early worshiped, from which to inferior objects, the descent was easy; so that, at length, such worship prevailed over nearly the whole earth. But whether this passage marks the precise era, when such idolatry began, may well be questioned. Previous to this, Cain and his family had withdrawn from the pious portion of mankind. They were a guilty race, and would early fall into the worship of other objects, than the one great and glorious Lord of all.

According to other expositors, the marginal reading is the correct one. "Then began men to call themselves by the name of the Lord" 1:e. then began a portion of men, (namely, the children of Seth) to be distinguished from the descendants of Cain, by an open and special profession of God's holy name, and by being recognized as his true worshipers. Perhaps the distinction of, "sons of God," and "sons of men," to which allusion is made in the following chapter, then began more generally to prevail. The more common interpretation, however, is, and it is one which, to say the least, gives us intelligence of a delightful advance of piety in that far off, but alienated, and perhaps, impious age of the world, "that about that time began a more complete separation of the pious from the ungodly; that the name of God began to be invoked in a more open and public manner, and the ceremonies of his worship to be more solemnly observed. Adam and his pious offspring had doubtless at an earlier day maintained the worship of God in their families, and in their closets; but, till the human race was considerably multiplied, no occasion existed for what may be denominated public worship. But when families became so numerous, that they were obliged to separate, then it was necessary to call them together, at stated times and seasons, that they might collectively receive instruction, and keep up an habitual reverence for God." (Bush's

Notes, in loco.) Thus the more public worship of God began.

004. The Worship Of Abraham.

The Worship Of Abraham.

Genesis 13:4. The “place of the altar” to which allusion is here made, was Bethel, which signifies “house of God.” It was a name given to it by Jacob, in after times, when on his journey from Beersheba to Haran; but, in the days of Abraham it was called Luz. It was situated some fifteen, or twenty miles north of Jerusalem. Moses, the author of the Pentateuch, often speaks of places by the appellation they bore at the time he wrote, instead of their original names. At Bethel the Lord had appeared to Abraham soon after he reached the promised land, a distance from Haran, in Mesopotamia, of some five or six hundred miles. Here he had pitched his tent; built an altar, and “called upon the name of the Lord.”

This, indeed, would seem to have been his constant practice, wherever he sojourned (Genesis 12:7; Genesis 13:18.) “Wherever he had a tent,” says Henry, “God had an altar, and an altar sanctified by prayer. He erected his own altar that he might not participate with idolaters in the worship offered upon theirs.”

While sojourning at Bethel, or in its vicinity, a “grievous famine” occurred, which compelled the patriarch to remove with his household. Accordingly, turning south, he directed his course towards the fertile country of the Nile. At this time, he was poor; but after a residence in Egypt for some time, his temporal condition had greatly improved; since, according to the sacred narrative, on his return to Canaan, he was “very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold.” On once more reaching the promised land, he repaired to a spot, which, in former years, had been endeared to him by the manifestations of the divine mercy; “unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first; and there Abraham called on the name of the Lord.” On the occasion of first building that altar, before which he now stood, he had many and joyful reasons for thanksgiving and praise. It had been preserved, during a long and untried journey; he had entered the land of promise, and been protected in the midst of a proud, imperious, and idolatrous people. But, how greatly were those reasons for thankfulness and praise increased! He had been sustained during a grievous famine; he had gone down into the land of the Pharaohs, where, in respect to his wife, losing confidence in the assurances of divine protection, he had been guilty of an unworthy deception; yet, God had delivered him from his fears; had enlarged his house, and increased his wealth; why should he not be grateful? Why not remember the way, in which God had brought him, and renew his pledges of love and fidelity to Him, who had thus already favored him, and moreover had promised him blessings, which in their influence should extend to nations yet unborn? An old divine, in commenting on the practice of Abraham in regard to prayer, has well observed:

1. “All God’s people are praying people. As soon will you find a living man without breath, as a living Christian without prayer.
2. Those who would approve themselves upright with God, must be constant and persevering in religion. Abraham did not leave his religion behind him, as many do, when they travel.” The fidelity

of Abraham to his religion, wherever he sojourned, does, indeed, rebuke a multitude in modern times; who, with more light and knowledge, might be expected to be even more scrupulous in their practice. But their conduct, instead of adding to, greatly detracts from, the honor of religion.

Take, for example, a professor of the gospel, a young man, who, for the purpose of business or pleasure, leaves his home, and commences a journey among strangers. From the day he sets forth, his devotional duties are, perhaps, imperfectly performed, or entirely suspended! Instead of seeking out as he passes on, for those who love the name of Jesus, consorting with them, and holding communion with them, he finds his pleasure in associating with the gay and volatile; and is, at length, found mingling with the vicious and profane. Is religion attacked? He regrets it, indeed, but has no courage to defend his master's cause. Are professors derided? Quite possibly his previous conduct requires silence, lest the finger of scorn should be pointed at him.

It is urged, that in stages, in steamboats, and in railroad cars it is difficult to attend to devotional duties, or maintain a devotional frame? This is not denied. But the very difficulty creates a necessity for universal watchfulness and effort. Granted that the professor may not find his own quiet "Bethel," while a passenger, may he not lift his heart to God? May he not maintain a devotional spirit? And if his absence be long, will he not occasionally stop? Happy is it, if, when opportunity allows, he is ready to avail himself of it, to renew his intercourse with his Heavenly Father, and gather fresh strength for days to come. The great desideratum is to keep the heart right. If that be so kept; if a sense of holy obligation be duly cherished; if we rouse ourselves to appropriate moral courage, we shall be able to attend to the duties of piety in every situation, whether at home or abroad; whether on excursions for pleasure or business.

Mr. Bickersteth gives an account of a pious man, who was led by some engagement to associate with a minister of the gospel, who had sadly neglected his sacred duties. They journeyed together, and the subject of religion was, indeed, a topic of conversation. But on retiring to rest, being obliged to lodge in the same room, the clergyman undressed, and was soon in bed. The pious man paused, hesitated, and for a short time appeared to doubt what was duty; but, at length, convinced that he was bound to pray, even although he should thereby rebuke a minister of Jesus Christ, he knelt down, while yet the light was unextinguished, and prayed as he was wont. The rebuke was felt; conviction of guilt followed; and, from that time, the unfaithful ambassador became a devoted and laborious servant of Jesus.

But, perhaps, professors who travel, do the cause of Christ even greater injury, by continuing their journey on the sabbath, and thus intermitting the duties appropriate to that day.

I have, indeed, read of those who travelled only till the hour of divine service; when, if they happened to reach a church, they would attend service, and proceed when that was ended. There have been those also, who were quite careful to lay in a stock of good books to peruse, while proceeding on their journey on the sabbath; and not long since, it was stated in a public journal, that a steamboat put out on one of the western lakes, on Saturday evening, or on the morning of the sabbath, with four clergymen on board, who quieted their consciences and the consciences of numerous professors, with the determination of holding divine service on board; thus serving God, while at the same time they were serving themselves. Dr. Nevins tells us of a lady, who, intending to travel on the sabbath, volunteered this exculpation of herself. "She had travelled one sabbath already since she left home, and she supposed it was no worse to travel on another." To the

spiritual and conscientious believer, such apologies it must be apparent, are mere excuses to silence an upbraiding conscience; to keep up the show of piety and devotion, while, in fact, piety and devotion have little, if any concern in the case.

There are those, however, who have more of the spirit of the conscientious patriarch. They carry their principles, and a pious practice, with them. The late Mr. Evarts, the distinguished secretary of the American Board, being once on his return from a visit to the Missionary stations, among the Indians, was passing up the Mississippi in a steamboat. Just before Saturday night, he informed the captain that it was not his custom to travel on the sabbath, and requested, therefore, to be left at some convenient village on the banks of the river. The captain remonstrated; and, when, at length, the intention of the Secretary became known to the passengers, they also attempted to dissuade him from his purpose. "Another boat might not come along in days; nay, a fortnight might he be detained" "No matter for that," replied Mr. Evarts, "Providence will take care. Duty is mine; consequences I must leave with God." Finding his passenger fixed in purpose, the captain landed him. On the sabbath, Mr. Evarts conducted a religious meeting in the destitute village, at which he had stopped; and on Monday morning another boat came along, on board of which he took passage. It so happened, that the other boat, not long after he left it, broke some portion of her machinery, which so retarded her progress, that the secretary reached his destination on the river about the same time.

Such a regard for the honor of God may be rare; but who will deny its propriety and beauty? And, in this case, we see virtue rewarded. God did not suffer a servant, who wished to honor him, to be retarded in the journey before him. And who can say, that the security in which Abraham travelled among heathen, and even warlike tribes, was not a reward for his "building an altar to the Lord," whenever he encamped? He had the courage to show to the idolatrous nations of Canaan, that he feared the Lord; and he found time to send up the smoke of the expiring victim on the altar, or some other sacrifice, while "he called upon the name of the Lord."

Recall, for a moment, the journeyings of Paul. Who travelled more than the great apostle of the Gentiles? We read of his visiting some of the most celebrated regions, and renowned cities of the world. "With indefatigable step, he toiled his way over no small portions of Syria, Arabia, Asia Minor, and Europe. He sailed the waters of the Mediterranean sea. He coursed his track among the innumerable islands, that so beautifully stud the Grecian Archipelago. On the soil of ancient Troy, along the classic shores of Greece, at Antioch, Ephesus, Phillippi, Corinth, and Athens, he planted the standard of the cross" But when, or where; whether on the land, or sea; in polished Athens, or in licentious Corinth; before Felix, or while a prisoner near the court of Rome, did this champion of the cross, either through fear, haste, or indifference, fail in the duties of personal piety, or in honoring the cause of his Master?

005. Prayer Of Abraham For Ishmael.

Prayer Of Abraham For Ishmael.

Genesis 17:18-20.

Before us is the first prayer, in form, recorded in the Bible. Let us briefly review the circumstances which gave it birth:

Abraham being called to leave his country, and to go into a strange land, receives from God this gracious promise: "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing." (Genesis 12:2.) This promise was at several different times repeated; and, on one occasion, (Genesis 15:4,) it was distinctly announced that one should be born to him, who should be heir of the blessings involved in the covenant established between God and his servant.

Ten years, however, from his entrance into the land of Canaan, we find Abraham still childless. But he appears, notwithstanding his advanced age, not to have doubted the fulfillment of the divine promise, nor to have been impatient at the long delay. Not so with Sarah, his wife. She was solicitous to see a speedy accomplishment of a promise, which would signally contribute to the honor of her family. As yet, there had been no explicit annunciation that she herself should become a mother; and, as that happiness appeared quite improbable, she concluded that if the promise was to be fulfilled, it must be in the person of another.

Without pausing to reflect upon her culpable distrust of God, or her censurable impatience, it will suffice to say, that she proposes to Abraham to take Hagar, a bond-woman in the family, as his concubine. Abraham inconsiderately listens to this "weak and carnal expedient," as if God were at a loss, in what manner to fulfill his own promises, and, therefore, needed the wisdom and aid of his creatures. The year following, Ishmael was born. From this time, it appears probable that Abraham rested in the belief, that Ishmael was the destined seed; and, consequently, renounced the expectation of any further heir. But the promise had reference to a son, to be born of his more legitimate wife. Yet, from the birth of Ishmael, thirteen years elapsed, before the views of the patriarch were in this particular corrected, and the full import of the covenant respecting the child of promise was understood.

Sometime in the 99th year of his age, the patriarch receives still another communication from God, who now, for the fifth time, repeats his assurances, gives more particular form and expression to the covenant, and, finally, makes the clear annunciation, that not Ishmael, but a son to be born the following year, is to be the child of promise. Surprised at these tidings, Abraham falls upon his face, and laughs for joy. "Shall a child," said he, "be born unto him that is an hundred years old?"

But, in the midst of his exultation, he seems to have paused. A doubt occurred to him, which struck a damp upon him. He had long regarded Ishmael as the child of promise; the affections of his heart had centered in him, and they had strengthened as years added to his age: but, now, it is

announced that Ishmael is to be set aside. And what is to become of him? The inquiry was natural, and does honor to the father's heart. He imagined, may be, that Ishmael was to be removed from life, to make way for the expected heir; or that the signal favors to be bestowed upon the latter would diminish the prosperity and blessings, which he had anticipated for the former. Abraham, therefore, like a fond father, seizes the moment of his disquietude to pray that his apprehensions in relation to Ishmael may be removed: "O that Ishmael may live before thee!" May he live, and may he prosper; may he enjoy the distinguished temporal blessings formerly promised to him: and, perhaps, we shall not err, if we include in this ardent supplication such an interest in spiritual good, as would, if rightly improved, insure his eternal life. To this supplication for Ishmael, God replied, that the covenant containing the promise of the Messiah, and all its related privileges and blessings, should be established with Isaac, as he had already determined. But he had not, and would not cast off his other son. "As for Ishmael, I have heard thee and he goes on to assure the anxious and inquiring father, in what manner he would bless him.

It may here be remarked:—

1. That the first prayer in form, recorded in the Bible, was that of a father in behalf of a child. Was there design in this? Did God intend to show to parents in all future time, by giving the example of Abraham so early and prominent a place in the Genesis, how parents should feel, and how they should pray for their children? Many parents put forth unwearied effort for the worldly prosperity, and advancement of their children, but they seldom or never pray for them. If they could do but one—better, far better, to pray; but both may be consistently combined; yet prayer should have the preeminence.

2. This first prayer asked more than God had offered to bestow. The patriarch did not ask for a reversal of the divine decision. Although he had long cherished the belief, that Ishmael was the promised heir, and that the covenant was to descend to him, when informed that Isaac, and not Ishmael, was the divine choice, he at once cheerfully acquiesces. It is not our prerogative to prescribe to God; nor, when his will is revealed, should we wish it altered. But our Heavenly Father allows his children to plead with Him for other and larger blessings, than at any time he has promised. This Abraham did. God had made no distinct and special promises to Ishmael, but great and incomprehensible blessings to Isaac. Grateful for these in prospect, Abraham ventures to intercede for blessings for Ishmael. The bestowment of great blessings should lead us humbly to seek for still greater. Blessings bestowed upon one child should not deter parents from soliciting favors for another. In this connection, it may be observed, that parents, especially those who have large families, are often guilty of a singular and surprising wrong to the grace of God. They seem to apprehend, that if several of their children are converted, it is all they may expect. But why not all? Where is the intimation that some of any family must necessarily perish? Alas! while some, perhaps, of almost every large family do perish, may it not be imputed to this most unwarrantable and mischievous assumption to which we have adverted? The apprehension is indulged, in the first instance, that the grace of God must be limited; and, hence, after the conversion of some, prayer and effort are, in a most cruel degree, suspended in relation to the others. This was not the reasoning or the practice of Abraham. He considers the divine liberality, in respect to Isaac, no obstacle to the solicitation of blessings for Ishmael. Let parents, who have converted children be indeed grateful; but let them remember that, notwithstanding this, they may pray for those out of the covenant, as earnestly and importunately, as if none were converted; nay, they may urge

blessings bestowed, as a good argument, why others should follow.

3. This first prayer was immediately answered.

“O that Ishmael may live before thee,” was the humble supplication of the believing patriarch; and the prompt reply of a gracious and prayer-hearing God was, “as for Ishmael, I have heard thee.”

Parents! do you wish for a higher warrant to pray for your children—for all your children, than is here presented? The first prayer recorded in the Bible is that of a parent in behalf of a child: that prayer asked for more blessings than had been promised; and, finally, that prayer was immediately answered. The example of Abraham is a beacon-light, which may well guide parents to a God, who hears prayer for children!

006. Intercession Of Abraham For Sodom.

IntercessionOf Abraham For Sodom.

Genesis 18:23-33. This eighteenth chapter opens with a beautiful delineation of oriental manners. "A tent erected; flocks and herds grazing around; and Abraham reposing at the door of his tent, during the heat of the day. While thus engaged he raises his eyes and sees three strangers approaching. Instantly he rises and hastes to meet them; unsolicited, he admits them to all the rights of hospitality. Water is brought to wash their feet; ample provision is made; the table is spread under the friendly shade of a tree, and Abraham himself performs the office of waiter."

It is generally agreed, that two of these strangers were created angels; but, from the context, it has been inferred, that the third was the Eternal Son, visibly appearing in human form. Indeed, there is no intimation in the narrative of any other appearance than the three men, whom Abraham entertains. No allusion to the Shekinah, or Divine Manifestation, when Abraham prays, as, in the subsequent part of the chapter, he is represented as doing, in behalf of Sodom, but the narrative seems to represent, that when he "stood before the Lord," he addressed one of the three. During the whole interview, one of the personages has the preeminence, and talks as having power and authority within himself.

Two objects seem to have brought the strangers to the tent of Abraham the first, to announce to the patriarch and his wife the time of Isaac's birth; and the second, to communicate to the former the destruction of Sodom, which they were on their way to perform. Genesis 19:13. The first message having been delivered, two of the messengers arose, and directed their way towards the guilty city; but the principal personage tarried behind. Abraham, probably, in deference to a custom of the times, accompanied the two a short distance, and then returning, "stood before the Lord."

Two reasons are assigned for letting Abraham know of the approaching doom of Sodom: the first is, the dignity and importance of his character, and the great things, which God had proposed to do for him. When God has begun to do good to his servants, he follows them with still accumulating mercies. The second reason is, that Abraham would make a good use of the intelligence; he would naturally relate the divine communication to his family; he would point to it, as the consequence of bold transgression, and thus employ it to warn his household "to keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment." Thus the intelligence, so solemnly announced beforehand, would contribute to the accomplishment of the divine purpose and promise, in respect to the future enlargement of Abraham's posterity; who, being a people instructed in the way of the Lord, might be consistently blessed, with all the blessings promised to their pious ancestor. Perhaps, also, although not mentioned in the narrative, the Lord designed to furnish Abraham with an opportunity to exercise his benevolent affections in pleading for Sodom; especially for Lot, who was within its tainted atmosphere, and also to prove his righteousness in destroying a city, in which not ten righteous persons were to be found. The announcement is made. Whether amazement might have at first filled the heart of the patriarch, we soon find him intent on rescuing

the guilty city from her impending doom. He could not, indeed, interpose a shield, if he would, between her and a justly indignant God; nor could he, by any art or force, stay, for one moment, the storm which was now ready to sweep with desolating fury through the vale of Siddim; but he had one resort, one duty, one privilege—he could pray; and he “commences one of the most remarkable instances of human intercession to be met with in the whole compass of revelations; one in which the tender and sympathizing benevolence of Abraham, on the one hand, and the astonishing clemency and forbearance of Jehovah, on the other, are portrayed in colors, such as the pencil of inspiration alone could present.” At first, Abraham seems to have contemplated the preservation of the righteous only: “wilt thou destroy the righteous with the wicked?” But he soon enlarges his views of the divine mercy, and his intercession thence has a corresponding wider scope: “spare not only the righteous, but, for their sakes, the wicked also” This narrative may lead us to remark:—

1. Upon the benevolence of good men.

Abraham, no doubt, abhorred the wickedness of Sodom, and he did not intimate that God would not be just in her contemplated destruction. But he felt deeply in view of the approaching doom of her inhabitants. He wished that they might be spared, if consistent with the honor of God; and he addresses himself to effect their salvation, in the only possible way, in which he can act, with any hope of success. He prays—prays most fervently—prays most importunately. This is a beautiful trait in the character of all good men. They dread the doom of the ungodly. They ardently desire their salvation, and often pour forth their supplications with many tears, that, if possible, they may be spared.

2. The importance of the righteous to a wicked world

“They are well termed the ‘light of the world,’ and the ‘salt of the earth,’ for, without them, the world would be immersed in total darkness, and speedily become one mass of corruption. Little do the world think, how much they are indebted to God’s people. If only ten persons of this character had been found in Sodom, it would have been spared. Good men are the safeguards of a nation. Though often traduced, and represented as the ‘troublers of Israel,’ yet were they viewed aright, they would be considered rather as the ‘shields of the earth,’ who ward off from it the judgments of the Almighty, and their removal would be mourned as a public calamity. ‘When Lot is taken out of Sodom, Sodom is taken out of the world.’”

3. The kindness of God to them.

He allows, and even encourages them to address him on any subject, which concerns either his honor, or their happiness. He does not confine them to themselves; they may open their hearts to him in behalf of the vilest, and he has patience to listen to them while they plead. Abraham draws “near;” he appears exceedingly reverential; he feels that he is in the presence of a holy and avenging God; yet he pleads with the assurance of a son with a father.

4. The humility, which should ever characterize prayer.

“Nothing more distinguishes the prayer of Abraham on this occasion, than the profound abasement of spirit, which breathes through it. He speaks as one who can hardly realize, that he has taken it upon him to speak at all. Under the same oppressive consciousness of our being but sinful dust and ashes, should we draw near to God. It is only when the awe of the divine majesty and purity falls upon us, and we are filled with an overwhelming sense of our own unworthiness

and vileness, and of the vast distance that separates us from God, that we can suitably approach him.”

5. The efficacy of intercessory prayer.

Six times does the patriarch plead for Sodom, and six times does God grant his intercessory petition; and, as has been truly and beautifully remarked, “Abraham left off interceding, before God left off complying with his requests.”

It has been asked, why Abraham paused where he did, in his supplication! No one can affirm, that one step farther in the reduction might not have secured the salvation of Sodom. “Certain it is, that on a subsequent occasion, when God was about to send the Jews into captivity, Jeremiah 5:1, he told them that if they could find one righteous man in Jerusalem, he would spare them all; and after he had inflicted his judgments upon them, he assigned as his reason for it, Ezekiel 22:30-31, that not one had been found to stand in the gap and intercede for them. But, on the other hand, it must be admitted, that God holds the prerogative of pardoning in a sovereign manner, and will not allow himself to be bound by his own precedent. The clemency, which would have spared Sodom for the sake of ten, could not be moved, on any account, to avert the threatened wrath from the city, which had rejected the Savior, Matthew 11:24. And the iniquities of a people may arrive at such a pitch, that if Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, those holy men should not prevail, except to deliver their own souls by their righteousness. Ezekiel 14:14. It is not to be forgotten, therefore, that, notwithstanding the amazing condescension of God, manifested on this and other occasions, to the prayers of his saints, there is a limit, beyond which, their intercessions will not avail.” The opinion of the pious Mr. Henry may here be added, why Abraham left off asking when he had prevailed so far: “Either because he owned they deserved to perish, if there were not so many as ten; as the dresser of the vineyard, who consented the barren fig-tree should be cut down, if one year’s trial more did not make it fruitful, Luke 13:9, or because God restrained his spirit from asking further. When God has finally determined the ruin of a place, he forbids it to be prayed for. Thus, in respect to Judah, he said to his prophet Jeremiah, “Pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me; for I will not hear thee.” Jeremiah 7:16; Jeremiah 14:11.

Most fearful is the condition of those against whom the door of mercy is closed. There have been such in the world, for whom even the children of God might not pray. Their doom was sealed; their ruin certain. But if this be true of some, the number, it is to be hoped, is small; yet we are not required to cease praying for any, without an express revelation from God. But there are millions in danger! There is probably many a city as guilty as were those in the vale of Siddim; and in those cities there are children of God, whose spiritual welfare is in danger. How should those, then, who have power with God, who by fervent supplication may prevail at a throne of grace, cry day and night in behalf of Christians, who are in jeopardy; and, still more importunately, for those whose “damnation slumbereth not.” A thousand prayers should go up to the throne of God, where one is now offered; and to the fervent supplication, which is clothed in words, should be added “groanings which cannot be uttered.”

007. Eliezer's Prayer At Haran.

Eliezer's Prayer At Haran.

Genesis 24:12-14.

Abraham had now reached the 140th year of his age. Admonished by infirmities, which were yearly increasing, as well as by the departure of his beloved wife, that his own death could not be far distant, like a wise and prudent father, and according to the custom of the times, he turns his attention to the establishment of Isaac in a family state. It would doubtless have been easy for him to have entered into some advantageous worldly alliance, and taken the daughter of some distinguished prince, or chief of the land, in which he sojourned. But, while he had no objection to exchange with them the common civilities of life, he was aware of the hazard of asking of any one of them a daughter in marriage for his son. He could not be ignorant of the grand design of God, in calling him into the land of Canaan—the ultimate overthrow of idolatry, of which that land, and indeed the whole world, was full, and the establishment of his true worship on earth.

He would feel it to be a duty, therefore, “to erect the strongest possible safeguard around the pure faith of his seed;” and to this he was still more strongly urged, by knowing that the inhabitants of Canaan were, on account of their great wickedness, devoted to destruction. He saw them filling up the measure of their iniquities, and he feared lest his beloved Isaac, and his descendants, becoming partakers of their evil deeds, should share in their punishment. The measure proposed of sending for a wife for Isaac into Mesopotamia, where Nahor, Abraham's brother, and his family were living, was, therefore, every way worthy of one upon whom the security of such important interests devolved. Vestiges of idolatry, indeed, lingered among them, but it was far less prevalent than among the families of Canaan.

Having thus settled one important point, the kindred from among whom a wife for his son should be selected, the patriarch proceeds to the consideration of another, scarcely less important—the person, whom he should send on this delicate but interesting embassy. Fortunately, in his own family he had one who feared the Lord, and whom, therefore, he could trust. This was his eldest servant, or steward, probably Eliezer, who is mentioned Genesis 15:2. To him he confides this important undertaking, takes from him a solemn oath to insure his fidelity, expresses his firm and unshaken confidence in the prosperous issue of the expedition, as in the measures he was adopting, and in the end he proposed, he had in view the honor of God, and the fulfillment of his promises.

Having received his commission, Eliezer departs on his journey with suitable presents, and probably with a suitable retinue. At length, he reaches the city where Nahor resided. The evening was just setting in. It providentially happened that he was near a well of water. It was about the time, when, according to the custom of those eastern countries, and with which he was doubtless acquainted, the women would come out to draw water. Taking advantage of this prospect, and well aware of the importance of God's good guidance, he devoutly prays for success upon the

mission confided to him.

“This prayer,” says Mr. Bush, “is remarkable:—

1. “For the faith in which it is offered.

“He speaks all along under a full persuasion, that the providence of God extended to the minutest events, and that there was no presumption in appealing to him on the present occasion. His words are full of confidence that God would direct him in a matter of so much importance to his church in all future ages.

2. “For the correct views of the character of Jehovah which he expresses.

“He addresses him as the covenant God of Abraham, who had given him exceeding great and precious promises. In approaching him in this character, he would occupy the best possible vantage ground for urging his request, as any promise made to Abraham would furnish a plea, which could scarcely fail to be effectual.

3. “For the sign, which he presumed to ask.

“A better he could not well have desired; for such an offer, freely made to a stranger, would indicate a most amiable disposition. It would demonstrate at once the humility, the industry, the courtesy, the extreme kindness of the female, and would be a pledge that she possessed all the qualifications, which he deemed most desirable in a companion worthy of his master’s son. She who could be thus complaisant and obliging to a stranger, would certainly conduct herself well in the relation of a wife. It is a natural inquiry, whether the servant did right in thus fixing in his own mind upon a sign, and apparently prescribing it to God as a test of the selection about to be made. In reply, we may observe: (1.) That the event seems clearly to prove that the proceeding received the divine approbation, if it were not in fact of divine suggestion. (2.) Let the circumstances of the case be considered: It does not appear that any particular individual or particular family had been designated by Abraham, to whom his servant was to apply. All was uncertainty in this respect; and yet a choice was to be made without any great delay, which might have been attended with special inconveniences on all sides. The exigency, therefore, was peculiar, and the servant seems to have determined to do what common prudence would have dictated to any sensible man, under similar circumstances. Being an entire stranger to all the people of the city, he resolved to take his stand at the public watering-place, and judge as well as he could, from the deportment of the young women, which of them promised fairest to possess the requisite endowments of person, temper, and manners. All this, as far as we can see, was both proper and politic under the circumstances; and being an habitually pious man, when once he had fixed upon a definite course of action, he looks up to God and implores his blessing upon it. This was all. But his conduct, except in imploring the divine blessing upon whatever he undertook, is evidently no rule for us in the ordinary transactions of life.” A prayer offered, with such a reliance upon the divine faithfulness, was sure to be answered. That answer was direct and immediate. The damsel came forth, whom the steward would have chosen before all others. He enters into conversation with her. This leads to an invitation to her father’s house, where Eliezer states the object of his visit, and relates the various circumstances, which had brought him acquainted with the family, whose hospitality he was enjoying. The hand of the Lord was acknowledged in the whole transaction, and the question is referred to Rebekah, whether she will return with Eliezer, and become the wife of Isaac. “Wilt

thou go with this man?" was the simple question propounded; and the direct and artless reply of Rebekah does her the highest honor, "I will go." On learning the success of his negotiation, Eliezer, prompted by a sense of the kindness of God, pours forth his heart in expressions of gratitude. Shortly afterwards, he takes his departure with Rebekah in charge, the latter having received the blessing of all whom she left behind. The journey home was prosperous. Isaac meets his bride, while walking out to meditate at even tide, and Eliezer introduces him to her. He conducts her to his mother's tent; she becomes his wife, and, it is added, "he loved her," a declaration which cannot, in truth, be made of all men in respect to their wives, but which we should expect would be true of one in whom, and for whose welfare, God had so kindly and signally interested himself.

008. Prayer Of Jacob.

PRAYER OF JACOB.

Genesis 32:9-12. The prayer of Jacob is one of the most devout, fervent, and successful prayers recorded in the Inspired Volume.

It was offered, under circumstances of peculiar perplexity and solicitude; and, as is common in such cases, there is manifest, on the part of the patriarch, a directness and an urgency well adapted to secure the blessing of Him, who has said, "The effectual, fervent prayer," i.e. the intensely fervent prayer "of a righteous man availeth much."

Jacob and Esau were twin brothers, and sons of Isaac and Rebekah. As they grew up to manhood, they evinced dispositions of a widely different character. Jacob proved to be meek and peaceable, contenting himself with the duties and pleasures of a pastoral life; while Esau gave preference to the more stirring and adventurous pursuits of the chase, which the better accorded with a nature comparatively restless and intractable. In process of time, an event occurred in the family, which involved consequences of a serious and lasting nature. One day, Jacob had been preparing some pottage, when Esau returning from the field, weary and faint, requested some of it. Jacob seized the opportunity of proposing to exchange the pottage for the birthright of the family, which, in virtue of his being the elder, belonged to Esau. Both, probably, understood the value of this birthright. But Esau, with an indifference to spiritual blessings and privileges, which can only be accounted for, upon the supposition that his heart was not right towards God, accedes to the proposal and for "one morsel of bread," quitclaims interests of inestimable value.

Whether Jacob was just and kind in taking advantage of his brother's necessity, may be questioned. But it is probable that he had daily proofs of the light estimation, in which Esau held the birthright. They were at this time, forty years old; an age, one would think, at which they were capable of appreciating a negotiation of the kind. And, moreover, Esau made no overtures to cancel the bargain, but "eat and drank, and rose up, and went away," as if he were satisfied with the equivalent which he had obtained. For thirty-seven years, according to Dr. Hales, following the above purchase, no mention is made in the sacred narrative of the transaction. But, at length, when Jacob had reached his 77th, and Isaac his 137th year, the latter, by some means anticipating death at no distant day, proposes to confer on Esau the blessing of primogeniture; and, as a concomitant of the ceremony in such cases, he directs him to prepare "savory meat, that I may eat," says he, "and bless thee before I die." By an artful expedient, or, as it has with greater truth been characterized, by a "crooked policy" of Rebekah, Jacob is made to personate his brother, and receives the blessing which Isaac intended for Esau. This blessing now belonged to Jacob by right of purchase, and most unnecessary, as well as criminal, was the stratagem devised by Rebekah, in behalf of her favorite son.

Consequences disastrous to the peace of the family immediately follow. Esau, maddened in view of his loss, threatens the life of Jacob. The deepest anxiety and distress pervades the bosom of

the unhappy mother. She parts with him to see him no more; while he, to escape an incensed brother, is obliged to commence a long and perilous journey, alone and unbefriended, to his mother's relatives in the land of Mesopotamia. On arriving at the place of his destination, he enters the service of Laban, his uncle, with whom he spends twenty years. He marries, and rears a large family; is oppressed, and even cruelly treated by his selfish and mercenary father-in-law; yet is prospered and becomes rich. At the expiration of twenty years, God directs him to return to the land of his fathers. Accordingly, collecting his family and flocks, he commences his journey. Passing over the difficulties in which for a time he is involved with Laban we arrive at the interesting incidents connected with his renewed intercourse with Esau, and the sore trial which preceded it. A sore trial! God had bid him return; and yet he suffers him to be brought into great distress, and the most painful apprehensions. For some years, Esau had been residing in mount Seir, where he had become rich and powerful. But Jacob had no evidence that his former enmity had abated. He had once threatened his life, and who could say that his resentment might not enkindle, and not only himself, but his wives and children, fall victims to his unabated fury? Jacob was afraid. And God leaves him to the painful recollection of his sin, which had originally excited the anger of Esau. With great prudence, however, Jacob takes measures to propitiate his offended brother. At some distance he encamps, and sends messengers forward to inform Esau of his return, and to assure him that it was not with any intention of assuming the honor of precedency, or of claiming the double portion, to which he might seem to be entitled. God had prospered him, and he was contented. But this prudential step, for a time, only adds to his cumulative trouble and anxiety. The messengers return. They had seen Esau. They had delivered their message. He had made no reply, but was on his march, at the head of four hundred men!

What his real purpose was, Jacob is left to conjecture. But his fears are by no means allayed by the news of his approach. If disposed for peace, why comes he with the imposing and threatening array of four hundred men? There was ground for increased alarm, and to the eye of the patriarch, there seemed, at length, but one path of safety; one, and one source only of protection; God must help, or ruin is before them.

Jacob now hastily divides his company into two bands, that if Esau should come and smite the one, the other might possibly escape. Having done this, his last expedient is to present his case, with all its perplexities and dangers, to the notice of his covenant God.

1. In the first place, he approaches God, as the God of his father; and as such, a God in covenant. This was an appeal to the faithfulness of God. It was faith taking hold of a covenant, which, however unworthy he was, might not and could not fail.

2. He addresses him as his own God, pleading what he had promised to him, as well as to his father. "Thou hast bid me return; I am following thy directions, and wilt thou not now preserve thy servant?"

3. To such a struggling with God, as a God of promise, and a God of everlasting faithfulness, he adds a deep spirit of self abasement. "I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies." In view of his own sinful conduct on a former occasion, he is amazed at the returns of mercy, which he had met with from a gracious God, and yet he now needs his divine aid more than ever.

4. Having, in this devout and humble manner, prefaced his petition, he now presents it. "Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother," &c. This was doubtless the petition of a kind husband, and a tender father; but it was not as such only, that it was presented. It was mainly in the character of a believer in the promise, and one deeply concerned for the divine glory that it was offered. It was as though he had said, "If my life, and that of the mother with the children be cut off, how are thy promises to be fulfilled?" (Bush's notes, Vol I. p. 136.) The prayer of Jacob was now before the Lord. But he did not intermit such measures, as seemed likely to propitiate the favor of Esau. Prayer and means must be combined. He selects from his flocks, five hundred and fifty cattle, a magnificent present, which he divides into convenient droves, sends them forward under the care of his servants, whom he instructs as to the message, which he wishes them respectively, to deliver to Esau, when they should meet him. This done, he rose during the succeeding night, and having seen his family over the brook Jabbok, he returns, and is again alone.

What is his object? He had already presented his case to God; he had acknowledged his unworthiness, and had claimed divine protection; but Jacob did not feel that this was enough. He had become still more deeply sensible of the importance of prayer. The conviction came rolling in upon him, that God only could furnish the requisite relief. We, therefore, find him again alone, in the darkness of the night, holding deep, holy, intense communion with his God, and the God of his fathers.

Suddenly, he is assaulted by some one, who, with a strong grasp, seems intent on prostrating him. Who can it be? At the first onset, Jacob might have apprehended that it was one of Esau's four hundred men, for he comes upon him not as a friend, but as a foe. Himself strong, and perhaps girded up to still higher strength by his troubles, he defends himself to the utmost of his power. He grasps his antagonist with all the strength he can summon. How long the conflict continues before Jacob became aware of the true character of his opponent, we are not informed. But it was not "until the breaking of the day, that the wrestling ceased;" nor even then did victory declare for the divine antagonist. No. God gives his servant strength to carry on the contest with himself; and, though by a single touchy he dislocates his thigh, to show him his utter weakness in himself, he enables Jacob to hold on, and to continue the struggle till the glorious Personage with whom he contends consents to bless him.

While we consider this as "a real occurrence, a true and literal act of wrestling" it had a more important meaning. What was it? Jacob was now agitated and distressed, in view of the uncertain issue of a meeting with his brother. In his perplexity, he has recourse to a throne of grace; he casts himself on the mercy and protection of God. In order to calm his fears, and inspire him with confidence, God is pleased to inform him by a significant action of the favorable issue of the affair; as he was permitted to prevail over the angel, so he should prevail over Esau. But it has been generally understood also to teach the importance and efficacy of earnest, fervent, agonizing prayer, particularly in circumstances of affliction and distress. The prophet Hosea, in alluding to this transaction, Hosea 12:3-4, says of Jacob, "by his strength he had power with God; yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed; he wept, and made supplication unto him." If the prophet is instead alluding to the humble and importunate prayer of Jacob, made some hours previous, (Hosea 12:9-12,) still his wrestling with the angel, and refusing to let him go without a blessing, is evidently to be considered as implying the essence of prayer, and that of the most importunate

and agonizing character.

It only remains that we look at the result. That is soon told; and, as long as the Holy Scriptures shall have an existence, it will be told to the honor of God's marvelous power, and exalted kindness, as well as to the efficacious influence of "intensely fervent," and importunate prayer. On the day following the midnight struggle of Jacob, these brothers met, "and Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him; and they wept." Here is the answer to Jacob's prayer; here is the delightful issue of a controversy of twenty years standing; here we see a heart burning with resentment bursting forth into the most sincere and tender affection; here, instead of a sword, is a kiss; instead of blood, are tears; instead of murder, is love. God had moved, and "the lion had become a lamb; the vulture had become a dove." And as to Jacob, what a happy termination of his long anticipated trouble! What joy must have thrilled through his bosom, as that brother embraced him, and imprinted a kiss of affection upon his cheek!

What adoring gratitude must have gone up from his heart to the God, who answers prayer! Who in view of such a scene, of which there are but few in this jarring world, is not ready to exclaim, as he looks upon these brothers, so long estranged, but now reconciled;

Lo! what an exalting sight These friendly brothers prove, Whose cheerful hearts in bands unite Of harmony and love.

'Tis pleasant as the morning dews That fall on Zion's hill, Where God his mildest glory shows, And makes his grace distil.

Several reflections are suggested by this narrative.

1. That great trials sometimes befall the people of God, when in the way of commanded duty.

God had himself directed Jacob to return, and had promised to sustain him; yet, what troubles he encounters in the way of duty! True, the gathering clouds are graciously dispelled, and are succeeded by a delightful sunshine and calm. Yet, for a time, Jacob is brought into sore distress, and prompted to say, as on a subsequent occasion, "all these are against me!"

We are not to infer, then, that because we are walking in the path of duty, we may therefore promise ourselves exemption from afflictions and trials. The best men are sometimes the most tried. They are humble, prayerful, devoted, and yet they experience grievous troubles, and are led to exclaim; "Is his mercy clean gone forever, and will he be favorable no more?" Let us learn from the case of Jacob, that the most signal mercy may be intended for us, even when every thing around us wears the darkest aspect.

2. The surest way of prevailing with man, is to prevail with God.

Jacob well knew what the resentments of Esau had for merely been; nor had he evidence that those resentments had cooled. With such a one, what could he do? From one who was approaching with four hundred men, what could he hope? Esau, probably, started with an intention to wreak his vengeance upon him. The latter, therefore, had reason to tremble. But happily, he knew the power of God. He could soften that hard and resentful heart; he could allay that impending storm. Jacob, therefore, resorts to prayer, and we see the blessed result. Have we ourselves reason to fear the wrath of an enemy?—let us pray for him. No matter how formidable

he may be; no matter what occasion we may have given him to be displeased. Deep humility before God, and fervent prayer, will accomplish more than bribes; more than arms.

3. Yet, while we pray, we should omit no probable means of accomplishing the end desired.

It is sufficient to say, that Jacob seems to have acted through the whole of his trying circumstances, as if his safety depended upon God; and yet, as if it depended upon himself. This is the true secret of prevailing prayer. Bring into action all our wisdom, prudence, and energy; and yet appeal to, and trust in God. Human means and human efforts, however wise, will fail, unless a divine blessing accompany them.

And, finally, prevalence will recompense us, for all the toil and agony of strong and persevering wrestling.

Jacob continued his wrestling long, even until the dawn of day. He was probably tempted, at times, to give over the contest. And well might he inquire, "what can I do with such an antagonist?" Wrestle with God! enter into a personal contest with him! yet, knowing that upon his success with the "angel of the covenant," depended his success with Esau, he perseveres; he wrestles with the energy of desperation, and behold the result! he prevails! Did he regret his efforts and perseverance? When Esau ran and fell upon his neck, when he wept and kissed him, what a delightful triumph did Jacob enjoy!

Let us profit by an example filled with such profitable lessons! Are we in any trouble? Do clouds gather round? Is misfortune pressing upon us? Are friends cold and distant? Are enemies many and inveterate? Let us pray— pray long—pray ardently—pray prevailingly. And the victory will come. The day of joy and peace will dawn. If not here, beyond this vale of tears. God will make all these troubles redound to our joy. And when the glories of that better world shall be revealed; when our enemies here shall meet us as friends there, and more than all, when God, reconciled to us through the blood of Jesus, shall welcome us to his love, then shall we realize the full benefit of a life of prayer. Then, we shall have no regrets over any fervent, agonizing petitions we may have offered. Rather, we shall thank our heavenly Father for those troubles and trials, which met us in our path, and which kept us fast by a throne of grace.

009. Exodus.

Exodus.

010. Prayer For The Removal Of The Plagues.

Prayer For The Removal Of The Plagues.

Exodus 8:12-13.

(See also Exodus 8:30-31, and Exodus 9:33; Exodus 10:18.) The time fixed in the divine purpose for the deliverance of the children of Israel from their long and oppressive bondage in Egypt having arrived, God gives this direction to Moses: "When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all these wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in thine hand." Exodus 4:21. From this requirement, it would appear that the plan of divine operations in Egypt, designed to effect the release of God's people, had not only been settled, but had been announced to Moses. And as he was commissioned to superintend the process of their deliverance, this annunciation was highly important; otherwise, Moses would not have known how to proceed, except by special and immediate revelation, and would have been exposed to despair of success, in view of the strange and prolonged obstinacy of Pharaoh. "Which I have put in thine hand;" i.e. which I have commanded, and will enable thee to perform. In fulfillment of his commission, Moses presents himself before Pharaoh and announces his message. The monarch demands some sign or evidence of his own and Aaron's divine commission. In compliance with this reasonable requirement, Aaron's rod is turned into a serpent in the monarch's presence, presenting a miracle, as the highest possible evidence of their divine commission. Upon this, Pharaoh summons his wise men, or magicians, who attempt to deceive the monarch, by their feats of juggling or legerdemain. In this they are successful. The illusion of Pharaoh is complete, and he refuses compliance with the divine command to let Israel depart.

Upon this, the plagues commence; the first of which was to turn the waters of the Nile into blood. It can no longer be drunk, and even the fish die and petrify on the shores. By digging, however, sufficient is procured to preserve life; which, added to the renewed enchantments of the magicians, fortifies the monarch in his obstinacy, and in his refusal to let Israel depart. At the expiration of a week the waters are restored, and flow as usual. A second plague commences. Frogs, — a race obscene, Spawn'd in the muddy beds of Nile, came forth, Polluting Egypt; gardens, fields, and plains Were covered with the pest; the streets were fill'd; The croaking nuisance lurk'd in every nook; Nor palaces, nor even chambers'scaped; And the land stank—so numerous was the fry. From this judgment there is no escape, and no respite, Pharaoh relents; Moses and Aaron are recalled, and the now wavering monarch requests them to entreat the Lord to remove the plague, and Israel may depart.

Moses assents; and so full of confidence is he in God, as a prayer-answering God, that he allows Pharaoh to fix the time for the removal of the plague. That time was "tomorrow." If it be asked, why he did not demand an instantaneous cessation of the plague, it may be replied, that perhaps he imagined that Moses would require time to present his petition; or, which is the more probable supposition, he might hope that, meanwhile, the frogs would, by some other means, be removed.

Moses goes forth from the presence of Pharaoh, and enters into the more august presence of Jehovah. And how does he pray? He “cries”“From the force of the original,” remarks a commentator, “it is to be at least inferred that Moses prayed with great earnestness and intensity of spirit, if not with special energy of utterance.” He felt deeply for the honor of God; deeply for his oppressed brethren of the house of Israel; and deeply for Pharaoh, whose heart he desired to see relent under manifestations of divine power. The prayer of Moses was not merely a set of words, which he had only to repeat, and the desired response would come; but true, fervent, intense supplication was as essential to his success, as, in after ages, it was for Paul, or any other apostle, or minister of Jesus Christ. Indeed, Moses in promising Pharaoh that the plague should be stayed “tomorrow,” and, perhaps, at a particular hour, had no special assurance from God that it should so be, and therefore he might so promise the monarch; but Moses knew that God always hears the prayer of faith, and, designing to offer such prayer, he feels warranted in giving that assurance.

It is not important to dwell upon the other instances of supplication by Moses in behalf of Pharaoh. Those supplications were often repeated, and probably in more instances than are recorded. But there is one instance which might have affected a heart still harder than Pharaoh’s: when (Exodus 9:33) Moses goes forth out of the city to entreat the Lord, walking amid the most sublime and awful displays of divine power—the lightning gleams with terrific flashes, and fireballs roll with horrid glare along the ground, while corresponding thunders break in peals upon the astonished inhabitants; calm, fearless, and confiding, Moses walks forth, and, raising his hands to heaven, implores the God of those convulsions that there may be “a hiding of his power.” From this example of Moses learn two important lessons:—

1. Ever be ready and willing to pray for wicked men. No matter how wicked, or hardened they may have become. No matter how often they may have violated their promises, nor what influences they may have resisted. They may have solicited our prayers, and then have acted most inconsistently with such requests. They may be even inimical to us; oppressive in regard to ourselves and friends, and in open hostility to the plans and purposes of God; yet, on all proper occasions, we should be ready to forgive them, and be ready to pray for them; not once, nor twice, but as often as they desire, and even if they make no such request. And our prayers should proceed from benevolent hearts, and out of unfeigned lips.

2. Aim so to preserve and control your temper towards others, as to be able to pray for them affectionately, whatever provocations they may have given you. In this respect, Moses has set a noble example. We hear of no intemperate replies; no reproachful epithets; no heated and unwarrantable threats. He acts with a dignity becoming an ambassador of God, and with a calmness and kindness, which should ever characterize the Christian statesman. His errand was an important one, involving the honor of God and the happiness of millions. He bears himself accordingly. His provocations are great, but he manifests no bitterness. His negotiations are protracted and fruitless, but he evinces no impatience. From every interview with this proud, imperious, and cruel oppressor, he departs with a spirit with which he can properly enter the presence of God and pray; and pray for him.

011. The Widow Authorized To Pray.

The Widow Authorized To Pray.

Exodus 22:22-24.

Here is an express prohibition to afflict the widow and the fatherless child; and a special warrant, in case they “are in any wise” afflicted, to cry unto God. He avows himself the husband of the one, and the father of the other; and the righteous and ready avenger of the wrongs of both. “A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widow, is God in his holy habitation.” Psalms 68:5. In thus forbidding his people to afflict widows and orphans, he does, in fact, enjoin it upon them to comfort and assist them, and to be ready on all suitable occasions, to show them kindness. In making even just demands upon them, their condition should be considered; but injustice and oppression towards them God declares he will avenge by the retributions of his providence, if they cry to him. And the reason for this particular divine cognizance of their cause is, that they may have no one to whom they can successfully complain, or appeal. Besides, they are supposed to be unversed in business, destitute of advice, timorous, and of a tender spirit. They might find it difficult to bring their cause before a human tribunal; or, if entered there, who would espouse and manage it for them? Hence, God opens the “Chancery Court of Heaven” to them, and himself offers to plead, judge, and avenge their cause. The woe denounced against such oppressors is a fearful one. They shall be paid in kind. “Their wives shall be widows, and their children fatherless.” Such was the divine decree under the former dispensation.

We will not decide that it is just so now; but the widow and the fatherless have God for a father still. They are authorized to bring their wrongs directly before him. And, if he undertake for them, their oppressors have no power to thwart justice, or pervert law, by packing juries, or bribing judges. There is no bribing of the Lord of Hosts.

Pray, then, ye widows, and ye fatherless children; pray! cry! and he that has said, “Remove not the old landmark, and enter not into the fields of the fatherless,” he “will plead your cause,” (Proverbs 23:10-11,) for he has so promised, and he is “mighty.” His truth forever stands secure, He saves the oppressed, he feeds the poor, And none shall find his promise vain.

Such a denunciation may well startle the oppressor of the widow and the fatherless. He may, perhaps, justify his exactions by legal technicalities; or he may imagine that the manner in which his ill-gotten wealth has been obtained is unknown; but there is a God who weighs all things in a righteous balance, and who sees through all disguises. And, therefore, what though the oppressor be rich and prosperous; what though his wife and children be encircling him in all the flush of health, and in all the enjoyments of life; could he look into some retired chamber, at no great distance from his palace, and could he there see the daughter of penury, or the orphan, whose property has been appropriated to build his marble mansion, or goes daily to furnish his table with costly viands; could he see them bending before a just God, and pleading their cause with him; bringing before him his own declaration, “I will surely hear thee,” would not his “countenance

change?” would not the “joints of his loins be loosed, and his knees smite one against another?” Not for the riches of Croesus would I live in a habitation garnished with the products of ill-gotten wealth; nor would I see wife and children robed in the silks of India, or sparkling in the gems of Golkonda, if they must be the price of the tears of the widow and the orphan. Rather would I crave the poverty of Lazarus for myself and mine, than know that one prayer—only one, went up to heaven against me; an appeal of a widow, or a fatherless child.

012. Prayer Of Moses For Israel.

Prayer Of Moses For Israel.

Exodus 32:9-14. In their journey towards Canaan, the Israelites, having reached the neighborhood of Mount Sinai, encamp by divine direction at its base. Here God proposes to enter into covenant with them, and to deliver to them his law. Preparations are made for the sublime and august ceremony. The morning of the appointed day is ushered in with the visible descent of a dense, dark cloud, which rests on the summit of Sinai, and from which issue thundering and lightning, spreading a solemn awe throughout all the camp of Israel. In the midst of this terrific display of divine power, to which are added earthquake, fire, and the presence of the ministering angels, the covenant is proposed, and the law delivered. With one voice the people respond: "All the words, which the Lord hath said, we will do, and be obedient."

Following this "sight," which was so "terrible," that even Moses said, "I exceedingly fear and quake," (Hebrews 12:21.) he receives the divine command to ascend the mount. "And the sight of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mount, in the eyes of the children of Israel." Towards this cloud of glory Moses proceeds—he enters it, and there, for nearly forty days and forty nights, divinely sustained, he holds communion with God, and receives instructions in regard to the Tabernacle; its construction and furniture; and in regard to the worship of God, its ministers and ceremonies.

While thus employed, and just as he was on the eve of returning, an event transpired in the camp of Israel, which, as an exhibition of depravity, had never been paralleled. Daily fed by manna from heaven; daily refreshed by water from the smitten rock; surrounded by miracles of might and benignity, wrought daily for their comfort and support; who could have anticipated that, in defiance of the command, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me; thou shalt make no graven image," to which they had so lately and so solemnly promised obedience; they should so soon demand the fabrication of a molten image, "thus changing the glory of God into the likeness of an ox, that eateth grass?"

Yet such was the scene transpiring in the camp of Israel, when the interview between God and his servant Moses was about to terminate. Impatient at the delay of the latter, and pretending that they knew not what had become of him, but in reality "disrelishing a purely spiritual worship," the Israelites prefer their request to Aaron, "to make them gods who should go before them," and even clamorously demand of him a compliance with their wishes. And to a demand, so unnatural and Heaven-daring, what does the associate of Moses reply? Does he remonstrate? Filled with grief and dismay, does he chide? Does he denounce the judgment of Heaven upon them? Perhaps so, in the first instance, although the sacred narrative accords to him no such extenuating merit. But, if so, at length, he yields; the minister of religion becomes an accessory to gross and insulting idolatry; and he, who should have guarded the divine honor at the sacrifice of his life, himself fashions a molten calf, and superintends the sacrifice offered unto the dumb and senseless idol.

Thus, in the very sight of the most awful and sublime manifestations of the divine power and glory; Sinai's summit still invested with the symbols of the divine presence, and Moses still with God on the mount, this people, whom God had rescued from a bondage of centuries, and cruel as it had been long; whom he had conducted through the channels of the sea; whom he had fed, and was still feeding with bread from heaven; whose thirst he was slaking with water, which rolled by their side as they journeyed; this people, thus rescued, fed, clothed, preserved by a constant miracle, are bowing down to a senseless idol! Who could have thought it?

God's eye is upon them, and it kindles with holy indignation. "Go, get thee down," says he to Moses, "for thy people which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves." God speaks as if this people had forfeited all right longer to be considered his people, and as if he was about to cast them off. And why should he longer bear with them? Why not now, in view of this strange and wanton violation of their covenant, write upon them, "Lo-Ammi, Thou art not my people!"

Moses is ready to descend, to interpose and prevent, if possible, the continuance of this infatuated and monstrous idolatry; when God again addresses him. "This is a stiff-necked people; now, therefore, let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them; and I will make of thee a great nation." Does God then forbid his servant to pray for them? May he not intercede? Moses had attempted no mediation; had offered no supplication. But it is apparent that God feels that if he should cry, as he might cry, he would prevail. "The words which seem to forbid, are really intended," says a commentator, "to encourage Moses in his suit. They are not, indeed, a positive command to him to pray in behalf of Israel; but they indicate what it was that would stay the divine hand; and were equivalent to saying, "If you intercede for them, my hands are tied, and I cannot execute the deserved vengeance." Blessed power of prayer! "Able, after a sort," as Trapp says, "to transfuse a palsy into the hand of Omnipotence." But the proposal of God to Moses—will he surmount that? "I will make of thee a great nation." Oh, thou man of God, what a trial of thy spirit! What an appeal to the ambition, which may be latent in thy heart! Thou offered the occupation of the high and exalted station of Abraham! Thou to become the father of the faithful! Canaan thine inheritance, and thine the blessings of that covenant, which in future years, will give through the line of thy posterity a Savior to the world! Will Moses, in view of such personal interest; such promised honors; will he pray?

What a delightful exhibition does he give of the magnanimity and benevolence of his heart! Pray!—he not pray? See how he seizes the first favorable moment to throw himself, in all the ardor of earnest and importunate entreaty, into the breach. "Why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people," &c.

"The prayer of Moses on this occasion contains a threefold plea;

- (1.) That God would not reflect upon his own wisdom, by so soon destroying what he had employed so much power to preserve.
- (2.) That He would not give advantage to the Egyptians to glory over the ruin of a race whom they so much hated.
- (3.) That he would remember his covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The second of these arguments he prosecutes in the passage before us, and in doing so shows that he had the

glory of God quite as much at heart as the welfare of Israel. Aware that the eyes and the tongues of Egypt, and the surrounding nations, were intent on finding matter of malicious triumph over a people so signally delivered from bondage, so miraculously sustained, so wondrously conducted, he would at all hazards preclude every ground and occasion upon which the divine glory could be blemished in the estimate of his enemies. Should the chosen people now, after such illustrious displays of divine power in their behalf, perish under the stroke of deserved wrath, what would be more natural than that fickleness or impotence should be imputed to their covenant God, and thus his holy name be blasphemed on every side? All that had been thus far done would go for nothing, and to human appearance the Most High would 'disgrace the throne of his glory.' But this was a consequence which the pious heart of Moses could not endure to contemplate, and therefore is he so emphatic in urging the question, 'what will the Egyptians say?' But the great argument of all is the promise made to the fathers. "To the fulfillment of this promise the veracity of God would have been pledged, had it been given simply in the form of a plain declaration; but there was more than this; it was a promise confirmed by an oath, and an oath sworn by himself, than whom he could swear by no greater. Consequently nothing could be conceived more binding by which the honor of divine truth could be engaged to the performance of its stipulations. It is as if he had said, 'Lord, if thy people be now destroyed, shall not thy promise fail for evermore? And shall their unbelief be allowed to make thy truth of none effect? God forbid.'"

If there was ever a case in which prayer might have failed, was it not this? Who could expect the Lord to be propitiated towards a people so ungrateful; so insulting; so rebellious! Yet Moses prevails. And we have the divine attestation to the prevalence of his prayer; for the Psalmist declares, "he would have destroyed them, had not Moses, his chosen, stood before him in the breach."—Psalms 106:23.

Wonderful the efficacy of prayer! And wonderful the forbearance and condescension of God!

013. Second Prayer Of Moses.

Second Prayer Of Moses.

Exodus 32:30-34.

We have seen Moses prevail with God in the mount, to forego “the evil which he thought to do unto his people.” His request being granted, he descends the mountain, and approaches the scene of mirth and idolatry. There stood the “molten calf,” the monument of folly and madness; and there was the festive dance of God’s chosen people around it; the evidence of impiety and rebellion.

It was a sight for which, meek as the man of God was, and apprised as he had been of what was transpiring in the camp of Israel, he was ill prepared. There was such an abuse of divine goodness; there was such an insult upon the divine majesty; such a stain cast upon the divine glory, that we may well imagine that a holy indignation fired the bosom of Moses. The sequel proves the supposition true. He had borne from the mount “the tables of the testimony;” the workmanship of God; “hewn,” as Jewish tradition would have it, “out of the sapphire of the throne of his glory;” these, so sacred, considering their origin, and still more sacred, viewed as containing the imperative law of Jehovah; these, Moses dashes like a potter’s vessel to the ground, in the sight of all Israel. It savored of rashness in appearance, but a divine impulse doubtless actuated him. It was a significant action, denoting that from the covenant, which his people had so sacrilegiously violated, God might justly consider himself released.

Hope, however, sprung to the bosom of Moses, and immediately he addresses himself to the emergency. The idol god is reduced to powder, which is mingled with water, and the people compelled to drink it. Aaron is summoned to account for the weak and guilty part he had taken in the transaction, which he attempts rather to explain, than to justify. The Levites are called to vindicate the divine honor, by putting to the sword neighbor, friend, relative; whosoever is found in open defiance in the camp. They enter upon the painful commission, and before night-fall three thousand pallid corpses upon the field proclaim how fearful it is to give an idol the place of the living God.

Thus the sullied honor of God is vindicated; the reproachful idolatry of his people condemned. But so deeply is the heart of Moses affected, that he must bewail before the Lord the wickedness and ingratitude of the people, and again lay before him the subject of their forgiveness. Accordingly he retires to prostrate himself before the mercy-seat. In tones of impassioned and pathetic eloquence he breaks forth: “Oh, this people have sinned a great sin!” He knew it; he felt it in all its enormity, and his spirit is overwhelmed on account of it. The heart which is broken for sin, never attempts to conceal its sense of its guilt and demerit. It is ready to confess; it must confess. So the Psalmist:

While I keep silence, and conceal My heavy guilt, within my heart,
What torments doth my conscience feel!

What agonies of inward smart!

Moses, standing in the place of his people, and feeling all their turpitude, cannot ask the divine forgiveness, until he has made ample confession of their sin. Hence the language employed: "they have sinned a great sin." With this confession, he ventures to supplicate for their forgiveness. "If thou wilt forgive their sin;" he pauses; what would he say? He leaves the sentence unfinished, adding, "if thou wilt not forgive them, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book, which thou hast written;" if they must be destroyed, and that be thy determination, let me die with them, for I would not survive.

Through the grace of God, Moses is again successful. God replies by assuring him that, as a nation, the Israelites should not be destroyed; but that condign punishment should fall upon the guilty. And as a farther token of his being accepted, God promises that his "angel" shall go before them to the land whither they were bound; meaning that either the "pillar of cloud," or his "special providence" shall accompany them, notwithstanding their recent Heaven-provoking revolt.

Thus we see the power of humble, yet importunate prayer. But what condescension in God, to listen to the voice of mortal man, in behalf of a people worshipping a senseless idol, while the glory of Jehovah was "as devouring fire" on the mount! What honor is put upon Moses himself! Happy the nation which has rulers who can throw themselves into the "breach," when national sins are inviting the wrath of God. But for Moses, Israel would have been blotted out, and the blessings of the covenant transferred to others.

O may the sons of men record, The wondrous goodness of the Lord!

How great his works! how kind his ways!

Let ev'ry tongue pronounce his praise.

Yet the sequel may admonish those who are spared through the intercession of the righteous, that some of the consequences of their sins may remain, and still be suffered. From a condign and immediate punishment, the Israelites were exempted; but God assures them, that if he shall have occasion to visit them in judgment for future offences, he will remember this, and increase their punishment on account of it. Accordingly, a tradition exists among the Jews to this day, that whatever afflictions their nation has experienced, there has been mingled at least one ounce of the golden calf.

Happy is it if, when we have sinned, and have been forgiven, either through the supplications of our Christian friends, or at the instance of our own penitential cries, we do not again "turn to folly." Let us remember, that, at length, we may so sin, that though "Moses and Samuel should stand before the Lord for us," God would not hear them.—Jeremiah 15:1.

014. Third Prayer Of Moses.

Third Prayer Of Moses.

Exodus 33:12-15.

See also, Exodus 13:18-22.

Moses for the third time, is prostrate before God; and the prayer which he now offers, seems to be a continuation, or rather renewal of that which he offered when he returned unto the Lord, Exodus 32:31. In that interview with God, he obtained a promise that an "angel" should accompany him in conducting the children of Israel to Canaan, Exodus 32:34. But here the subject is renewed, evidently with a desire on his part to secure the same guiding hand which Israel had enjoyed. Thus far, the "cloudy pillar" had conducted their march. Was this symbol of the divine presence still to go before them? or, were they henceforth to trust to the more ordinary providence of God? Moses wished his doubts resolved; he wished his heart to be set at rest on a point of so much importance.

Mark the manner of his plea: "See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and thou hast not let me know," i.e. not specifically, "whom thou will send with me. Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight." Moses had satisfactory evidence that God regarded him as his friend, as he had had before assurances of the divine favor; inasmuch as God had offered to destroy the whole nation of Israel, and bestow upon him the blessings designed for them. Might he not, then, venture to ask that God would manifest his "way," his mind to him, in reference to the course he should pursue in conducting the children of Israel to their destined inheritance; and especially that he would favor him and them with the guardianship and guidance of the "angel of his presence." And to these personal considerations, he now adds others, growing out of their relationship to God: "Consider that this nation is thy people." God had long before adopted their fathers; he had made them "exceedingly great and precious promises he had watched over the nation in Egypt with a divine and parental care; he had effected their deliverance by means of, and amidst the sublime manifestations of his power; for them he had poured out water from the rock, and rained bread from heaven. Moses bethought himself of all these tokens of God's interest in this people, and now he asks, "wilt thou now forsake them? If thy presence, thy special presence, go not with us, carry us not up hence. Better that we should fail and fall in the wilderness. And unless the "pillar of cloud" guide us, as it has done, how shall we know that we have found favor in thy sight? Go with us, as thou hast done, and we shall know that we are the 'peculiar people' of God, separated by him from the heathen nations of the world, to maintain his holy worship, to observe his ordinances and statutes, and to convey to future generations the inestimable blessings promised in the covenant."

Such is an outline of the fervent supplication of Moses. And how is it received? An immediate and definite assurance is given him that it shall be as he has asked. The same gracious symbol of the divine presence enjoyed by them since their departure from Egypt should accompany them, till they reached the land of their inheritance, and he "would give them rest." They should subdue their

enemies; which, having accomplished, they should sit “each one under his vine and fig-tree, having none to molest them, or make them afraid.”

Let us pause, and consider the efficacy of prayer. Before us is a nation, a whole nation, guilty of ingratitude the most offensive, and of idolatry the most senseless and provoking. And before that nation, as they are encamped round about Sinai, are the most magnificent displays of Jehovah’s power. His voice, with terror in the sound, Through clouds and darkness breaks;

All heaven in lightning shines around, And earth with thunder shakes.

Yet, behold them prostrate by thousands, paying homage to a calf! Was there, in all time, a more humiliating spectacle? Was it strange that the indignation of Jehovah was like devouring fire? Was it not yet more strange that he should have restrained himself, and suffered Moses to intercede in their behalf? A few, may be, would not join in with the unhallowed worship, but we read of none—no, not one—ready to unite with Moses in deprecating the wrath of Jehovah. He stands forth alone. He prays; prays for a nation—a nation —more obnoxious at that hour, Than Sodom in her day had pow’r to be; And wonderful, most wonderful, he is heard; he secures their pardon; he procures a blessing for all.

Hence, learn what an individual may accomplish! God has set bounds to the billows of the ocean; the earth itself must revolve in her prescribed orbit; the eccentric comet must return from her “voyage of awful length;” but where is the limit to the efficacy of “the fervent, effectual prayer of a righteous man?” On which page of the sacred oracles is it inscribed, in respect to the humble supplicant, “thus far thou mayest prevail, but no farther?” Blessed truth! God can hear one for thousands; one for millions; a president for a state; a monarch for a kingdom. And if one may, and, in times of emergency, should thus plead, how will men in office and authority excuse themselves in the neglect of a duty, which, if faithfully performed, may be of more avail than the most numerous armies, and the most firmly constructed fortifications?

How many of the presidents of this republic have been praying men? How many of our governors feel it incumbent on them to pray specifically, ardently, for the people over whom they preside? Who of our generals retire to their tents to hold converse with God, and ask for blessings on the armies which they lead? Emperors, kings, queens, princes—how many of them, in times of national sins, imitate the example of Moses? Yet we learn what such might do, and what blessings they might prove to the nations among whom they dwell, and over whose destinies they preside.

We return again to Moses. He had obtained one important blessing, which conveyed joy and assurance to his heart, But, now, there was another blessing—one of a more personal nature, and which, doubtless, was suggested by those divine manifestations, the “Shekinah,” the “pillar of cloud by day, and pillar of fire by night;” the “sapphire throne,” seen by Moses and the elders of Israel, Exodus 24:10, those different forms in which God had revealed himself. What did these wondrous symbols involve? What lay behind? And were there not brighter glories which mortal eyes might behold? Might he not wish—not to gratify a vain curiosity, but as a means of a more perfect assimilation to God, as such holy communion would contribute to effect—might he not venture to ask, “making one concession an argument for seeking another,” a sight of the more unclouded glory of his Maker? But what was it Moses desired; a sensible manifestation? some bright and corporeal vision? or, was it a mental apprehension of the divine perfections, as they

exist in, and are connected with the spiritual essence of Jehovah? We should speak with caution on a subject so solemn and recondite. We may not be positive, but it would seem that he had in view some visible glory; something which he desired to behold, and which, if his request was granted, he expected to behold with his mortal eye. Who can say that it was not “the brightness of the Father’s glory” which he desired to see; “the express image of his person;” some corporeal or visible manifestation of the Messiah—that Mediator, through whom he might have understood the Infinite Father designed to exhibit himself to his saints to all eternity, and Shed sweet glories on them all?

But, whatever it was that Moses asked, God was pleased to grant, so far as “he had ability to receive it.” As to a full, unclouded view of the divine glory, that he could not enjoy, and live. It was a splendor which would overpower; an effulgence which would extinguish life.

But, with inexpressible kindness and condescension, God assures him that he shall be favored with a softened view of his glory; not the full view of his face, that no man could see and live, but with a vision of him after he had passed, and which might be denominated his “hinder,” or “retiring” glory. That he might see; that he could see; but, even for such a view, he must enter a cleft in the rock, and be shielded by the divine hand. That hand would be removed, when Moses might gaze with safety upon the softened glory of his Maker. The day following, the prayer of Moses is answered. He ascends the mountain alone. He repairs to the rock, and retires to the cleft. Not an Israelite may be seen, even on the skirt of the mountain; not a beast may touch it, during the solemn and mysterious interview between God and his servant Moses.

Let us not hope to reach the feelings of the favored leader of Israel. A holy awe pervades his soul. A deep, and, perhaps, oppressive sense of the approaching scene settles on his heart. At length, the hand of Jehovah, probably some cloudy medium, covers the cleft. The insufferable brightness passes. The cloud is withdrawn, and——

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Let us attempt no further description of the scene. Rather let us join this favored man of God, in the homage he pays, as he bows and worships. Let us unite in the devout and lofty gratitude, which, we may well suppose, bursts from his lips, as he hears—hears for himself; hears for sinning Israel; hears for us, and all mankind—the proclamation so full of goodness and salvation: “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious,” &c. “I will make my goodness to pass before thee,” said God. That goodness was love embodied; and, as it passed, it shone in all its native glory, too effulgent for the eye of Moses, except that he saw it retiring.

Thus was Moses preeminently favored. Thus he beheld a “similitude of the Lord,” Numbers 12:6-8; some such view as Elijah had, in after times, near that very spot; some such view as the disciples also enjoyed, in still later days, when Jesus was transfigured before them, and in the presence of Moses and Elijah. But few of the children of God have been so honored and blessed as was Moses and these other servants of Jesus. The same necessity, perhaps, does not exist for such manifestations in their case, nor are they prepared for them. But there have been many who have enjoyed seasons of delightful, and even rapturous communion with Christ; whose visions of his glory have been ravishing and absorbing; and which, if they have not caused their face to shine, as did that of Moses, have spread moral beauty and loveliness through the soul. Such

manifestations some children of God enjoy, while on their journey; and even brighter manifestations, as they draw towards its close. Why should they not? Why should not Jesus reveal himself to them? They love him purely and ardently. Why should he not bring them into his banqueting-house, and open to them his heart of love? Why, when just entering the Celestial City, should he not come to them? Why not part the vail, and let them look in upon that glorious city, where God shines in one unclouded day, and which is so soon to be their eternal residence? I have seen some such death-beds, where the soul was filled with "joy unspeakable, and full of glory," when it exultingly exclaimed:

Jesus! The vision of thy face Hath overpowering charms;

Scarce shall I feel death's cold embrace, With Christ within my arms.

Then, while ye hear my heartstrings break.

How sweet my minutes roll! A mortal paleness on my cheek, But glory in my soul!

Oh, how little do men of the world know of the glory of Jesus, or of the joy of communion with him! I wish they could see him as he is sometimes seen by his children; I wish they could realize the bliss which his love imparts. The brightest objects of earth would then fade, and the most intoxicating cup of pleasure would then be easily relinquished. They would not wonder at the holy ecstasy of a dying Payson, nor at the "wonderful glory" seen by a departing Evarts.

015. Numbers.

Numbers.

016. Prayer On Removing The Ark From Horeb.

Prayer On Removing The Ark From Horeb.

Numbers 10:33-36. The Israelites had abode in the wilderness of Sinai, near the base of Horeb, about a year, Numbers 10:11-12. Deuteronomy 1:6. But now, by divine direction, they were to renew their journey towards Canaan. Accordingly, the needful preparations were made; the tents were struck and folded; the tabernacle was taken down, and carefully packed for removal. The several tribes were arranged in their divinely designated order; the trumpets sounded an “alarm,” and they left “the mount of the Lord,”—a spot long likely to be remembered by them as the place where they had seen the glory of Jehovah; where they had heard his voice; where they had received his law; where they had entered into covenant with him; and where, to their long and deep sorrow, they had been guilty of the most shameful ingratitude and provoking idolatry. The “ark of the covenant” went before, being borne on the shoulders of the Levites, who, in their journeyings, were divinely directed to search out suitable places in the desert, on which the tribes were to encamp. The removal of the ark, each morning, was preceded by a solemn prayer; and their coming in, or halting at evening, was sanctified in like manner. The form of morning prayer was: “Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered: and let them that hate thee, flee before thee.” They were now in a desolate region, but marching towards an enemy’s country. It was right, therefore, thus to pray, as they were daily exposed to sudden attacks from rapacious hordes, (Exodus 17:8,) and needed to be reminded that all their hope was in that arm, which had brought them up from the house of bondage. At evening the form varied: “Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel;” i.e. return them to their rest again after this fatigue.

It is a pleasant reflection, suggested by this historical incident, that God goes before, and accompanies his believing people, in their journey through this world, to their rest above. And he provides, and points out suitable resting-places by the way, so that each one may, at least, occasionally say with the Psalmist: “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters.” The way in which the Israelites were conducted to Canaan was chiefly a desert—so is the way to the Canaan above. But every desert has its oasis; its verdant spots, where the traveler may repose: and, though these may be far distant from each other, with gloomy intervals between, yet, how refreshing, when, at length, he reaches a place where he may repose, and slake his thirst. So with the spiritual traveler to the land of Beulah. Long marches, and distressing conflicts may await him; he may sigh for rest, as the tired dove longs for her window; or, as the parched hart pants for a cooling stream at hand, And he must drink, or die—

Yet, let him not despond. That divine shepherd, who conducts him, will enable him to surmount every obstacle which obstructs his way, or which serves to diminish his strength. But it is, perhaps, more to our purpose, to remind our readers, that the example of Moses and his people, in invoking the blessing of God morning and evening, while on their journey, should be imitated by them, when in similar circumstances. As we set forth in the morning, either commencing or prosecuting a journey, how know we what may betide us? How many circumstances may transpire, any one of

which may thwart our plans, interrupt our journey, involve us in danger, and even “finish our course.” Do we go in our own vehicle? the horse attached may take fright, and dash us down some fatal precipice. Do we embark on board some steamer? some sudden and fatal explosion may, in a moment, send us to the bar of God; or, the fire may kindle, and leave us only the awful alternative—the devouring flames or a watery grave. Or, are we borne by some railroad car? a single pin loosened may whirl us from the track; or a single spike disengaged may send the frightful, death-dealing “snake’s-head” through our bodies, terminating life with a single groan.

Ere I set out on a journey, I would hide to my closet, and, with special care, commend my all to God. I would go from the footstool, saying: My feet shall never slide, Nor fall in fatal snares, Since God, my guard and guide, Defends me from my fears.

Or, if it seems better to my Heavenly Father, that, while absent from home—absent from “wife and children dear,” I should meet death, by some sudden and unexpected incident, I would have provided therefor; remembering how truly, solemnly, it has been said, that ——a moment we may wish, When worlds want wealth to buy.

I would prepare for such an emergency, and have had my prayer laid up before the throne of God, that He, with whom there is no surprise, may save me in a moment of such danger; or, if otherwise, and I die—he may, in answer to my prayer, “receive me to glory.” Nor should we fail, when we have gone out, and come in in safety, to acknowledge the good providence of God, which has been over us. Many, I apprehend, pray for protection, who do not think to thank God for it, when it has been most kindly extended to them. Let those, however, who are so fearful, lest they should meet some Amalekite in the way, and, because of such fears, are quite ready to bespeak the divine protection—let them not fail, when, in the sequel, they have either avoided such a foe; or, having met, have vanquished him—to return, and give thanks to God. Ten are preserved, where one traveler is even in danger; but, as our Savior asked, in respect to the lepers, whom he had healed, so it may be asked of ten travelers preserved, “Where are the nine?”

017. Fire Quenched Through Prayer.

Fire Quenched Through Prayer.

Numbers 11:1-2. The Israelites are again “journeying unto the place which the Lord hath given them.” What pleasure must they feel,, in seeing their encampment broken up! “The solitary place,” for such it was, where they had long abode, must be “glad.” I seem to myself to hear the song of the young, as the standards are raised, and the banners stream on the breeze. I seem to hear the aged sire congratulating his consort at the prospect, that even they may yet see the land of promise, and lay their bones where their children, and children’s children, may watch over their sepulchers. But the day whose morning is bright, is often beclouded before noon; the journey, whose outset is pleasant and auspicious, may soon become painful and distressing. So it proved with the Israelites. Not three days elapse, before countenances, which were happy, are sad; and hearts, which were bounding with joy, are filled with consternation and dismay. But why? What has befallen them? What has so suddenly changed the aspect of the people of God? Has their Divine Protector forsaken them? No; there is the “pillar of cloud” still going before them. There is the ark of the covenant, borne by the Levites, and God between the cherubim. Manna descends, as usual, and water follows their pathway. Their feet swell not, and their garments wax not old. Are they threatened by hostile tribes, hanging upon their skirts? No such foe has yet made his appearance; or, if he has, Israel, a name divinely blest, May rise secure, securely rest; Their holy guardian’s watchful eyes, Admit no slumber, nor surprise.

What, then, ails the people of God? They are already complaining. Complaining! Not openly, as Moses seems not to have known it, but in secret; perhaps, in low murmurings, one to another—so, however, that “the Lord hears it.” But why complain? The sacred narrative gives no explanation, and, therefore, we are left to conjecture. But it seems most probable, that they were too fond of their ease, and too indifferent about the promised land, to make the effort necessary to reach it. Or, if they desired to enjoy so noble an inheritance, may be they thought that God, whose miracles in their behalf had been wonderful, and even stupendous, might convert the barren and inhospitable desert into a fruitful and delightful way, which would avert many evils, now seemingly besetting their path.

But, whatever may have been the cause of their complainings, they were highly offensive to God, and his anger was kindled. Suddenly, flashes of fire were seen darting forth from the “cloudy pillar,” reaching to the very extremity of the camp, and laying many a rebellious Israelite low in death.

It was a sudden judgment, and fearful as it was sudden. Nor were they at a loss for the reason of it. Conscience would bring home the guilt of ingratitude and rebellion to their bosoms; and, as one after another fell before the consuming fires of the Almighty, the spared would stand trembling, lest a similar judgment should overtake them. God is sometimes so rapid and fearful in his rebukes, as to excite men to immediate measures to avert his wrath. It was so in the present case. Consternation sat on every countenance; dismay filled every bosom. They hasten to Moses. They

implore his intervention. On a former occasion, they were indifferent about him; “they wot not,” cared not what had become of him; but now, how important to their cause! how exalted he appears, as a mediator for the thousands of Israel! Moses addresses himself to the solemn emergency. And, while yet the lightning of God are still destructively at work, he bows in supplication, and beseeches the God of his people to quench those appalling fires, and stay his work of destruction. Again Moses is heard; and, from that hour, the “pillar of cloud” assumes its milder form; the lightning ceases; mercy smiles; the rebels are safe. Such, sometimes, are the effects of unreasonable complaints against God. Such, sometimes, the effects of the humble, fervent prayer of a righteous man, in behalf of the ungrateful and rebellious.

Some children of God, at the present day, are quite as unreasonable in their murmurings as were the Israelites in the desert. They are journeying towards a spiritual Canaan—a far better inheritance than that of the temporal Canaan, valuable as that was. And, in order to reach it, some deserts are to be passed; some trials are to be sustained. The path of sorrow, and that path alone, Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown; No traveler e’er reached that blest abode, Who found not thorns and briars in his road. Shall the children of God therefore murmur? Must their spiritual voyage always be across smooth waters? Their spiritual journey in some splendid car, moved on without care and effort on their part—they, meanwhile, singing: My willing soul would stay In such a frame as this, And bear myself away To everlasting bliss?

Ah! does the child of God look for such ease? He will find himself disappointed. His Heavenly Father knows better than to permit him thus to —dance along the flowery plain.

Bright skies, without clouds; worldly joy, without occasional sorrow, would prove the ruin of every child of God on earth. They cannot bear it. Well did God know this; and, therefore, as the poet has beautifully expressed it: In pity to the souls His grace design’d To rescue from the ruins of mankind, Call’d for a cloud to darken all their years, And said, “Go, spend them in a vale of tears.”

Fortunate were the children of Israel, that they had an advocate at hand—one who had power with God, and who was willing to step into the “breach.” Christian! you are more fortunate still. You have an Almighty Intercessor— one more willing; one whom the Father always hears. He has trod the desert before you. He is acquainted with all its difficulties and discouragements; and he invites your confidence. He solicits the favor of helping you on with your burden. What says he? “Cast all your cares upon me, for I care for thee.” Not only those cares, which spring up in the providence of God—which will come, must come; but cares—deep, corroding cares, the result of your own folly; your ill-timed conduct; your peevishness; your fretfulness. No matter from what cause—innocent or guilty; providential or self-inflicted—come, and cry unto Jesus, and ask him to ward off the “fiery darts;” ask him, and he has promised to pray the Father for you. And the “fire will be quenched;” the hand of rebuke will be removed, if God deems it wise; if love and kindness to you so decide.

But, perhaps, your present safety, and your final joy, would be endangered, were the troubles, under which you groan, removed. If so, they will be suffered to remain. Paul could not do without that “thorn in the flesh.” It was essential to his success as an apostle of Jesus Christ; essential to his “victory” in his “fight of faith.” But there was an antidote to the daily, hourly sting of that thorn; a counterpoise to the burden, which the loving kindness of God decided he must continue to bear. “My grace is sufficient for thee.” That promise was enough. It poured more joy and contentment into his bosom, than the thorn did shame or disquietude. Said this same apostle, who has given us

a catalogue of his sufferings and trials in his second epistle to the Corinthians, to which, aside from the sufferings and sorrows of Jesus, I know of no parallel, —“these light afflictions, which are but for a moment!” Paul! I thank thee for helping me to such an estimate of afflictions, which have so much troubled my soul. But more I thank thee, my gracious God, who hath told me how, through prayer and faith, I may obtain the victory, now and finally: through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

018. Moses Complains Of His Charge.

Moses Complains Of His Charge.

Numbers 11:4;Numbers 11:10-15;Numbers 11:23;Numbers 11:31-34. A few days only have elapsed, since God sent forth his fires against the Israelites, in token of his displeasure, at their unreasonable murmuring. That rebuke might have sufficed to subdue and humble them. But again they are engaged in a similar way. And, at this time, we are not left in doubt as to the cause. A "mixed multitude," some from various nations, had attached themselves to the Israelites, on leaving Egypt, and were now proceeding with them to Canaan. These, becoming dissatisfied with the food provided, are loud in their demands for flesh. The spirit of discontent becomes contagious; and soon all Israel are weeping, and inquiring: "who shall give us flesh to eat?" They "remember the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlicks," which they had in Egypt. "Yes," says an old divine, "they remember all these; but they forget the brick-kilns, and the task-masters, the voice of the oppressor, and the smart of the whip." And they regard with loathing the food rained down from heaven; "there is nothing at all besides this manna before our eyes," say they; "this manna! poor miserable food, which only serves to dry up our souls!" The manna, like a morning shower, Lay thick around their feet: The corn of heaven, so light, so pure, As though 'twere angel's meat.

But they in murmuring language said, "Manna is all our feast, "We loathe this light, this airy bread; "We must have flesh to taste." The discontent is deep; is universal. As he goes through the camp, Moses hears the loud lamentation in every tent, and sees every man at his door in tears.

Ungrateful people! who delivered you from a bondage, in which groans and tears were daily mingled? Who saved you from the wrath of Pharaoh, and his horsemen? Who has hitherto fed and clothed you? Alas! that you should murmur in the midst of plenty; and almost in sight of "a land flowing with milk and honey!" No marvel that God is angry; no marvel that Moses is displeased.

It would seem, that the cares and trials of Moses had for some time been accumulating. The people whom he was conducting were numerous, sensitive, and restless. Moses is wearied and discouraged. His patience is put to the test; and, under a provocation not light, he complains. But with every kind explanation and apology, Moses is still in fault. "Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant?" he inquires, as if God were wrong. "Have I conceived all this people?" "Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people?" "And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee."

Strange language for the divinely commissioned leader of the people of God! ill advised! intemperate! But the condescension and grace of God are still more remarkable. Not a single word by way of rebuke is heard. No notice appears to be taken of his servant's inconsistent and complaining speech. Moses is burdened; God admits it, and provides for his relief, by directing the organization of a council of seventy Elders, to share with him the responsibility of government. Nor is this the end of the divine kindness. Even the humor of this ungrateful people shall be gratified. "Let them sanctify themselves," i.e. put themselves into a fitting frame to receive such a token of

God's power, as shall be a token both of mercy and judgment. They shall have flesh; not one day, nor two days; but a month.

Moses replies; but his reply does honor neither to his faith nor humility. "Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them to suffice them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them to suffice them?" Has Moses forgotten the many, the stupendous miracles of God in Egypt? Has he forgotten that day when, in the midst of tempest and lightning and hail, he walked forth from the palace of Pharaoh unharmed? Has he forgotten the summit of Horeb; the glory of God, which he there saw in the cleft? Surprising, that with all the array of divine power, which had passed before him, he should now inquire, "can God furnish a table in the wilderness?"

"But what saith the answer of God?" It contained a rebuke, which must have filled Moses with shame and confusion: "Is the Lord's hand shortened? Thou shalt see, whether my word shall come to pass unto thee, or not." The sequel may be told in few words. The Elders of Israel are gathered, and the spirit promised is poured out upon them, by which they are qualified for their new and responsible station. In respect to flesh for the people, the promise of God is most signally fulfilled. On the day following, an innumerable number of quails make their appearance in and around the camp; of which every one is permitted to gather, as he pleases. The food thus bestowed, had it been used with moderation, might have proved a comfort and a blessing. But, under an excited and inordinate appetite, it is converted into a curse. A plague ensues, by which so many are destroyed, as to justify the significant name given to the place, Kibroth-Hattaavah, or the graves of lusts.

It is a remark of some importance, suggested by the language employed by Moses, in his address to God, that great illuminations, and exalted divine favors, do not always prevent the children of God from doing wrong. Who had enjoyed such divine manifestations as Moses? Or who had such power at a throne of grace? He had often prayed, and, in no recorded instance, had his request been denied. He had sought signal blessings, both for himself and people, and these blessings had been granted. And, hitherto, he had appeared humble, reverential, and confiding. But a surprising change comes over him. He appears arrogant, distrustful, impatient and peevish. To what cause shall this change be referred? Is God less kind? Has the divine aid been in any measure withheld?

It must be admitted that Moses had in charge a restless people. They were continually murmuring; and, so far, the trial of Moses was real and severe. But at this time he bears his trial with less fortitude and patience than usual. He complains: "Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant?" He magnifies his own performances: "Thou layest all the burden of this people on me." He takes too much to himself when he asks: "Whence should I have flesh to give them?" He speaks distrustfully: "I am not able to bear all this people." And, "worst of all, he passionately wishes for death, and prays to be killed, because his life was at that time a little uneasy to him."

"The best," says Henry, "have their infirmities, and sometimes fail to exercise that grace, for which they are eminent." Happy was it for Moses, that God did not "severely mark his fault." Happy for other children of the Most High, that he can "bear long with them." Oh, how often are their prayers any thing but the humble supplications of humble, grateful, and obedient children! How much of that which passes for prayer is only murmuring and complaining! the result of a proud and arrogant spirit! The plain import of which is, that God's dealings are unequal and unkind; that more favor is

merited than is shown; that less trouble and trial are deserved than are inflicted.

Said the disciples, "Whence can a man satisfy these men?" as they looked round upon the thousands, which were gathered to hear our Lord in a desert place. "Can God spread a table in the wilderness?" asks Moses: the man who had seen more of the miracles of God than any other since the fall. What distrust! what unbelief in the power and ability of Him, who measures the waters of the ocean and metes out the heavens. Well did God inquire, "Is the Lord's hand waxed short?"

Let us do more justice to the power and kindness of God; especially when we approach Him by prayer and supplication; let us reflect that the everlasting God never fainteth, nor groweth weary.

Lord, I forbid this hopeless thought, This dark, despairing frame, Rememb'ring what thy hand hath wrought;

Thy hand is still the same.

019. Prayer Of Moses For Miriam.

Prayer Of Moses For Miriam.

Numbers 12:1-2;Numbers 12:10;Numbers 12:13.

We have just seen the whole nation of Israel leagued together in murmuring against God, for not administering to the full enjoyment of their carnal appetites. Murmuring is still the subject of our contemplations; but, in the present instance, it is more limited, and falls upon the servant, rather than upon the sovereign; is against Moses, rather than against God.

Miriam and Aaron, sister and brother of Moses, not having been consulted in the choice of the seventy elders, affect to be highly displeased. "Hath the Lord spoken only by Moses?" they significantly and complainingly inquire. Shall he arrogate to himself these important appointments, and put dishonor upon us, who have hitherto been his counselors?

Such was the jealous and ill-tempered conference between these ambitious, but disappointed relatives of Moses. They are ashamed, however, to make their disappointment a topic of public complaint; since but few, possibly, may be found to sympathize in a matter so personal. They must seize upon something more public; a grievance which will address itself to the nation at large. This they find in connection with some circumstances, not explained, relating to the marriage of Moses with an Ethiopian woman.

But, whatever was the foundation of their complaint against Moses, either as to his wife, or his monopolizing the government, he was inclined to take no notice of it. He had lately been greatly tried by the murmurings of the people; and well might he deem the complainings of Miriam and Aaron ill-timed, as their example was not unlikely to renew the spirit of discontent and mutiny, which had only just been allayed. But being himself meek and forgiving, he was disposed to pass by the wrong which had been done him. In the more perfect judgment of God, however, theirs was a complaining, which required a prompt and decided rebuke. Accordingly, Moses, Aaron, and Miriam are soon summoned to the door of the tabernacle. Here God addresses the two latter in tones of solemn and pointed censure. At the same time, he takes occasion to pass an encomium on Moses, which remains on record to his lasting honor His faithfulness receives the divine attestation and endorsement; he is insured holy and intimate communion with God; and even "the similitude of the Lord or some visible manifestation of the divine glory shall he behold.

Thus, these complainers stand before the Shekinah, or cloudy pillar, at the door of the tabernacle, rebuked. And, in token of the divine anger, the cloud rises, and as it departs, Miriam, who, it seems, was "first in the transgression," becomes leprous, white as snow. "Her foul tongue," says Bp. Hall, "is justly punished with a foul face, and her folly, in pretending to rival Moses, is manifest to all." Had Aaron and Miriam wished to make their confession directly to God, they are, for the present, deprived of an opportunity. The Cloudy Pillar has departed. God will not stay to hear any excuse. Moses may become their mediator; but will he condescend to plead for them, under an injury, which might have caused mutiny throughout the camp of Israel?

Whatever reluctance Aaron might have to appealing to Moses, in behalf of himself and Miriam, there is no other alternative. Indeed, he soon appears to be sensible of his error, and humbled for it. He approaches Moses, whose forgiveness he implores for himself and Miriam; and Moses, at his further instance, intercedes with God, for the removal of Miriam's leprosy. How affectionately and sincerely he prays; prays as one who, from the heart, has forgiven all the wrong done; and who ardently desires, that her transgression may be forgiven, and her grievous and loathsome malady may be removed!

How often are the good reviled? Their conduct, however judicious, is censured; their good name traduced; and their influence designedly undermined, and, if possible, destroyed. And even Christian friends and near relatives are sometimes the authors of unfounded aspersions, and auxiliary to injuries, which, but for the overruling providence of God, might blight the fairest prospects of usefulness. But in such cases, let the example of Moses be imitated, both in temper and conduct. How beautiful the spirit he manifests! How kind the course he adopts! He casts no reproaches; utters no angry denunciations; indulges no revengeful feelings. But in the true spirit of our Lord's gospel injunction, uttered centuries after, he prays for those who had "despitefully" used him.

Such, indeed, are the inculcations of our holy religion. Such the dignified, beautiful, and even sublime conduct of the true children of God. To pass by an insult or injury, in dignified silence, is sufficient to attract the notice and secure the applause of men of the world. But how easy that, in comparison to going to a throne of grace; and there, with a forgiving spirit, truly, and from the heart, imploring rich, lasting blessings upon our calumniators and abusers! This, however, is the law of love; this the injunction of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We cannot say, that even the disciples of Jesus do always fully come up to this standard; at least, not as readily and early as they should do. But there is more forgiveness than the world knows of, or believes, on the part of the truly pious. Nor can I doubt, that when the secrets of the closet shall one day be revealed, it will be known to the honor of religion; to the honor of thousands of Christians, that they prayed; most kindly, most sincerely, most importunately, for enemies. I do not say, that there will not be some sad disclosures; perhaps many, of a different spirit, and of a contrary practice, on the part of some professors of religion. May be, they will find, to their surprise, that they had none of the forgiving spirit of Jesus; and that even when they prayed, if they ever did, "forgive us, as we forgive others," they were in truth praying against themselves. But the gospel inculcates forgiveness of enemies, and prayer for them. And it is pleasant to see such a manifestation of this spirit, in a far-distant age of the world; identical with that which our Lord so strenuously enjoined upon his followers, and of which he himself gave, in his own spirit and conduct, a bright and memorable example.

020. Prayer Of Moses After The Report Of The Spies.

Prayer Of Moses After The Report Of The Spies.

Numbers 14:11-25.

Here is yet another provocation, on the part of God's people; and one which, in some respects, exceeds, in point of aggravation, all that have preceded. But, the picture presented has its colors of relief. We discern the same kind and affectionate friend and mediator, whom we have noticed in past provocations, bending before the footstool, and urging, with holy eloquence, his plea for pardon; and we hear the same merciful and compassionate God, saying, "I have pardoned according to thy word." We may not admit, that such instances of ingratitude and rebellion are desirable, in order to exhibit the efficacy of prayer; but most happy we may deem it, that we may see how, time after time, man can plead; and how, time after time, God may be influenced to give an answer of peace. The above is the tenth provocation of the Israelites, since leaving Egypt; and though in this, as in former instances, they are pardoned, yet important and direful consequences ensue, as the sequel will disclose. The Israelites had reached the southern border of Canaan, and might soon have entered upon the possession of it. But the people, through unbelief, proposed (Deuteronomy 1:22,) to send forward spies, who should search out the state of the country and its inhabitants, and bring back a report; upon which, they designed to predicate their course—either to go up and possess it, or return to Egypt. "Moses, mistaking their intentions," observes Dr. Scott, "approved of the plan; and the Lord, being justly displeased, permitted the people to follow their own counsels. As they were unwilling to trust God, but must judge for themselves, as to the expediency of entering upon their inheritance, God permits them to proceed; but gives directions as to the number of spies to be sent, and the manner in which they shall execute their commission." Having received their instructions, the spies departed, and, after an absence of forty days, they returned with "an evil report." The inhabitants, they represented as strong and giant-like, and the cities walled and impregnable. The conquest of the country, in their view, was impracticable. A report, so gloomy and depressing, filled the camp of Israel with despondency, and even dismay. The night succeeding was one of lamentation and tears. Forgetting their sufferings in Egypt, and their sighs and groans, year after year, for deliverance, they strangely wish that they had never been brought out of bondage. Forgetting the honors which God had put upon them; the divine favors, by which they had been encompassed; the miracles, which, almost daily, had been wrought in their behalf, they now propose to cast off Moses, and even God himself, and to appoint a captain, under whom they would return to Egypt. In the midst of this popular infatuation, Caleb and Joshua, two of the spies, rose, and bore direct and solemn testimony to the injustice, and even falsehood, of the report of the majority; at the same time, they reminded the people that God was able to defeat every foe, and give them the quiet possession of Canaan, according to his promise. What were the sons of Anak, or the multitude of walled cities, scattered over the country, if Jehovah were on their side! But at this counter report, and this solemn expostulation, the people were only the more provoked; and now, as a climax to their folly and madness, the congregation unite in requiring them to be stoned. At this critical juncture, the glory of the Lord, i.e. the Cloudy

Pillar, descends, and rests on the tabernacle of the congregation. God himself comes down to settle this controversy. His sudden appearance fills them with awe, and the eyes of all Israel are at once turned towards this symbol of the Divine Presence.

Moses immediately directs his steps towards the tabernacle. He enters. He stands in the presence of an insulted and justly-incensed God. "How long," exclaims Jehovah, in the abrupt language of astonishment and indignation, "how long will this people provoke me? Come, I will smite them with pestilence, for they are unworthy to live. I will disinherit them, for they have reproached, despised, and rejected me, and I will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they." To the heart of Moses, jealous as he was for the honor of his Sovereign, such a destruction could appear no otherwise than most righteous. But he still loved his nation; he wished her salvation and prosperity. He foresaw her coming glory, if the divine promises are carried out; and, therefore, no temptation could be presented to him, which would induce him to prevent, or in any wise diminish, her future renown.

Once more, therefore, he threw himself into the "breach." Without even an allusion to the divine proposal to exalt him, he seems intent only on averting the doom which threatens his people. And how he pleads! What arguments he employs! How well selected! With what tact and emphasis they are urged! "Destroy thy people!—The Egyptians will hear the story, and they will tell it to the inhabitants of the land! What surprise it will occasion, for they have heard that thou, Lord, art among this people, and they are under thy special guardianship, by night and by day. And what will they say, and have reason to say? That thou, Lord, hast sworn unto them to bring them into this land, but wast not able! But now, O Lord, honor, I beseech thee, thy power, and show that it is great; honor thine own proclamation, made on a former occasion, when pardoning thy people. Exodus 34:6-7. "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands," &c. "Oh, pardon—pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people, for thou hast pardoned all their sins hitherto, since they came forth from Egypt, and I would urge their past experience of thy pardoning mercy, as a reason why thou shouldst pardon them again." The prayer of Moses is immediately and fully answered. He is assured that Israel shall not be cast off all at once, as God had proposed, nor shall they be disinherited. Yet, from their rebellion, and by his dealings with them, he would take occasion to make known his glory unto the ends of the earth. The nation survives; but, as a token of the divine displeasure against that murmuring and ungrateful generation, God decides that they shall sojourn in the wilderness, till they have all fallen, excepting Caleb and Joshua, who alone, of those grown up, shall enter the promised land.

What a blessing was Moses to Israel! But for his firmness and decision—but more his prayers—they would never have entered upon their promised inheritance. Nor are we to suppose that Moses was prompted by any miraculous influence to plead as he did; nor that he was not susceptible to temptation, like other men. That great grace was imparted, who can doubt? But he received it, as others have received it, through prayer. He was, doubtless, much engaged in the duties of secret devotion. There, in his tent, he prayed and wrestled; and, by such strong and importunate supplications, his faith was strengthened in God, and in his promises. The man, whoever he may be, who would pray successfully for a people, to whom he may stand in any public relation, must know how to pray for himself in secret. In this connection, may we not, with propriety, speak of the value to a people of an affectionate, assiduous, and prayerful minister; one,

we mean, who, while he has the honor of God near his heart, as had Moses, lends every effort, as he did, to effect the salvation of his people? Moses loved Israel better than he loved himself; he loved their honor better than his own renown; and their possession of Canaan better than his own life. Had it been otherwise, would he have made such sacrifices? Would he have so planned, and toiled, and prayed? But for him, what, in their frequent emergencies, would they have done? They were a stiff-necked and restless people. They were easily diverted from duty. They were prone to unbelief and idolatry. They were easily alarmed, and easily discouraged. Often, they incurred the divine displeasure; and, on several occasions, God was ready to sweep them to destruction. But, at such times, Moses interposes, and, by his humble, affectionate, and importunate supplications, he averts the stroke, and brings back the people to repentance and obedience. And what would be the effect upon the American people, if their ministers were, in the foregoing particulars, like Moses? Let us select such a minister; one —whose heart is warm; Whose hands are pure; whose doctrines, and whose life, Coincident, exhibit lucid proof That he is honest in the sacred cause; that he sincerely and ardently desires to put all his people in possession of the heavenly Canaan; and that, so desiring, he addresses himself to that one great and momentous object, with appropriate zeal and fidelity with the intention, if it be possible, of accomplishing it. Is there another blessing of greater importance to a people than such a man? Has he ambition? It is not to preach eloquently, or pray eloquently, that he may gain some brief applause, but that he may honor his Master, and save souls. These objects mingle in all his plans; in all his labors; in all his thoughts. They enter with him into his closet; they go forth with him into the streets, and into whatever circle he visits. By him, in strains as sweet As angels use, the Gospel whispers peace.

He 'stablishes the strong; restores the weak;

Reclaims the wand'rer; binds the broken heart;

And, arm'd himself in panoply complete, Of heavenly temper, furnishes with arms, Bright as his own, and trains, by every rule Of holy discipline, to glorious war, The sacramental host of God's elect. Are all such teachers?

Well does the poet inquire: "Are all such teachers?" Oh, if they were, what a different aspect would our churches and congregations assume? We see the influence of one man among millions. We see his prayers answered, in respect to them all. Not one family; not a single individual in the whole nation, but is blessed through him. And if the ministers of Jesus Christ, in their preaching, would more forget themselves; if they would lay aside that ambition, which so mars their piety; if they would banish all feelings of rivalry; all unholy aspirations for worldly praise; if they would pray more, and far more intensely, and with such importunity as corresponds with the magnitude of the object in view; if they had the pure, patriotic feelings—the perfect self-denial of Moses; his holy, ardent, enduring love, would not the church shine far brighter? would not many more sinners be saved?

Let us not be misunderstood. The ministers of Jesus Christ have a life of toil and sacrifice; and, as to good accomplished, who compares with them? But, then, might they not accomplish yet still more? Might not the ministerial standard be still higher? Might not ministers cultivate a purer and more fervent piety? Might they not secure, by more importunate pleading, far greater measures of grace? Let them take stronger hold upon the promises. Let them employ some such arguments as Moses used. Let them honor Jesus Christ more, by a firmer conviction that he is willing to fulfill all

that he has pledged. Let them confide in him more, and put a far higher value upon the power of the Gospel. Let them depend less upon human wisdom, and human learning, and more upon the Spirit. Let them preach in expectation that the word will take effect. Let them pray as if they knew that, for Christ's sake, they will be heard and accepted.

Ministers must have more faith. They must preach, and pray, and labor, as if, God willing, they will carry up the people to the New Jerusalem. And why not this faith? why not this resolution? And, if one blessing be bestowed; if one soul be converted, or one revival be enjoyed, let them use that as an argument with God, why more souls should be renewed, and another revival should be begun. Said Moses: "Thou, Lord, hast forgiven thy people all their transgressions, since the time thou broughtest them up out of Egypt, and, therefore, forgive them again, I beseech thee." So let the ministers of Jesus pray: "Thou hast converted some, therefore, convert others; we have enjoyed a rich and powerful revival, therefore, may we enjoy such a blessing again." And let the faithful minister assume some more boldness. He must, indeed, be humble, and, in all his approaches to God, remember in whose presence he stands; but let him recollect, also, that he is an ambassador of God. He holds a high and sublime commission. To him are guaranteed exalted honors—privileges—promises. He is allowed to take of the things of Jesus for himself and the souls of his charge. He has the offer of just as much grace as he desires; and of just such measures of the Spirit, as he will honor, and usefully employ.

Let such heralds of the cross abound, and the world will, at no distant day, do homage, appropriate homage, to the Gospel; and of Jerusalem, our "happy home," it will, in truth, be said:

Praise is in all her gates: upon her walls, And in her streets, and in her spacious courts, Is heard salvation.

021. Removal Of The Fiery Serpents.

Removal Of The Fiery Serpents.

Numbers 21:5-8.

We are like some traveler in a mountainous region, who, as he ascends one eminence after another, at length gains one, which he would fain hope to be the last; but finds, as he reaches its summit, that another, and a still higher elevation, lies beyond. In like manner, numerous as we have found the instances of murmuring on the part of the people of God, there is yet another instance before us, and one of great aggravation in the sight of God, if we may judge from the divine judgment which followed. Indeed, it would seem that murmuring had become a habit with the children of Israel; and hence, we are not surprised that, in the chapter preceding, there is loud and bitter complaining, and in the usual tenor: "Why have ye brought up the congregation of the Lord into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there It is an "evil place—no place of seed, or of figs, or vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink." Water is abundantly supplied, and their complainings cease. But a short time only elapses ere the spirit of discontent pervades the whole people anew, and they give vent to it in terms of bitter reproach: "Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread." From Deuteronomy 8:15, we learn that the wilderness through which the Israelites had passed was all along infested with fiery serpents. But God had wonderfully preserved them from their poisonous fangs; nor is it probable that even now would they have been permitted to molest the people of God, had the latter not been most unreasonable in their murmuring against their Divine Benefactor. Isaiah calls these serpents "flying," or winged, (Isaiah 14:29,) from which circumstance, it is inferred, that they were better able to dart upon their victims. They were denominated "fiery," either from their color, their rage, or the effect of their bite upon the body, producing high inflammation, attended with insatiable thirst. The people had, without reason, complained for the want of water; and now, they are chastised with thirst which no water could quench. The evil soon reaches a frightful magnitude. Hundreds in every part of the camp are stung. Alarming symptoms ensue. Scorching fever sets in, accompanied by racking pain, and probably furious delirium. The poison soon pervades every part of the body; and in every case, it would appear, proves fatal. This was a judgment, which addressed itself to the fears and consciences of every Israelite. There could be no mistake as to its cause, and none as to its violence. The remedy, also, it was plain, lay only with God. The people, therefore, impelled by the force of their sufferings, hasten to Moses, and make confession of their sin. That sin was two-fold. They had spoken against God and against Moses. This, with becoming humility, they acknowledge, and now intercede with Moses to pray for their relief.

How often it occurs, that sinners are, at length, forced to apply to those whom they have contemned and reproached, to supplicate divine mercy for them! What minister, or what Christian, has not known such instances; and often many? The tongue, which could "speak all manner of evil and falsely" of the Gospel and its professors, is employed in humble supplication, that prayer may

go up for pardon and peace. What a change comes over the sinner, in such circumstances! His very looks are altered! his language, his tones, his feelings, all are changed. What he lately scorned, he prizes; what he would have shunned, he seeks; what most of all he would have despised, a throne of grace, where saints pray, he honors; and there will he be found by the side of some child of God, whom he has "reviled," but who bears his wants and woes most tenderly and affectionately to Him, who alone can impart peace and joy. Never did the Redeemer appear more glorious than on the cross, crying, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." Never did Moses appear more honorable, than when supplicating pardon for those who had murmured against him. And, when, in the present world, does the child of God appear more lovely, than when affectionately offering to God his prayers for those who have "despitefully used him and persecuted him?" This is the manner and spirit of heaven itself. Love, which prompts to prayer, under such circumstances, is as the poet says:

Sweet as the dew on herb and flower, That silently distils, At evening's soft and balmy hour, On Zion's fruitful hills. The request of the Israelites was, that Moses should pray the Lord to take away the serpents. We are not informed in what terms the prayer of Moses was couched. "He prayed for the people;" but whether that the serpents should be removed, or a remedy provided, the sacred narrative does not acquaint us. Probably, however, Moses prayed as the people requested. His prayer is answered; not, however, in the precise manner, which the people had desired; but in a way which, while it afforded instant and effectual relief, taught them most impressively, that their dependence was upon God. The method of cure was just the one, probably, which would have been deemed, of all others, the most improbable; and, indeed, the more wonderful, and the more manifestly a divine work, if, as some naturalists say, the sight of burnished brass only aggravates the disease of those who are stung by fiery serpents.

We have here an instance in which prayer is answered; but in a different way from what is expected, or was originally desired. The request is, that the serpents may be taken away, and thus the evil be avoided. God decides that the evil shall be remedied, not by the removal of the serpents; but by a process which, while it affords relief, shall secure other important ends. And in this manner, God, probably, often answers prayer; especially in cases where his people have asked that blessings might be received in a particular way; or, without asking, have so expected them.

Take an example. Look at that child of God, in his closet, praying for non-conformity to the world. He is sincere and ardent in his wishes, for such a self-denying spirit. But his circumstances in life are opposed to non-conformity. He is rich, and his friends are rich around him; and withal, he is encircled by the gay and the fashionable, whose influence he feels, and from whose society he finds it difficult to escape. Well, in such an atmosphere, and in such circumstances, he brings forth, comparatively, little fruit to God. He ripens slowly for heaven himself, and accomplishes little, either by example or personal effort, for the salvation of others. At length, he is made sensible of his deficiencies; and prays, that the world may exert a less baleful influence upon him. He wishes to be less conformed to the precepts and examples of the gay and thoughtless about him; and so he prays.

Now, in no way can his prayers be answered, and the spiritual good sought be attained; at least, in no so good way, as by affliction. And it must be affliction adapted to his case. And in answer to his

prayers, and in kindness to his soul, it is sent. In a few months, or a few years, you find him a poor man. In most unexpected ways, his wealth, of which, perhaps, he was proud, and which was a constant hindrance to his spiritual prosperity, has departed. He is poor, and, perhaps, neglected. But his soul is benefited. He is cured of his pride, and his love of the world. But the process, by which that cure was effected, was entirely different from what he asked or expected. But approach him, and inquire of him, in what light he views the dispensations of God; and he will tell you, that painful, agonizing, as the trial was, it has proved a blessing to his soul. Instead of longer pursuing after the world, to hoard it up, or to seek its enjoyment, he is striving for an inheritance above; instead of deriving his comforts from earthly sources, he is drinking from the pure and refreshing spiritual fountains on high. His prayers are answered, by a faithful, covenant-keeping God; to whom, looking up through tears and trials, he can rejoicingly say:

—Bounteous Giver of all good, Thou art of all thy gifts, thyself the crown:

Give what thou canst, without thee we are poor, And with thee rich, take what thou wilt away. The answer, which God gives to the prayer of Moses, inculcates an important practical lesson; namely: the use of those means, which are directly prescribed by God; or by which the blessings sought are ordinarily attained. The children of Israel may be healed, if bitten; but a brazen serpent must be made, not one of silver or of gold; and it must be made by Moses, or under his direction; not each one for himself, nor by an elder for a tribe, but one for the nation. And it must be elevated upon a pole, and the poisoned or bitten must look upon it, and they must look in faith. Every one of these agencies, or circumstances, are essential to an answer to the prayer of Moses, if an individual would be benefited.

There is not, perhaps, a more important consideration, connected with prayer, than this. Prayer should be offered, but means are not to be neglected. God can, indeed, answer the prayers of his children, directly, without their using means; and, perhaps, he sometimes does, but this is not common, nor is it to be expected. He might, in answer to prayer, lift a shipwrecking vessel safely on to the shore; but who expects this? The crew must use all ordinary means, by which to anchor that vessel, in some safe place, or steer her on to some safe strand. God could give us harvests, without our ploughing, or sowing; but who thus dares tempt Providence? A writer has remarked with great truth—but he might apply it to others, as well as to the “young,” and the “ignorant”—“There is a species of enthusiasm, not uncommon, and to which young or ignorant professors of religion are exposed, that is, to expect the blessing desired in prayer, without any effort or exertion on our part. But in the Bible you may constantly see how those who earnestly prayed, used the most likely means to effect their desires. Though Jacob passes the night in prayer, he still, in the morning, takes the best means to pacify his brother Esau.

“Asa sets the battle in array, as well as cries to God, ‘we rest on thee.’ Bishop Hall says of Moses, when Israel was about to contend with Amalek, ‘I do not hear Moses say to his Joshua, Amalek is come up against us; it matters not whether thou go against him or not; or, if thou go, whether alone, or in company; or, if accompanied, whether by many or few, strong or weak; or, if strong men, whether they fight or not; I will pray on the hill;’ but he says, ‘choose us out men, and go, and fight.’ Then only can we hope, when we have done our best; and though means cannot effect that which we desired, yet God will have us use the likeliest means on our part to effect it. Prayer, without the use of means, is mockery” (Bickersteth on Prayer).

These truths deserve to be engraved on some tablet, to be hung before the eye of the Christian, where he usually prays, that the due use of means is just as essential as prayer itself. And it is doubtless through the neglect of practicing upon this plain but cardinal truth, that so many petitions receive, and can receive, no answer.

022. Joshua

Joshua

023. Joshua's Prayer After The Defeat At Ai.

Joshua's Prayer After The Defeat At Ai.

Joshua 7:6-10.

Moses has gone to his reward, and Joshua has succeeded to the command of Israel. The passage of the Jordan has been effected. Jericho has been taken. The Israelites are encamped on the soil of Canaan, and have begun the subjugation of the land. The first place, against which a detachment is sent, is Ai; a city situated some ten miles north of Jerusalem, and embracing a large population. Joshua 8:25. Previously to the attack, Joshua had sent men to conduct reconnaissance, and report its condition. The city was represented as weak and defenseless, and but a small detachment was deemed necessary to take it. Without the usual precaution of consulting God, as to his movements, in relation to an attack, Joshua sends forward a detachment of only three thousand men— thirty-six of whom were killed, and the main body repulsed. This was, indeed, an inconsiderable loss; but even this, and much more the repulse, occasioned surprise. It was manifest that, for some reason, the divine hand was against them. In this state of uncertainty and anxiety, Joshua betakes himself to a throne of grace. There, with the elders of Israel, he humbles himself; there, "until even-tide," he and they remain before the footstool. So far, it must be conceded, Joshua pursued a wise and becoming course. And, moreover, his pleas are excellent, and his concern for the honor of God worthy the successor of Moses. But are there not portions of his prayer apparently censurable? "To consider this trivial check," as Dr. Scott remarks, "as the forerunner of total ruin; to inquire wherefore the Lord had brought them over Jordan; and to admit the thought, that it was in order to deliver them into the hands of the Amorites—were proofs of unbelief which may be accounted for, but were wholly inexcusable, especially after the express promises, and miraculous success, just before received."

Yet, God kindly answers Joshua's prayer; and while he was yet lying prostrate, as is supposed, before the ark. In that answer there is, at first view, the semblance of rebuke; but it is, probably, in appearance only. God would seem to intimate that his mournful posture had been continued sufficiently long. There was urgent business to be done. He must arise, and address himself to the discovery of an accursed thing, which had taken place in Israel; and which, while it remained covered and unpunished, would prevent the divine aid in subduing his enemies. An important practical truth is suggested by the preceding narrative, namely: that duty sometimes calls us from a throne of grace, as clearly as, in other cases, it directs us to it.

Joshua was quite right, on receiving intelligence of the defeat of the Israelitish detachment at Ai, to spread the case before God, and to continue his supplication, till he was favored with an answer. But no sooner is he informed of the state of things in the camp of Israel, and of the necessity of probing the wounds which had been caused, than it became his duty to rise, and, leaving a throne of grace, to discharge that now more imperative duty. So God decided; and vain, therefore, would it have been for Joshua to have sought the continued favor and aid of God, while the existing evil was not remedied, and the sullied honor of God was not vindicated. And often would the Christian

be otherwise more appropriately employed, than continuing at a throne of grace, obligatory as the duty may be, that he should abound in prayer. Take an example: a Christian has wronged his neighbor, either in respect to his property or his good name. In some hour of temptation, he may have exacted more than was his due, or he may have spoken to the injury of his neighbor's reputation. Is the place of prayer the proper place for that Christian? He should, indeed, humble himself before God; he may ask forgiveness; but, while at a throne of grace, with the guilt of transgression upon him, might not God well address him, as he did Joshua: "Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?" Go, and repair the wrong you have done. Go, confess your fault. Make restitution. This is your first and paramount duty. Until that is done, a throne of grace is no befitting place for you. Your confessions; your tears; your vows, are of no avail, while you neglect the golden rule of doing to others as you would have them do to you.

Until the Christian is willing to repair wrongs done to others, he is not repentant; and, without a broken heart and contrite spirit, how can he expect pardon and acceptance from God? Says the Psalmist: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."

While I my inward guilt suppress, No pardon could I find;

Thy wrath lay burning in my breast. And rack'd my tortured mind.

Then I confessed my troubled thoughts; My secret sins revealed:

Thy pard'ning grace forgave my faults;

Thy grace my pardon seal'd.

Take another example: the church is often surprised that sinners are not converted. Meetings for prayer are frequent, and well attended. A spirit of prayer seems to prevail, and strong and importunate appeals are made to God, in behalf of the impenitent. Indeed, Christians appear greatly alarmed for the safety of sinners, and lie prostrate in the dust before God. Yet there are no inquiries on the part of sinners, and no conversions.

Now, we dare not say that Christians pray too much. Their fault generally is the reverse; they pray too little. And yet, in certain cases, might not God, with propriety, say to them, as he said to Joshua: "Get ye up; wherefore do you lie thus upon your face?" There are other duties connected with the conversion of sinners, besides praying for them. Means must be used. Appeals must be made. Seed must be sown. Let the children of God pray: fervently, intensely, importunately: let them also go forth, and enter into the habitations of the impenitent—speak to them—warn them—labor with them. Prayer combined with labor, and labor combined with prayer, may be expected to result in the salvation of souls. God must, indeed, be honored, and the glory of the work be ascribed to him; but never should it be forgotten that he works by means. Had this principle been recognized by some churches, and some Christians, while they would not have prayed less, they would have labored more; and blessed harvests would have been reaped, where but little, if any, fruit has been gathered into the garner of God.

Let the children of God, then, recognize the importance of this principle: that means, aside from prayer, are to be used for the conversion of sinners; and that the neglect of those means may be just as fatal to their conversion as the neglect of prayer itself. Christians may, sometimes, be at a throne of grace, when their duty, in respect to sinners, requires that they should be otherwise

employed.

024. Sun And Moon Stand Still, In Answer To Prayer.

Sun And Moon Stand Still, In Answer To Prayer.

Joshua 10:12. The sin of Achan having been signally punished, God directs Joshua to renew the attack upon Ai, which soon falls under the power of Israel. The destruction of two cities, of so much importance as Jericho and Ai, naturally occasions great apprehension among the Amorites—a name given to several tribes in that vicinity. This apprehension is, also, soon, in no small degree, increased, by the news of an alliance between the inhabitants of Gibeon and Joshua. Pressed with the necessity of immediate measures to secure themselves against invasion, the five Amorite kings combine, and commence offensive operations by an attack on Gibeon. The latter, taking advantage of their recent alliance with the Israelites, forthwith communicate to Joshua the dangers which environ them, and beg immediate succor.

Joshua is directed to hasten to their assistance, and receives the divine assurance that success shall attend his arms. Yet, we find him neglecting no prudent means of effecting his object. By a military stratagem, he surprises the Amorite kings, and their confederate army. The attack is successful, and a most signal slaughter of the enemy ensues. Their ranks are broken. They are put to flight—taking opposite courses; some attempting to escape north, to Beth Horon, and others south, to Azekah, and Makkedah. At this juncture, God interposes, to make the destruction of these idolaters more complete: a tempest of hail stones is supernaturally employed, by which more perish than are slain by the sword. The day was now declining, and still the enemy were not entirely destroyed. The Israelitish forces were pressing on—strong—spirited—determined. But Joshua perceived that night would shut in ere the entire work was accomplished. What more could he do? What expedient adopt, to destroy he remaining cohorts of the army of idolaters? He turned is thoughts to God. It was his cause. They were fighting for him and his glory. He was a prayer-hearing God. Suddenly, the important expedient occurs to him—doubtless divinely suggested—and, the next moment, we behold him prostrate before the footstool;

—with his temple bare, And hands uplifted to the sky, he prays:

‘God of this people, hear! and let the sun Stand upon Gibeon still; and let the moon Rest in the vale of Ajalon!’ He ceased;

And, lo! the moon sits motionless, and earth Stands on her axis, indolent. The sun Pours the unmoving column of his rays In undiminish’d heat: the hours stand still; The shade hath stopped upon the dial’s face.

* * * * * On with thy armies, Joshua! The Lord God of Sabbath is the avenger now:

* * * * * On! till the avenging swords have drunk the blood Of all Jehovah’s enemies; and till Thy banners, in returning triumph wave. (J. B. Van Schaick.)

Although nothing is said in the sacred narrative of a direct prayer to Jehovah — at least, no form of words is given—yet, it is apparent that a solemn and fervent appeal to Jehovah preceded the

command of Joshua to the orbs of heaven; and, in this opinion, we are strengthened by the declaration of the historian, Joshua 10:14, "that there was no day like that before it, or after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man," etc. The sense of which doubtless is, that never before, for such a purpose, had God listened to the prayer of an individual; for, oft-times, Moses had prevailed with God, in relation to miracles of great magnitude, but never before had God hearkened to the voice of man, to alter so signally the course of nature, or to grant such an illustrious display of his power, in behalf of his people. It might have been a secret prayer; but, whether secret or audible—protracted or momentary—it was a prayer for that which had, probably, never before entered into the heart of man to offer. Moses had converted the river of Egypt into blood; he had brought down hail and fire from the clouds of heaven; he had divided the Red Sea; he had smitten the rock, and brought forth water; but here, the very orbs of heaven, far off, are stopped in their course! Stopped by God, (who performs all miracles,) but at the instance of a worm on his footstool!

Whatever we might wish, we are unable to heighten, by any language of ours, the impression which the simple narrative conveys. The language of Joshua is sublime; but more sublime the wonderful results. The only thing further which we wish to suggest is, that as God has himself prescribed no limit to what, on proper occasions, we may ask, neither should we. We cannot say what faith, even at the present day, might not obtain from God, were it sufficiently strong, and had it purely his glory in view. Certain we are, that the children of God might obtain far greater spiritual blessings than they do, had they a higher faith, and were they more willing to labor for the glory of God. Joshua prays that the sun and moon may stand still, that he may work—work in God's cause, and to God's glory. And if good people were as willing to labor "to pull down the strongholds of sin and Satan," would not God send down his holy Spirit often, in answer to their prayers, and continue the light and blessings of such days, till the whole work should be accomplished? Oh, That we had Joshuas in our days, whose faith would allow them reverently, but efficiently, to say to the Sun of Righteousness, "Stand thou still, over this and that place, till all thine enemies are subdued!" And that day will come. The present puny race of Christians will, by and by, give place to one which will be "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." They will pray far more; they will plead the promises with glorious efficiency; they will cry, and God will hear; they will agonize, and the blessings asked — all of which will so respect the glory of God, as not to be withheld—the blessings asked, and far more than asked, will come down, as showers that water the earth.

O scenes surpassing fable, and yet true!

Scenes of accomplish'd bliss! which, who can see, Though but in distant prospect, and not feel His soul refresh'd with foretaste of the joy?

025. Judges

Judges

026. Prayer Of Manoah.

Prayer Of Manoah.

Judges 13:8-9. To a just understanding of Manoah's prayer, a knowledge of some previous events and circumstances is important. For a series of years, the Israelites had suffered under Philistine oppression. Whether they had become sensible of their sins, on account of which God had given them into the hands of their enemies, does not appear. But He, who had until now sustained and protected them, now orders the dispensations of his providence, with reference to their deliverance. For this purpose, one is to be raised up, of a peculiar character, who should crush the power of their foes. In the tribe of Dan, whose territory bordered upon the Philistines, there lived a man, by the name of Manoah, whose wife was without children. To this woman, the Angel-Jehovah, so often spoken of in the history of the Israelites, and who appeared to Moses, Joshua, Gideon, and others, now manifests himself, and announces to her that she shall become a mother; and that, as her son, from his birth, shall be a Nazarite, she must herself be subject to the laws of the Nazarites, that the sanctification of her son may commence with herself. Other observances, on her part, and in relation to the management of the child, are enjoined; upon which, the angel departs, making the important annunciation, as he retires, that, on reaching maturity, "he should begin to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines." The wife of Manoah, whose name is not revealed, soon informs her husband of the appearance of the "man of God," of whose superhuman character she seems to have had some surmise, and acquaints him, also, with the import of his communication.

Prompted, it would seem, by a strong faith, and a high esteem of the promised blessing, and, withal, desirous of receiving further instructions in regard to the child, Manoah betakes himself to prayer. "When I see the strength of Manoah's faith," says Bishop Hall, "I marvel not that he had a Samson to his son. He saw not the messenger; he heard not the errand; he examined not the circumstances: yet now he takes thought, not whether he should have a son, but how he shall order the son, which he must have. Zacharias had the same message, and, craving a sign, lost his voice, wherewith he craved it. Manoah seeks no sign for the promise, but counsel for himself. Happy are they that have not seen, yet believed. True faith takes all for granted—yea, for performed, that is promised."

Manoah's prayer is answered, and again the angel appears; and, as at the first, to his wife. Immediately she seeks her husband, to whom she communicates the re-appearance of the "man of God." He returns with her, and presently Manoah stands before him, and expresses a desire that the gracious promise made to his wife may be fulfilled. The injunction, given at the former interview, in relation to the mother's abstemiousness, is reiterated; upon which, the angel, probably giving some intimation of his readiness to depart, Manoah begs him to tarry till food should be prepared. To this the angel, yet unknown to Manoah in his true character, responds, that he would not himself eat; but Manoah, if disposed, might offer the food as a burnt-offering, only it must be unto the Lord. The way was preparing to make known to Manoah the true character

of the august personage with whom he was holding converse. Already it would seem, that he had suspicions that he was some celestial messenger; and now, with reference to satisfaction on that point, he inquires his name. The answer was remarkable—apparently a denial; perhaps intended, in part, as a rebuke, and yet, in truth, it was a disclosure: “Why asketh thou after my name, seeing it is secret?” or, as the same word is rendered in Isaiah 9:6, “Wonderful,” a name expressly given to Christ. Whether Manoah understood its entire import, may be doubted; but he had become so satisfied of the real character of his guest, that he no longer hesitates to make an offering to him. For this purpose, he selects a rock, as did Gideon on a like occasion, (Judges 6:20-21,) instead of an altar. “And the angel did wondrously.” How “wondrously?” Doubtless setting on fire the offering, as he had done for Gideon; and, as the flames rose, he went up towards heaven thereon, leaving Manoah and his wife intense gazers of the sublime scene, and confirmed in the belief that they had seen the Angel-Jehovah.

Thus signally honored were Manoah and his wife, by a visitant of exalted dignity and glory. And when, at length, they discovered who that visitant was, a holy awe seems to have taken possession of their hearts; and, in respect to Manoah, he seems to have been apprehensive lest they should die, because they had seen God. On many occasions, the Old Testament saints were blessed with personal interviews with the Angel-Jehovah, and received communications from him, which had respect to their own interests, or the interests of God’s people.

Anterior to the appearance of the Messiah in the flesh, the Shekinah, in one form and another, was a frequent and established organ of communication, between Jehovah and his covenant people; and, by means of this, the divine will was often delivered to them. Such honor had Adam, Noah, Abraham, and the other heirs of the covenant; as, in after times, had also Moses, Joshua, Gideon, and the prophets.

But, with the ascension of Jesus, such manifestations generally ceased. We rarely read of the Shekinah, in any of its visible forms. But are the children of God now less favored? Less honored, than under the ancient dispensation? On the contrary, they are more favored, and far more honored. And, though the medium of communication be changed, the intercourse between heaven and earth is more frequent—more intimate—more glorious.

Under the former arrangement, the Angel-Jehovah made his appearance not often, and only on special occasions. But now, how many thousands of his children does he visit every day? Said he to his disciples—and what, in this respect, he said to them, he has said to all, who should believe on his name—“I will not leave you comfortless: I will come unto you.” “He that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.” “If I depart, I will send the Comforter to you.” “He shall receive of mine, and show it unto you.” To many, these promises are daily fulfilled. And there lives not that disciple of Jesus, who may not, each and every day, hold far more intimate and blessed communion with the Redeemer, than the ancient believers did, or perhaps could. We have now a more full and ample revelation. They enjoyed light, which shone dimly through types, shadows, cloudy pillars; but we see the Sun of Righteousness, shining in full gospel-splendor. They had the promise of good things; we the fulfillment. They the shadow; we the substance. Were some children of God to tell of their interviews with Jesus; of their communion with him; of the wonderful effects it has upon their souls; raising, expanding, warming, blessing them, and filling them with such raptures, as that they scarcely know whether they are in the body,

or out of it—and this, day after day, and month after month; and this, too, while, perhaps, a cold and chilling apathy is prevailing all around—would there be any question whether the advantage lies with the ancient or modern believer? Doubtless the “ministration of the Spirit” is far more glorious.

While, therefore, I feel that such interviews as Manoah, and others, in still more distant periods, enjoyed with the Messiah, were very desirable, I prefer my own interviews with him, by means of his Word and Spirit; and, especially, when engaged in prayer, led on and influenced by this blessed agent. When may I not retire, and hold such communion with him? feel, and, indeed, know that he is present with my soul? And, in the ardor of my love to him, while he whispers that I am his, say to him, in return, “Whom have I in heaven but thee; and there is none on the earth that I desire besides thee?”

There are some, at the present day, who are looking for the personal appearance and reign of Jesus on earth. There is something startling, and, at times, delightful, in such a thought. But I cannot say that it would enhance my views of the blessedness of the Church. Rather let the “ministrations of the Spirit” proceed; let the communion of the saints with Jesus be spiritual, till such times as the earth is filled with the knowledge and love of God. Then, let him come, “to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.” Meanwhile, let us, who now live, and those who shall live till that glorious day dawn, sing in hope:

O may we reach that happy place, Where he unveils his lovely face!
Where all his beauties you behold, And sing his name to harps of gold!

027. Prayer Of Samson.

Prayer Of Samson.

Judges 16:23-30. The story of Samson is too familiar to require even an outline of the incidents of his strange and eventful life. He early gave indications of great strength; and, at length, began that series of exploits, which has given him notoriety, in every succeeding age, where his history has been known. He was raised up to judge Israel; and, in that capacity, to defend them against their most implacable foes, the Philistines. And, on several occasions, he proved himself a formidable champion. He destroyed their crops; he slaughtered them by thousands. But with all his giant-strength, and astonishing courage; in other respects, he was weak, and easily overcome by temptation. At length, he falls under the power of a woman, in the pay of the Philistines; who, by the practice of her fascinations upon him, obtains an important secret; that he was a Nazarite unto God; and that "the preservation of his head unshorn is the mark, or sign of his Nazariteship, and a pledge, on the part of God, of the continuance of his miraculous physical powers." That sign lost, his vow would be broken, and his strength depart, and in that respect, he would become as a common man. Not with greater delight does the sea-bird scream, as she discovers some hidden wreck, than the harlot of Sorek exults when, at length, she discovers the secret, which would bring not Samson only, but the lords of the Philistines at her feet.

He soon sleeps in her lap. The locks of his strength are removed. He wakes; but God has departed from him. This is the prelude to a series of degradations, most humiliating and painful. The Philistines have accomplished their long-cherished purpose. They take him; deprive him of sight; bind him in fetters of brass, and he becomes grinder-general in the prison-house of Gaza.

Ask for the great deliv'rer now; and find him Eyeless at Gaza, at the mill with slaves.

We attempt no lengthened explanation of these dark and mysterious matters. The character of Samson, in some of its features, is inexplicable. "By none of the judges, did God work so many miracles, and yet by none were so many faults committed. He is enrolled by Paul in the list of ancient worthies, in the eleventh of Hebrews, which affords a strong presumption, that, notwithstanding his errors, he was a pious man. It must be recollected, however, that his history is short, and that the peculiar dispensation, under which he lived, may account for some things, which, if done at this day, and without the special appointment of God, would be highly criminal. Besides, there may have been in him many exercises of true piety, which, if recorded, would have reflected a different light upon his character." Good men, in all ages, have been imperfect; and some of them, upon the whole eminent for their piety, have evinced great failings. Good men may sin; we know not precisely the limit; but this we do know, that they must, and do repent.

Samson was now in the hands of his bitterest foes. Was he there to correct him for his transgressions? Will God give him a cup of bitterness for trifling with a sacred vow? In the prison-house of Gaza, he had time for deep and solemn reflections; and it is probable that they came. Indeed, it is to be inferred that there he repented, since, as his hair grew, his strength

returned. Not as a natural consequence, but because he repented; and therefore God, being once more reconciled to him, reinvests him with his lost powers. In the language of Bp. Hall, "his hair grew, together with his repentance, and his strength with his hair."

God had still an important work for Samson to do. He shall avenge himself upon his enemies; he shall give relief to the people of Israel; he shall vindicate the honor of God. An opportunity for the accomplishment of these objects, not long after, occurs. A sacrifice to Dagon is proposed by the Philistines, in honor of his having delivered the champion of Israel into their hands; though they well knew that his captivity was owing to the arts of the sorceress of Sorek. The plan is adopted. The Philistines assemble by thousands at Gaza. They give themselves up to mirth and revelry. In the midst of their insane and idolatrous joy, it is proposed to bring Samson out; no longer an object of fear; but blind, weak, and defenseless; that they might make him the butt of their scoffs and insults. The proposal is acceptable to the multitude, and Samson is led into the idol temple; within which the mighty lords of

Gaza, Gath, Ascalon, and other cities, are assembled. Thousands of others gather upon the roof, so arranged that they, too, can look down upon the object of their insulting triumph. At length, Samson finds himself near two pillars, supporting the roof. He hears the shouts of thousands. What exultations! What taunts are heaped upon him! What insults are poured out against the God of Israel! Let us not impute vindictive feelings to the penitent, humbled judge of Israel. In the prison of Gaza, he had gone through a purifying process. He had humbled himself before God. What he now hears, fills him with sorrow and grief. May he not vindicate the divine honor? May he not prove, by one single and one signal effort—his last, if that be the divine pleasure—that the God of Israel is still his friend, and the Savior of his people. At this critical juncture, he seems suddenly impelled by some influence from on high. The spirit of God is evidently moving with mighty power upon his heart. Under the inspiration of that Spirit, he lifts his soul to Him that sitteth on the throne; his prayer is holy, devout, intense.

He ceases. The might of God is upon him. He grasps the pillars, on which rests the idol temple of Gaza, and bows himself with the superhuman strength with which God invests him. Those pillars, strong and massive, tremble, rock, fall; and with them, as they fall, are mingled the broken fragments of the temple, and the thousands, which had gathered upon the roof, or were within its walls.

How soon does the eye, which was gazing in fiendish delight upon Samson, roll wildly in its socket! How soon is the boisterous laugh turned into the shriek of death! Samson himself dies; such is the will of God; but he triumphs in his fall; and he becomes more terrible to the Philistines in his death, than he had ever been during his life!

028. 1 Samuel.

1 Samuel.

029. Prayer Of Hannah.

Prayer Of Hannah.

1 Samuel 1:10-11.

Descending with the sacred history, we have now reached nearly the three thousandth year of the world, and before us is the first recorded instance of a woman at prayer. But, though it be the first recorded instance, let it not be thought, that of the daughters of Eve, Hannah of Mount Ephraim was the first at a throne of grace. Eve herself, we hope, was often there, praying that the evils, which she had been instrumental in pouring into the cup of her daughters, in all time to come, might be mitigated. Nor can we doubt, that she would inculcate this duty; and of all privileges and comforts to woman, most important, to her female descendants, during her protracted sojourn on earth. She, who had first plucked the fruit Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste Brought death into the world, and all our woe; would she not tell her daughters, and teach them to transmit it to future generations, into whose ears they might pour their sorrows? whose aid they might implore, in sustaining the relations of life? And whose support and consolation they might claim, in the hour of their keenest anguish? And were the secret history of woman before us—of woman in the far-distant ages of the world—should we not find many examples—bright, beautiful, lovely—of those, who were devoted to prayer? Many a mother, who has sought blessings upon her children? Many a wife, who has prayed fervently for her husband? And many a daughter, for her parents?

It certainly is so now. There are more daughters than sons of Zion, in the Christian world; and they spend more hours in prayer. Their supplications are more fervent; their faith more confiding; their love more pure and constant. And has it not been essentially thus in all periods of the world? Wherever light has dawned, the pious female has been up to see, and announce it. Whatever alleviations to human woe, moral or spiritual, have been possible, she has been out in the field in search for them. Into the web of human hope, she has woven promises, drawn from the divine word, and better prospects and happier anticipations gathered from her confidence in God, which have served to wipe away many a tear. "First at the cross, and last at the sepulchre," involves a principle of action, which has ever characterized pious females, to whatever age or country they have belonged. Nor can it be doubted, that when this world's drama shall close, it will be seen, that, if there have been some Jezebels, who have disgraced, there have been more Hannahs, Annas, Marys, and Dorcases, who have honored and exalted their sex. It will be seen, and acknowledged to the praise and honor of female piety, that it did much in making children, families, the church, and the world, what they should be. Many a child may trace its piety, under God, to the prayers and counsels of a good mother; and communities and nations, in not a few instances, are indebted to some Hannah for the judge, the king, the prophet, the minister, who have ruled, taught, and served them in the Lord. But the prayer of Hannah claims our notice. It was on this wise:

She was a wife, but not a mother; while Peninnah was both. The latter, it would seem, bore herself, at times, towards the former, haughtily, on account of her being more favored in having children; a blessing greatly and universally coveted in ancient, oriental countries. On the other

hand, Hannah was equally, and, perhaps, more beloved by Elkanah, their husband, which, to the selfish and peevish spirit of Peninnah, was exceedingly grievous.

Elkanah, being a pious man, was wont to present himself and family at Shiloh, where he sacrificed, and performed such other acts of worship, as were, at that time, observed by the pious. His wives, also, accompanied him to the house of the Lord; but the feverish and fretful temper of Peninnah would often manifest itself even there, in efforts to destroy the spiritual comfort of Hannah, and, perhaps, to weaken the affection of Elkanah for her. For a time she succeeded. Hannah was oppressed and grieved by her conduct; and, in addition, her life was embittered by the reflection, that she was childless. At length, however, she directs her thoughts to the great source of alleviation in times of trouble—a throne of grace. She repairs to the house of God; and, there, “probably, in some private corner,” she pours forth her supplications. And the burden of her prayer—what is it? That God would espouse her cause, by judgment upon Peninnah? No; but that she herself may become the mother of a son, who should be, by her vow, a Nazarite: whom she would teach to love and reverence his Maker; and whom she would lend unto the Lord, as long as he should live.

It is not needful to dwell upon other incidents, detailed in this narrative. It is sufficient to say, that as Hannah repairs to a throne of grace, with a desire to cast her cares upon the Lord; so she retires with the composure and comfort, which are ever the result of resignation to the will of God. “She went away, and did eat; and her countenance was no more sad.”

“Whence comes this sudden, happy change? She had by prayer committed her case to God, and left it with him; and, now, she is no more perplexed about it. She had prayed herself, and Eli had prayed for her; and she believed God would either give her the mercy she had prayed for, or make up the want of it to her some other way.” Her prayer is graciously answered. Her reproach is taken away. She becomes the joyful mother of a child, whose heart is turned towards the Lord from his very infancy. Faithful to her vows, she trains him up for the sanctuary, where, in due time, she presents him. The heart of Eli reposes itself upon him, though a child, while his own sons are his grief, and a source of constant disquietude. Samuel grows up, endowed with great grace and wisdom. He proves an inestimable blessing to Israel, and finally closes a long, honored, useful life, ripe for immortality. What may not a mother’s prayers achieve? That prayer of Hannah; that vow unto the Lord; consider their results.

Learn from these incidents:

1. That the true resort for help, in the time of trouble, is a throne of grace.
2. The deeper our trouble, the sorer we should weep, and the more strenuously we should pray.
3. It is right to vow unto the Lord; and this is one powerful means of securing a favorable answer; that we will improve, or consecrate the blessing sought to his glory.
4. Parents should remember that children are God’s gift, and that they should “lend them to Him, as long as they live;” and, as far as in their power, prepare them for his service and glory.
5. We should be careful to perform unto the Lord the vows, which, in our “troubles,” we have made. Never forget them. Never.

6. When God has answered us favorably, we should be mindful to praise him. Hannah praises him in a song, “which,” says Dr. Scott, “may bear a comparison, or even competition, with the most beautiful and magnificent productions of any other inspired writer.” Ch. 2.

030. Prayer Of Samuel At Mizpeh.

Prayer Of Samuel At Mizpeh.

1 Samuel 7:5-6; 1 Samuel 7:9-10.

Sometime after Samuel was “established to be a prophet,” a war broke out between the Israelites and the Philistines. In a battle, which occurred at a place afterwards called Ebenezer, Israel was defeated, with the loss of near four thousand men. This defeat being, by some, ascribed to the want of the ark of God in the army, it was brought into the camp, attended by Hophni and Phineas, the sons of Eli. Great were the rejoicings made at the appearance of this symbol of the Divine Presence, and great anticipations of success were now indulged. But the removal of the ark from Shiloh was unauthorized, and bitterly did the Israelites repent of their rashness. A battle soon after ensued, in which thirty thousand footmen of Israel were killed; the ark was taken, and Hophni and Phineas were slain. 1 Samuel 4:10-11.

Having thus obtained possession of the ark, the Philistines conveyed it, in triumph, to Ashdod, one of their principal cities, and placed it in a temple consecrated to Dagon, and by the side of an idol of that name. On the following morning, the idol was prostrate on its face; but the Philistines, supposing its fall accidental, set it up again. On the following morning, however, it had not only fallen, but its hands and feet were off, and lying on the threshold.

These circumstances were too significant to be mistaken, especially as, soon after, the inhabitants of Ashdod were attacked by severe disease, which resulted in the death of many. At length, convinced that the hand of Israel’s God was concerned in these matters, the people of Ashdod resolved on the removal of the ark, which they effected by transporting it to Ekron; and, finally, having placed it on a cart, to which were attached two cows, it was sent forward into Judea. On its arrival at Beth-Shemeth, a city of the Levites, some of the inhabitants, having the temerity to look into it, contrary to an express and standing divine prohibition, were slain, to the number of seventy. This circumstance so terrified the rest, that they sent to the people of Kiriath-jearim to convey it to that place, where, in the house of Abinadab, whose son was consecrated to keep it, it remained for twenty years. The loss of the ark from Shiloh was deeply afflicting to the Israelites. A general sense of their iniquities began to oppress them, and a spirit of penitence to prevail. This better feeling, coming to the knowledge of Samuel, whose counsels may have contributed to its existence, he informs them what is essential to their renewed favor with God, and their triumph over their enemies: their idol gods must be relinquished, and they return to the love, service, and worship of the true God.

Such was the import of Samuel’s instruction to the Israelites; and, being blessed to them, resulted in their renunciation of their idolatrous practices, and their general acknowledgment of the authority of God. The way being thus prepared for some more public demonstration of their desire to renounce idolatry, Samuel appointed a meeting of the several tribes, at Mizpeh, where he might offer up supplications for them, and lead them, in a solemn and impressive manner, to a formal

renewal of their covenant with God. At the appointed time, Israel was gathered to Mizpeh. And here were observed a series of religious services, consisting, among other things, of fasting, and pouring out water before the Lord, significant of their humiliation and contrition for sin, and especially of their renunciation of idolatry, the fruitful source of calamity to the nation. To Samuel, whose affections for Israel were those of a father, the occasion was most delightful. Israel is repentant! Israel has once more acknowledged their rightful sovereign! Happy was this prophet, as he lifted his voice in prayer for them! And how he did pray!—with what fervency, faith, and affection, that God would not cast off his people! The enemies of Israel were not, however, inactive. They heard of the gathering at Mizpeh, and, deeming it a fit occasion for a sudden attack, soon appeared in formidable numbers, and in hostile array. Great consternation pervaded the camp of Israel. The people were without arms, and, therefore, exposed to become an easy prey to the enemy. But Samuel was present; and, with their improved religious views, they soon learn to repose greater confidence in his prayers, than in any military efforts. Nor did Samuel fail them in this emergency. He felt a deeper interest in their welfare than ever; and, in their present condition, he could repair to a throne of grace for them with confidence. They had renewed their covenant, and now covenant-promises could be pleaded. Samuel was not a priest; but the case was extraordinary, and, doubtless, he was divinely moved to the course he pursued. He sacrificed a lamb, as a burnt-offering, which he followed by special and fervent prayer, that Israel might be preserved from the power of their enemies.

God heard and answered. As the offering was laid upon the altar and the smoke rose, the Philistines drew near, and began the attack. But, as Samuel prayed, God thundered, in token of his kindness to Israel, and in wrath towards their foes. Lightnings flashed out, and destroyed many of the Philistines; whose weapons the Israelites, it is conjectured, seized, and, by means of them, urged on the slaughter more effectually.

Let us hasten to the sequel. The triumph of Israel was complete. So broken and dispirited were the Philistines, that, for a long season, they did not again pass the frontier of Israel, nor otherwise attempt to molest the people of God. In view of that day's signal interposition on the part of God, and as a memorial of his wonderful deliverance of Israel, Samuel directed a monument to be erected, between Mizpeh and Shen, which he called Ebenezer—"Hitherto the Lord hath helped us."

Two important reflections are suggested by this narrative:

1. God is far more ready to hear the prayers of his people, when repentant and reformed, than when unhumiliated and disobedient.

While the people of Israel do not acknowledge God, he will not acknowledge them. If they look to idols for help, they must expect no help from God. And, under such circumstances, their enemies triumph. They slaughter them by thousands. The ark is taken. Their priests are slain. Their hopes are crushed. But, no sooner do they repent and return, than God hears them, and gives them victory over their foes; and, for that purpose, enlists even the elements in their favor.

2. God's ministers can pray with far more comfort and confidence for a repentant, than an impenitent people.

During the removal of the ark to Shiloh, and while the Israelites are experiencing sad reverses, we hear no tidings of Samuel. Where is the prophet of Israel? At his residence, perhaps, weeping in secret over a backslidden and an idolatrous people.

But, no sooner does he learn that there is an humble spirit pervading the nation, than he is abroad: praying, teaching, exhorting, guiding. And now, his mouth is open in prayer; and he has arguments to use; promises to plead; repentance to show. Oh, how easy and delightful to pray, when sinners are trembling and repenting! How difficult, when every heart is callous, and every affection is frozen! No marvel that ministers are sometimes dull and formal!

031. A King Demanded—Prayer Of Samuel.

A King Demanded—Prayer Of Samuel.

1 Samuel 8:6.

Thus far, the people of Israel had been under the special government of God, who had employed Moses, Joshua, and the Judges, to superintend their affairs. They had experienced great vicissitudes; but, from one calamity they had been exempted: no man had tyrannized over them. Not a tax had ever been imposed, to administer to the pomp and pleasures of a king, or to support the extravagance of a court. But the people were no longer satisfied with such simplicity. They aspired to be like other nations. They coveted a king, and the splendors which would gather around him. To Samuel, therefore, the elders repair, and represent that he is becoming advanced, (old servants are often cast off,) and that his sons do not walk in his ways: “therefore,” said they, “give us a king to judge us.”

They do not solicit the advice of this old and tried friend; nor do they request him to ask counsel of God, who had borne them “as on eagle’s wings;” and who, for their preservation, had enlisted the elements: hail lightning, and tempest. No such humble and befitting requests as these, but a stern and bold demand: “Give us a king.”—We will have one.

Samuel listened to the demand. But what must have been his surprise and displeasure! He might have felt for himself—for how could he avoid perceiving the neglect involved in the design?—but more did he feel for the honor of God, which, to the reproach of the nation, was insulted. Besides, how ungrateful in a people, to cast off one who had been their benefactor, as well as their sovereign! Samuel was perplexed, and, for a time, doubtful, as to the part he should act. But we soon find him, at a throne of grace, spreading the case before God. And, though he knew full well how sad the consequence, should God decide that they should have their choice, he had no demurrer to make. The result is not to our present purpose; and, therefore, we leave the narrative—deriving, from the course pursued by Samuel, in a case of great perplexity and trial, the good rule, namely: in all seasons of trouble and perplexity, to repair to God, and spread the case before him.

“Casting all thy cares upon him,” says an apostle, and one richly experienced in these matters, “for he careth for thee.” Whatever concerns the child of God, concerns God himself. Whatever troubles him may be said to trouble God. In all their afflictions, he was afflicted. Is it temporal trouble, or spiritual trouble? Trouble experienced by the minister—the missionary—the magistrate? by parent, child, citizen? by the rich man, or the poor man? The bond, or the free? The appropriate place for each and everyone is the footstool. And there are many reasons why it is so. Two only, however, can be specified.

1. Troubles, especially those of an unavoidable nature, can be told to God more freely and fully than to the dearest friend on earth.

2. Troubles, which admit of a remedy, can be best remedied by God. By a single change of circumstances, which are always under the control of his providence, he can alleviate our sorrows; remove our troubles and perplexities, and improve, and even make happy and joyful our condition. Is the faithful minister of Jesus Christ likely to be cast off by a people, to whom he has long preached, and in whose service he has spent the vigor of his days? Let him spread his case before God, and suffer him to order his affairs. I once knew a clergyman, who, on the eve of being dismissed, (nearly his entire flock were even anxious to bid him "farewell,") carried his case to God; and, having done so, preached a discourse to his people, which, by the blessing of God, in a single day, quelled all tumult; harmonized all minds, and led to an interesting revival of religion: and there, among that people, did that minister spend his days. And, when death came, and closed his lips, many a tongue spoke his praise, and many an eye wept his departure. Is a wife in trouble? Let her also go to a prayer-hearing God. The writer once knew a pious woman, who was desirous of honoring her Divine Master by a public profession of religion, but was prohibited by her husband. For a time, she yielded to his wishes and authority. At length, however, feeling the claims of the gospel to be paramount to those even of a husband, she kindly, yet firmly, made known her determination. The announcement gave birth to great irritation on his part. He talked loud, lordly, cruelly, and left her for a neighboring town. Soon after his departure, she retired to her closet, and spent the entire day in humble, fervent, affectionate pleading with God for that husband.

During his absence, as it afterwards proved, he was restless, agitated, distressed. Conscience upbraided him. A painful struggle, between his sense of right and his prejudices, tortured his mind. Towards evening, he returned; and, on entering the house, ascertained that his wife had kept her closet during the day. He ascended the stairs; softly made his way to the door of her chamber, and gently knocked. It was opened by one whose face was radiant with light and joy, that day gathered in communion with God. Her husband stood before her, a subdued and speechless man. He gently took her by the arm, and, at length, in tones of kindness, inquired—it was all he could say, and that only in a whisper—"My dear wife, will you pray for me?" Let it suffice to add, that prayer brought that rude, ill-tempered husband back; prayer humbled him; prayer made him all that a pious and affectionate wife could wish. Oh, it is well to carry such troubles to our Heavenly Father, who has said, and never forgets what He has said, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will answer thee, and thou shalt glorify me."

032. Prayer Of Samuel For Rain.

Prayer Of Samuel For Rain.

1 Samuel 12:17-19; 1 Samuel 12:23. The change which has recently been effected in the government of Israel, from a theocracy to a monarchy, as we have had occasion to notice in a previous page, was contrary to the divine will, and in opposition to the judgment of Samuel. But the people being determined on such a change, God directs Samuel to anoint Saul as king, and to establish him in that exalted and responsible office. Accordingly, the consecration is made, and Saul, whose conduct appears dignified and commendable throughout the entire transaction, enters upon the duties of his station.

Samuel, deeming it proper that the people, in their collective capacity, should ratify this transaction, and thus make king and kingly government their own choice, ordered a general meeting at Gilgal, where, with sacrifices and thanksgiving to God, they expressed their approbation of both. This having been done, Samuel proceeded to resign the government into the hands of Saul. Preliminary, however, he delivered an affecting and solemn discourse, in which he took occasion to vindicate his administration, to the justice of which the people unanimously assented. Next, he expatiated upon their transgressions and those of their fathers, and of the deliverances which, from time to time, God had wrought for them. This he followed by a promise of blessings, should they be obedient; and by a denunciation of divine judgments, in case of their rebellion. Lastly, he informs them, that in rejecting the divine government, and preferring a king, they had acted a part most unacceptable to God. Of this, he wished to convince them; and in order to make that conviction the more deep and solemn, he would call upon God to give them a sign from heaven; and one of whose divine origin every one could judge. It was now the time of wheat-harvest, when thunder and rain, in that country, were seldom, if ever, known. Yet, they should hear and see both; and in immediate answer to prayer.

What an hour of intense interest to prophet and people was this! What holy confidence Samuel reposes in God, in whose name he now acted, and whose honor he had undertaken to vindicate! The sign was not to be mistaken. It was to be a work, a miracle, which God only could perform, and which, if done at the instance, and in answer to the supplication of the prophet, Israel must admit the truth of what he had said, and stand convicted of folly and ingratitude before the Lord. At this point, Samuel pauses. An intense interest is awakened in the breasts of the assembled thousands. A solemn stillness pervades the multitude. Before them is a prophet of the Lord, who has charged them with ingratitude to God and himself; and now the charge is to be proved. Samuel spreads forth his hands in the sight of Israel: Oh, Lord," said he, "confirm unto this people the words spoken by thy servant. Let the clouds gather, and pour down rain; let thy lightning shoot out, and thy thunders roll in token of thy displeasure!" The sun was shining in his strength. No clouds skirt the horizon. No gale bears on its bosom the gathering storm. But suddenly, as Samuel ceases, the heavens become black with a dark dense cloud. The sun is shut out. The rain descends in torrents. The lightning flashes. The thunders roll. So terrific is the storm, that the

people cry aloud unto the prophet to intercede with God, that they may not be consumed. They have rejected God, as their king and protector, and cast off his prophet, who has befriended, counseled, and prayed for them, for years. And, now, made sensible of their demerits, they gather about the prophet, and plead with him, that he would intercede with God not to forsake them, and to stay the tokens of his wrath. And the reply is worthy of one so exalted; so benevolent; so forgiving. "Pray for you? Yes," says Samuel; "to my latest breath. God forbid that I should sin against the Lord, in ceasing to pray for you. And not only pray, but I will teach you the good and right way." Who does not love to dwell upon a character so noble and exalted? Who does not love to bring before him, and hold up to his gaze, conduct so disinterested and affectionate? For one, I love to think that such can be the dignity of our nature in this present world. But more do I love to learn, that the Mighty and Everlasting God can listen to the supplications of his children; and is ready, at their request, to make even the elements subservient to his glory, and their honor.

It has often been spoken to the praise of Washington, that when retiring from the presidency, he should have imparted such kind and fatherly advice to the people of the United States, as is embodied in his "Farewell Address." It was a noble thought; and that "Address" will remain a monument of his wisdom and patriotism to future generations. But Washington retired with the good will and affectionate sentiments of a nation. They delighted to honor him; and all hearts wished him still to guide the affairs of the nation. But Samuel is virtually ejected from office. Although for years he had consecrated time, efforts, prayers, to the welfare of Israel; and now, old and gray-headed, needed to repose himself on the affections of a grateful and affectionate people; they are dissatisfied, and demand a king to take his place.. And how does he bear this unexpected reverse? Like a prophet of God; like a true saint. He felt the unkindness and ingratitude of their conduct; but we see him still engaged for the welfare of Israel. With all their faults, he still loved them, and could still pray for them, and the true church of God.

"For her," he could emphatically say: For her, my tears shall fall; For her, my prayers ascend; To her, my cares and toils be given.

Till toils and cares shall end.

There are two classes to whom the preceding example of this venerable prophet may be recommended; the one, is the ejected minister; the other, the neglected statesman. The history of our own country, brief as has been that history, furnishes some instances of ingratitude towards honest and patriotic statesmen; but far more numerous instances of ingratitude towards faithful and devoted ministers of Jesus Christ. But there is one beautiful and exalted course for such to pursue; to retire, invoking benedictions on the ungrateful and ill-treating. This was the high and noble conduct of Samuel, when rejected by Israel. This was the sublime and god-like conduct of a greater than Samuel, when Israel, in after-times, not only rejected him, but nailed him to the cross.

And, if kindness towards a people, who have cast off a faithful and devoted minister; if efforts for their good; if prayer for their prosperity and salvation, be thus honorable on his part, these are not less kind towards himself. Both as a minister and a Christian, he will thereby promote his own peace. He will prove himself to have deserved a better lot. He will secure for himself, during his retirement and retreat from the world, a peace of mind, which nothing can disturb. Said our Savior, "Bless them that curse you; pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you." He that can do this; whether he be minister, or statesman; whoever he may be; if he does it from the heart,

that man must be born of God; and may expect, if any one can hope for a final welcome, to hear the plaudit, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your Lord."

033. 1 Kings.

1 Kings.

034. Rain Prevented By Prayer.

Rain Prevented By Prayer.

1 Kings 17:1.

More is recorded of Ahab, than of any other king of Israel; and he did more than any other to provoke the Lord God to anger, 1 Kings 16:30. But, as Henry remarks, "Never was Israel so blessed with a good prophet, as when so plagued with a bad king. Never was a king so bold to sin as Ahab. Never prophet so bold to reprove and threaten as Elijah." Of the early history of this prophet, little is known. "He was born among the mountains of Gilead, on the other side of Jordan; a region inhabited by idolaters, and overspread with abominations of the Amorites. Tishbe, his birth-place, lay not far from the country of the Gergesenes, where, in the time of our Savior, the devils entered into the swine; and it may be supposed that, unless from extreme necessity, no Israelite would take up his dwelling among those mountains. It was, probably, in some poor abode of a banished Jewish family, that Elijah was born and brought up."

He is first introduced into the sacred history, making the solemn declaration to Ahab: "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." But wherefore such a denunciation? The idolatry introduced by Jeroboam, Ahab, at the instigation of his bloodthirsty wife, had adopted. The worship of Baal became the established religion of the land, and the worshipers of the true God were persecuted with fire and sword. Gloomy idols rose in every direction; profane altars, stained with the blood of prophets, and other holy men, bade defiance to the Most High, and called for divine vengeance. Had Ahab alone been concerned, he might have been given over to fill up the measure of his iniquities; but the utter apostasy of Israel must, if possible, be prevented. The glory of God, and the interests of the true religion are involved; and hence, a calamity, severe in proportion to the evil to be remedied, must be inflicted.

It is probable that Elijah had before expostulated with the haughty Ahab, and warned him of judgments to come. But his expostulations and warnings were unavailing. On the contrary, the land is becoming more defiled; the worship of Baal will soon shut out the worship of God; earth and hell will triumph! A solemn rebuke is, therefore, required. A national calamity only will bring back the people to the acknowledgment of God. That must be inflicted; and it shall fall heavy, and abide till the cure is effected.

Elijah receives his commission to enter the presence of Ahab, and denounce the judgment. He obeys. And there, now, behold this man of God before the tyrant—calm, dignified, and fearless. He has no farther propositions to make. The time for negotiation is passed. The day of rebuke and indignation has come. Behold, then, Elijah, "a man of like passions with ourselves," uttering the denunciation, that no dew and no rain for these years shall descend upon Israel, but according to his word. And, now, he kneels and prays to the God of dew and rain, that it may be as he had declared to the monarch of Israel.

It was the prayer of faith. And, though Ahab might have ridiculed the prophet, and spurned the threatened calamity; though “the luxuriant pastures, and well-watered fields of Samaria seemed to exclaim together, ‘this judgment shall never be executed,’ yet, from that hour that Elijah bent before the footstool, neither dew nor rain descended. The heavens became as iron, and the earth as brass.” “The word of the prophet struck like a fever into the heart of the earth, withering and scorching; and all that was fresh and green faded, and hung its head; every stream and rivulet dried up; and all that had breath lay gasping and languishing on the ground. Neither dew nor rain fell during three years and six months. Such were the effects produced by the voice of man; but a man who was in communion and accord with the Almighty.” But who can say how often, before Elijah could attain to such power with God, he had humbled and abased himself! How often may he have fallen on his face in the mountains of Gilead! How many tears he may have shed in solitary caves and caverns before he could say, “As the Lord liveth, the God of Israel, before whom I stand, there shall not be rain nor dew these years, but according to my word.” The apostle James cites this example (James 5:17) as a proof of the great efficacy of prayer. It is indeed wonderful, that the High and Holy Ruler of the universe should so listen to the supplication of mortal man! That, at his instance, the laws of nature should be suspended year after year! But, while Elijah was “subject to like passions with ourselves,” and, therefore, imperfect, he was a “righteous man,” probably preeminently holy, and had at heart, in no ordinary degree, the honor of God. That was the secret of his prevalence. Arguments drawn from the divine glory, mingled with strong faith, are the most likely to prevail. Ahab was the personal enemy of Elijah; but more did he hate him as a prophet of the Lord. But, on the prophet’s part, that enmity was lost sight of in the intensity of his grief and indignation that God was so insulted and dishonored. When, in our supplications, we can say, Grant, O Lord, the favor sought, for thy glory is concerned in so doing, then may we hope that it will be according to our word.

035. The Widow's Son Raised Through Prayer.

The Widow's Son Raised Through Prayer.

1 Kings 17:20-22.

Elijah, having delivered his message to Ahab, is directed to retire, and hide himself from the exasperated monarch. The place selected is in the neighborhood of the brook Cherith, a dreary wild, near the banks of the Jordan. This is his appointed retreat. "The blue sky his roof; the bare rocks his walls; the stones his seat; the shady wood his bed-chamber; the grass his couch." For twelve long months Elijah dwells here, quenching his thirst from the brook, and receiving food daily from the hoarse and voracious ravens. At the expiration of this time, the brook dried up, and God directs him to go to Zarephath. It was a long and toilsome journey, through a wild and barren country, in a time of general famine, and extreme drought; and this into the land of Zidon, beyond the borders of Israel, among a heathen people, enslaved to a vile idolatry; the native country of Jezebel, his bitterest enemy, and the territory of her father, a furious tyrant, also in alliance with Ahab.

Elijah obeys; and, at length, reaches the neighborhood of Zarephath. The Lord had arranged for his reception. A widow receives him into her house. She was poor in this world's goods, but rich in faith, although in a heathen land. To put her heart at rest, as to the means of supporting the man of God, she is told that the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruise of oil fail, until the day that the Lord should send rain upon the earth.

If the presence of Elijah was a blessing, temporal and spiritual, as doubtless it was to the widow, not less was his comfort enhanced under her hospitable roof.

He had now passed several months in this quiet retreat, engaging in prayer and praise, and holy discourse, when, unexpectedly, a heavy cloud darkened the peaceful cottage. The widow's child—an only son—suddenly falls sick, and almost before she is aware, he is a corpse.

How mysterious! What explanation does the dispensation admit of? Could we assign no reason, we should believe that it was ordered wisely; for, though clouds and darkness are round about the Infinite God, yet "all his works are truth, and his ways judgment." or righteousness. But, possibly, a satisfactory reason may be given. "The widow, we may believe," says Krummacher, "was a person of real piety, but acquainted with God in a partial and too superficial manner. She knew something of God's loving kindness, but not enough of his grace. In short, while well-affected to godliness in general, she was too far off from God; ignorant of a Mediator and Intercessor; and not enough broken and contrite in heart." The design of God, then, was the improvement of this woman in piety. It was by afflicting her, that he designed to show her more of her heart; and, in the sequel, to exalt and confirm her faith. The grief of the widowed mother affects the heart of the prophet. Perhaps he understood the reason of the affliction, and blessed God for it, while he was touched with a heartfelt compassion and sympathy. At length, under a divine impulse, he asks for the child. She yields it, and he retires with it to his chamber, lays it on his own bed, and applies himself in

prayer to God.

“And now, listen! What a prayer it is which he pours forth! It is a prayer that certainly would not pass uncensured by us; that certainly would not escape the criticism- and the condemnation of our wisdom, had we heard it from the mouth of any other than such a one as Elijah. ‘O Lord, my God, cries he; ‘hast thou also brought evil upon the widow, with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?’ What! does Elijah speak before the living God of bringing evil? and does he venture to approach Jehovah’s throne with such a question, and with such a complaint? Yes; he speaks as his heart dictates. And if he speaks foolishly, he does it in simplicity, and in faith. And if he pleads too familiarly with God, he does so, encouraged by the blood of the Lamb, and the promises of God! It is not for us to censure him, for his prayer was accepted of the Lord. Yet, what was its purport? ‘Lord! didst thou care to slay this child? Impossible! Thy purpose was to lead this mother through affliction to repentance. This, O Lord, having been accomplished, must the child continue dead? Look, O Lord God, upon this widow graciously, and remember that I am her guest. She has shown much kindness unto thy servant. I would gladly recompense her. Do thou recompense her, for I am poor, and have nothing. And O, remember, also, that I am thy prophet. If I am reproached, thou art reproached also. Therefore, that thy name may be hallowed, and thy praise magnified upon earth, now, O Lord, hear my prayer.’

“Having thus expostulated, as it were, with Jehovah, Elijah arose, threw himself upon the dead child, and stretched himself upon it three times, as though he would say, ‘I will not leave the child, but will await God’s answer to my prayer.’ And he cried unto Jehovah, and said, ‘O Jehovah, my God! I pray thee let this child’s soul come into it again;’ a prayer, you perceive, quite positive and unconditional. And what followed upon this holy boldness in prayer? ‘The Lord heard the voice of Elijah, and the soul of the child came into it again, and he revived.’

“But how does this agree with our notions and maxims concerning acceptable prayer? Here we have, as I have said, an unconditional prayer; a prayer, too, for something temporal; a prayer for a miracle; a prayer without limitations; yet the Lord heard and answered it. Yes, our gracious God does not bind himself to our maxims, nor suffer himself to be limited by our rules.” (Elijah, The Tishbite, by Krummacher.)

“See, thy son liveth!” said the joyful prophet, as he took down the child to its mother. He added nothing more, but left the holy Spirit to say the rest. And that Spirit did speak; he enlightened her understanding as much as he warmed her heart. “Now by this I know,” she exclaimed, “that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.” The word of the Lord! What word of the Lord was it that Elijah had spoken to her? This may be easily conjectured. We find here, at the close of the narrative, a new key to the whole. Elijah had probably said something to her, during their acquaintance, which she had been unable to comprehend or believe. It is not difficult to suppose what it may have been. The widow was a woman of piety, but still sadly ignorant of many important religious truths—particularly of the doctrine of a promised Messiah. In respect to this doctrine, Elijah is supposed to have attempted her instruction: how the sinner might be pardoned; how, through the atonement of a Mediator, she might stand justified before God. This great truth now shone into her soul; and, to the faith of it, she yielded herself with joy. Henceforth, she stood upon solid ground; for, being a devout person, she was now evinced to be a daughter of Abraham’s faith; and, at the moment when Elijah said to her, “See, thy son liveth,” her

heart was fitted to say something greater still: "I know that my Redeemer liveth!"

God takes strange methods, by which to accomplish his plans; strange means, by which to dispel the ignorance of his children; to confirm their faith; to establish them upon a sure foundation. This widow needed instruction in regard to important truths; and in no way, perhaps, so well could it be imparted, as by the method which God adopted. Afflictions often enlighten and reform; correct and purify, better than it can be done by any other process.

036. Elijah's Prayer At Mount Carmel.

Elijah's Prayer At Mount Carmel.

1 Kings 18:36-40

Elijah had been concealed for nearly three years and six months, during which the famine had prevailed throughout Judea. Meanwhile, Ahab had been intent upon apprehending him; and with that intent had made diligent search through his own, as well as all the neighboring states, and had taken an oath from the different tribes and governments, that they knew not the place of his concealment. The time, however, had arrived for a change of operations; and God says to the prophet, "Go, show thyself to Ahab."

What a strange command! As well, seemingly, might he be directed to enter a lion's den. Present himself to Ahab! His resentment was originally great; but, now, it is aggravated by more than a three years' famine, and a three years' unavailing search. But God had given the word, and it was enough. Elijah, therefore, bids adieu to the widow of Zarephath, and to that chamber where he had restored her son to life, and where he had held high and holy communion with God. He commences his journey, and, at length, enters Samaria. At this very time, Ahab was setting out on a journey through the land. He had in his employment a man, by the name of Obadiah; who, strange to say, was a pious man, and who, under a commission from the king, was making search in one portion of Judea, while he did in another, for herbage and water for their horses and mules.

While Obadiah was fulfilling his commission, he is met one day by a venerable personage, girded as a traveler, and covered with a mantle. In the stranger, Obadiah recognizes Elijah, and prostrates himself before him. "Art thou that my lord Elijah?" he asks. "I am," replies Elijah.—"Go tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here!"

Obadiah objects. He forebodes that while he is gone to deliver the message, the spirit of the Lord may remove the prophet to some unknown region; upon which Ahab, thinking himself mocked by Obadiah, would deprive him of his office, and probably of life itself. His apprehensions, however, are allayed by the solemn assurance of Elijah, that he designed to show himself to Ahab that very day. Thus certified, Obadiah set forth in search of the tyrant, to whom he has the boldness to say, "Behold, Elijah is here!" With what sentiments Ahab receives the intelligence, we are not informed. But he turns to meet Elijah. Perhaps that heart, in its malignity, was plotting vengeance upon the prophet. But when, at length, he sees Elijah, neither curse nor menace does he utter; only, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" "No," replied the prophet. "No, I have not troubled Israel; but thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou has followed Baalim."

Thus fearlessly does Elijah meet Ahab, and thus faithfully does he charge his wickedness upon him. "And, now, let this question be settled," says he; let it be known, before all Israel, who is the great troubler of the land; Ahab, or Elijah; the worshipers of Baal, or the servants of the living God; and, therefore, send and gather to me all Israel unto Mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal, four

hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves, four hundred, which eat of Jezebel's table. I demand it, as the representative of the Living God; I speak in his name, and by his authority." Ahab obeys; and when, at length, they are assembled, Elijah appears before them upon the rising ground, conspicuous to all. Lifting his voice, he cries aloud to the thousands of Israel: "How long halt ye between two opinions? If Jehovah be God, follow him; but if Baal, follow him." This was an unexpected appeal. It was bold; but altogether to the purpose. They looked round upon one another, as if to inquire, What think ye? as if to gather strength and courage, one from another. But shame and conviction of guilt possess every heart and palsy every tongue.

Elijah has the vantage ground, and he hastens to occupy it. While the multitude are in eager expectation, he makes his proposal, 1 Kings 18:23-24. They hear and approve; "And all the people answered and said: 'It is well spoken.'"

Thus, an issue had been made. The priests of Baal are compelled to enter the lists. The great question must be settled, and settled now. Accordingly, they prepare their sacrifice; and when ready, they invoke the interposition of Baal. From morning until noon, and from noon until the offering of the evening sacrifice, the mountain resounds with their loud and frenzied cries. At length, in utter desperation, they leap upon the sacrifice, as if to provoke Baal to hear.

Meanwhile, Elijah stands and surveys the tumult. Noon arrives, and he becomes oppressed with the strange and ridiculous operations before him. At length, he can restrain himself no longer; but, mocking them, he bids them "cry aloud; for he is a god: either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or, peradventure, he sleepeth, and must be waked." Thus the priests of Baal fail; Ahab is alarmed; idolatry is abashed.

It is now the turn of Elijah to make trial of the power of faith, and of the omnipotence and righteous cause of Jehovah.

He bids the people, therefore, come near. On the top of Carmel were the ruins of an altar, here called "the altar of Jehovah." It had probably been built in better times, but had been thrown down by idolaters. This altar Elijah repairs; about it he casts a trench; and then prepares the wood; dresses the bullock, and lays it upon it. Next he commands that water should be poured on the wood, and on the sacrifice, in order that the miracle may be the more unquestionable. "Fill four barrels with water," said he, "and pour it the burnt sacrifice and on the wood. And he said, Do it the second time. And they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time. And they did it the third time. And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water." The preparations were now completed. A secret awe pervades the multitude. The moment of appeal to the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, has come. "Let it be known this day," says Elijah, "that Thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word." The honor of God is the prophet's supreme desire; and, yet, he could wish, and why should he not wish, to stand vindicated before the house of Israel and the prophets of Baal?

"The whole revelation of God is at stake. If no answer follows, the whole fabric falls in, and the ground of our hope is gone. Then all that Elijah has testified; all that the prophets have spoken before him, and which Elijah has confirmed; will be accounted a delusion; and the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Israel, will be no longer regarded! The prayer is uttered. The silence of death reigns in the assembly; every heart beats high; in every face is the extreme of expectation;

when, lo! the answer comes; the Amen is given; the fire of heaven descends, in the sight of every one, directly upon the altar, consumes the burnt-offering, the wood, the stones, the earth, and licks up the water in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, Jehovah, he is the God; Jehovah, he is the God! Elijah's faith is crowned; the foolish priests are put to shame, and their gods are confounded and annihilated." The people on Mount Carmel, as might have been expected, gave glory to the God of Israel. They could no longer doubt that Jehovah was God. And, moreover, they could not but perceive that Elijah was a true prophet, and God a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God. On them, therefore, the effect was happy; as it always is, when the truth is suffered to have its proper influence upon the heart.

But, on the priests of Baal, the signs and wonders of that day were lost. They were hardened before; they became harder still, and were now ripe for destruction. Acting under the authority of Jehovah, Elijah requires their slaughter. That slaughter is accomplished, and Ahab has no power to withstand the prophet of the Lord. Happy was it for him, that he himself was spared, to know yet, more of the power of faith and the efficacy of prayer. Happy should we be, if we might add, what the Scripture history, however, does not sanction, that the merciful dealings of God towards him, resulted in turning him to the love and worship of the true God of Israel.

037. Prayer Of Elijah For Rain.

Prayer Of Elijah For Rain.

1 Kings 18:41-46. The priests of Baal are slain—idolatry is rebuked—Ahab is humbled—Elijah is honored—Jehovah's cause is vindicated. The rain may now come.

Let us imagine ourselves once more at the foot of Carmel. Ahab is still here. He has witnessed all the transactions of the day; which have ended in the slaying of his prophets, and in the reestablishment of the worship of God. He still lingers on the memorable spot.

Elijah is also here, wishing, however, to be relieved from the company of Ahab. He has other, and more important business. He wishes to be alone, that he may pray for rain. With this in view, he suggests to Ahab to go up, and eat and drink, adding, "for there is sound of abundance of rain." Whether he heard it only in faith, with the ear of the spirit, or whether God rendered his bodily hearing so acute, that he really heard it from afar, we need not inquire. It is enough that he heard it, and it was a summons to prayer.

Elijah ascends to the top of Carmel; and there now behold him, kneeling, closing his eyes, bending his head forward towards his knees; and in this posture, supplicating the God of rain, that he would water the parched earth. When Elijah stood before the people, and the prophets of Baal, he spoke and acted with the authority of God's ambassador; but, now as he kneels in the presence of God, his whole demeanor expresses abasement and conscious unworthiness. And, yet, he is entreating for a new wonder; for the fulfillment of the assurance he had given to Ahab years before, that there should not be rain but according to his word. "When Elijah had wrestled awhile with God. in the depth of self-abasement and poverty of spirit, in a manner which, perhaps, few of us know from experience; for all believers do not tread in the path of such a deep and thorough humiliation; he said unto his servant, 'Go up now,' that is, to the declivity of the mountain, 'and look towards the sea!' He placed him, as it were, on the watch-tower, to look out, and inform him when his prayer was beginning to be answered by a sign of rain becoming visible in the distant horizon. For he was certain of a favorable answer, in faith on the word and truth of Him, who had said to him at Zarephath, 'Go, show thyself unto Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth!' The servant went, looked out in the distance; but the sky was as clear as crystal; not a cloud to be seen. He came back, saying, 'I see nothing.' But it is a matter of daily experience, that help does not appear at the first cry, nor is the harvest reaped the moment after the sowing-time of prayer. This is certainly not agreeable to flesh and blood; but, spiritually considered, it is most salutary. What were the consequence, if God's treasures were always open to us at our first knocking? Should we not then seem to be rulers and commanders in the city of God, and forget our dependent condition? Should we not be in danger of making an idol of our prayer, as the Israelites made of the brazen serpent, and think it is our prayer that effects all; that in it we possess a secret charm, a divine rod, or a legal claim upon the bounty of God? We should soon become self-sufficient. Therefore, our gracious God does not always appear to hearken to the first cry, but lets us generally stand awhile at the door, so that once and again, we are obliged to say, 'I see nothing.' We ought then to reflect

a little, and become deeply conscious, that we have, in reality, nothing to claim, but that all is mere unmerited favor. If we make our first approach to his footstool in the character of just persons, he keeps us back until we feel that we are poor sinners, unworthy petitioners; and are ready to say, 'Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table.' Such is his method."

"There is nothing," said the servant. Elijah continues his prostration and his supplication; while he directs the servant to go yet seven times more. It was a great blessing, which he sought, and one which could be granted only to fervent, persevering prayer.

But, at length, Elijah's prayer is answered. The servant returns the seventh time, and says "Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand." It was a little cloud. But it was enough. Elijah understood the intimation, and says unto his servant, "Go up, say unto Ahab, prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not." The message of the prophet is delivered. Ahab turns his eyes, and sees for himself. Dark clouds ascend out of the sea; the heavens become black, the rain pours in torrents. "Ahab is already seated in his chariot, and on his way to his royal seat in Jezreel. 'But the hand of the Lord was upon Elijah.' Jehovah invigorated him with supernatural bodily powers, so that the prophet, girding up his loins, ran before Ahab's chariot, which, doubtless, was at full speed, on account of the rain. The prophet was now a living memorial to the king, to remind him of all the great things which the God of Israel had brought to pass by his prophet; that Ahab might not easily forget them, but carry the fresh impression of them to Jezebel. Elijah, therefore, outran the chariot before his eyes, through all the torrents of rain and tempest, till he came to the entrance of Jezreel." The apostle James adduces this instance of Elijah's success in prayer, as an encouragement to us, to earnest, energetic prayer, and to believe that we also shall not fail of being answered, if we but pray in faith; because, "the earnest, energetic prayer of the righteous man availeth much." James 5:16. This is, indeed, the precise truth. He that "cannot lie," has promised to hear faithful, sincere, fervent prayer. Only ask as the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus, and you will succeed. It may be that, for six times, the answer will be, "There is nothing; yet, wait on; pray on; agonize still more. The seventh time, which is the Lord's time, will give the answer you need.

Wait on the Lord, ye trembling saints, And keep your courage up;

He'll raise your spirit, when it faints, And far exceed your hope.

038. 2 Kings

2 Kings

039. The Shunammite's Child Restored To Life.

The Shunammite's Child Restored To Life.

2 Kings 4:32-37. The mantle of Elijah is in the hands of Elisha, and with it he retires to Carmel, which becomes his residence; but from which, as occasion requires, he visits the seminaries of the prophets, and imparts instruction to the people.

He frequently traveled from Carmel to Samaria, between which lay the city of Shunem. At this latter place, during one of his journeys, he was introduced to a pious woman, who, with her husband, resided there. Her kindness to the prophet, on that occasion, so won his heart, that afterwards he often called, and was always welcomed with kindness and cordiality.

Elisha, in turn, by his holy deportment, and pious conversation, so wrought upon the heart of the Shunammite, that she proposes to her husband to erect a small chamber "for the holy man of God," which she would furnish with a bed, a table, a stool, and a candlestick. As such plain accommodations were within their means, the chamber was prepared and furnished; and the next time the prophet journeyed that way, he was invited to occupy it.

Grateful for the kindness thus shown him by this worthy woman, Elisha would fain make some suitable return. He bids Gehazi, therefore, request her attendance; and, on her presenting herself before him, he inquires what service he can render her. "Wouldst thou be spoken for to the king, or the captain of the host, for an office for thy husband? Or, hast thou any complaint, or petition, which I can present for thee?" To these inquiries, she returns for answer: "I dwell among mine own people."—We live in comfort in our present residence, and have no wish for preferment. Upon this, she retires. But the prophet was not satisfied. He was still bent on some requital, in token of his gratitude. In doubt, however, himself, what that requital should be, he refers the question to his servant. Gehazi, by some means, had learned the desire of this husband and wife, that they might become parents, and, accordingly, he informs his master. The Shunammite is immediately called; and when, at length, she presents herself at the door, the announcement is made that, in due time, she shall be the happy mother of a son. And it so came to pass. She folds the promised son in her arms. She cherishes him, and watches over him, till, at length, he is able to accompany his father and the reapers to the field. There, however, he suddenly falls sick.

They bore him to his mother, and he lay Upon her knees till noon—and then he died.

* * * * * How beautiful he lies, With his fair forehead, and the rosy veins
Playing so freshly in his sunny cheek!

How could they say that he would die!

It was indeed a strange providence. What could it mean? The mother makes no preparation for his burial, and asks none of others; but, having laid him on the prophet's bed, she proceeds, with the reluctant concurrence of her husband, to Elisha, at Carmel. "All shall yet be well," said she to her husband; "I cannot now fathom the counsels of God, but the issue of this dispensation will, in

some way, be well.”

While her faith thus sustained her in her affliction, her maternal solicitude hastened her in her journey to Carmel. As she approached the residence of Elisha, he perceived her, and bid Gehazi run and inquire, “Is it well?” Her errand, however, was not with Gehazi; and hence, simply replying to his question, “It is well,” she urges her way into the presence of the prophet. Before him she prostrates herself, and, in the anguish of her heart, clasps his feet. Gehazi, supposing that his master would not be pleased to see her thus prostrate, attempted to raise her. But Elisha waited to hear from her the cause of her trouble. Her painful story was soon told. Nor was it told to a heart devoid of sympathy. Alive to all her grief and solicitude, Elisha immediately bids Gehazi gird up his loins, and, without pausing by the way, to hasten to Shunem, and lay his staff on the face of the child. This expedient, however, did not fulfill the wishes of the mother. She evidently had no confidence in the means of restoration adopted, and this she plainly intimates, by assuring Elisha that she would not leave him. He must himself go with her.

He yields; and, on their way, they meet Gehazi, returning with the intelligence that the staff had not restored the child! And could Elisha have reasonably anticipated that it would? Certainly not, if, as Bishop Hall suggests, he had adopted this course “out of human conceit, and not by divine instruction.”

We cannot believe, however, that such a motive actuated the prophet. Rather would we hope that it was the result of a sudden sympathetic feeling—right in itself—but from which he acted hastily, and, therefore, improperly, without a due consultation of the will of God, and without humble, fervent, importunate prayer. Be this, however, as it may, the prophet himself passes on, and finds, on reaching his own chamber, the child lying on his bed a corpse.

He would feel rebuked; he had tempted God, in thinking to raise to life the child by the staff in Gehazi’s hand. God must be honored, or his interposition cannot be expected. No undue expedients may be adopted in attaining such important ends.

Sensible now that a great work is before him, the accomplishment of which lies with God, the prophet bethinks himself what the circumstances require. He excludes all—even the parents—that he may seem to be duly humble, and that no one may interrupt his communion with God, or witness the struggles of his faith.

He bows at the footstool of the Eternal. He acknowledges his nothingness. He confesses his presumption. He pleads that God would still vouchsafe his blessing, and honor himself and servant by restoring the life of the child. The manner in which that child is restored; the various actions of the prophet; his walking to and fro, and the slowness of the restoration—all would seem to indicate, that, either for the reasons specified, or for others connected with the previous conduct of the prophet, it was only by unwonted, importunate, agonizing prayer, that God was moved to restore the child. With what gratitude and joy, however, must Elisha have, at length, seen the accomplishment of his wishes—an answer to his prayer! The child lives. The man of God came forth, and led the child unto his mother, and went on his way: And he was then her beautiful—her own;

Living, and smiling on her, with his arms folded about her neck, and his warm breath breathing upon her lips, and in her ear, The music of his gentle voice once more.

If we compare the manner in which Elisha raised this child with that of Jesus, on similar occasions, we cannot fail to be struck with this remarkable difference: every part of the prophet's conduct expressed a consciousness of inability in himself, and entire dependence on another; but Jesus wrought by his own power; "He spake, and it was done." "Young man, I say unto thee, arise!"—"Talitha cumi."—"Lazarus, come forth!" Prophets and apostles all speak in the name and by authority of God, or of Jesus, but Jesus himself is dependent upon none. In his own name, and by virtue of his own power, he raises the dead, imparts sight to the blind, restores to tranquility the foaming billows and the raging tempest. Was the prophet presumptuous in sending Gehazi with his staff? Had he such a conceit of his power with God that he needed only to send his servant with his staff, and the miracle would be performed? If so, he was properly rebuked. Let all, whether ministers or private Christians, be admonished of the propriety of due humility in the discharge of their duties; especially during revivals of religion, when the spiritually dead are raised to life, should all be ready to exalt God, and hide themselves. But have not revivals, in some cases, been retarded, and, perhaps, cut short, by the pride of ministers or people? Have they not sometimes magnified their own importance, or the importance of some one or more measures, which they themselves have suggested? Have they not leaned upon their own staff, rather than upon the power of God? Or set greater value upon some balm of their own preparation, than upon the balm of Gilead? Let it never be forgotten, that he that exalteth himself, when God only should be exalted, will be humbled.

But, perhaps, the prophet, in the fullness of his sympathy, and in the haste of his heart to impart relief to the pious Shunammite, neglected to consult God; neglected to pray and humble himself, before he sent his staff. If so, who will not say that he was signally in fault? He might feel for the woe of one who had shown such kindness as had the pious Shunammite; but, in his ardor to help her, he should not have forgotten the honor due to God; he should not, by the very means by which he would have extended relief, have retarded it. In like manner, let not ministers and Christians, in their zeal and sympathy for sinners, or for the furtherance of a revival, neglect those means, which, alone, can secure their object. Has it not often, however, occurred that, while souls have been anxious; while spiritual distress has been prevailing on every side, and inquiries have been pouring forth from the bosoms of hundreds, has it not often happened that a throne of grace has been nearly neglected, and dependence has been placed on some staff of Elisha? On some new and extraordinary measure? On some human expedient, by which to raise the spiritually dead to life? We should never lose sight of the real power by which sinners are made alive unto God. Whatever instrumentalities are employed, ministers and Christians must get behind the curtain, and pray. Pray first—pray fervently: then go yourself, if you are able; but if, in the providence of God, you cannot go, you may then safely send Gehazi.

Finally, ministers may well sympathize with parents who have children dead in trespasses and sins. Oh, Ye servants of the living God, know you what joy you may convey to the parental bosom by your prayers for a beloved child! For every child whom, by the grace of God, you shall raise to life, you shall receive the grateful love of father and mother here, and will add to the brightness of your crown of glory in the world to come.

040. Prayer Of Hezekiah Against Sennacherib.

Prayer Of Hezekiah Against Sennacherib.

2 Kings 19:16; 2 Kings 19:18-20; 2 Kings 19:32; 2 Kings 19:35-36. On the accession of Hezekiah to the throne of Judah, he commenced an extensive reformation among the people. Idols had been set up in various places, and even incense had been burned in honor of the brazen serpent which Moses had made, and which, to this time, had been preserved. This, however, was now broken in pieces; the other idols were destroyed; the high places removed, and the land purged of idolatry. A few years following this reformation, Hezekiah, in token of having shaken off the Assyrian yoke, refused to pay tribute. 2 Kings 18:7. In the fourteenth year of his reign, however, Sennacherib, king of Syria, invaded Judah, many of whose fenced cities fell into his hands. Hezekiah, it would seem, offered no resistance; but, with a strange want of courage, and confidence in God, he makes his submission to Sennacherib, who requires from him the immediate payment of a sum equal to nearly a million of dollars. To meet this demand, with great impropriety, he takes the golden plates from off the doors and pillars of the temple. In consideration of the above tribute, Sennacherib, it was expected, would withdraw his forces. But, instead of this, Jerusalem itself is soon besieged by a formidable army, leaded by Tartan, Rabsasis, and Rabshakah. Hezekiah is invited by them to a personal interview, which, however, he declines, but sends three commissioners to represent himself, and to treat with the officers of Sennacherib.

Previous to, and during this interview, Hezekiah is insulted by Rabshakah; God is blasphemed; and the soldiers are menaced, and invited to mutiny. The condition of Hezekiah and his capital was, consequently, sufficiently gloomy; but from what quarter can he look for deliverance?

Like a prudent man, instead of depending upon human wisdom, or resorting to human expedients, he repairs to the house of the Lord, to meditate and pray; at the same time, he sends Eliakim and Shebna in sackcloth to Isaiah, to solicit his prayers in this "day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of blasphemy."

Isaiah replies, by direction of God, that Hezekiah has nothing to fear from the insolent and blasphemous Sennacherib. "I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumor, and shall return into his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land."

Rabshakah delivered his message; but, receiving no answer, he left his army before Jerusalem, under command of the other generals, and went himself to attend the king, his master, for further orders. Sennacherib, on learning the state of things, sends messengers a second time to Hezekiah, to induce him to surrender. In his message at this time, the haughty Syrian himself mocks and insults God; and, with great insolence, intimates to Hezekiah that no one will be able to deliver him out of his hands.

Hezekiah, however, had been instructed by Isaiah in whom to confide; and, believing the promises of God, he repairs to the house of the Lord, to lay before him his case, and to pray for divine guidance and protection; showing that even with the divine assurance of safety, we are still to

pray. The honor of God had been insulted. The power of Him who dwells between the cherubim had been defied. The covenant people of God had been reproached for their confidence in the divine protection. "O Lord," says Hezekiah,

"bow down thine ear, and hear: open, Lord, thine eyes, and see: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God." The best pleas are those which are taken from God's honor. These are the pleas of Hezekiah, and they prevail.

Isaiah is sent to Hezekiah with a gracious answer to his prayer: "That which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib I have heard." That same night the utter ruin of the Syrian army was accomplished.

Like the leaves of the forest, when summer is green, That host with their banners at sunset are seen;

Like the leaves of the forest, when autumn is flown, That host on the morrow lay withered and strewn.

For the angel of death spread his wings on the blast,— And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed; And the breath of the sleepers grew deadly and chill, And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever were still.

It was indeed a night of death; and the morning which ensued was a morning of surprise and consternation. One hundred and eighty-five thousand lifeless bodies lay scattered upon the field.

What an answer to prayer! How fearful for the enemies of the children of God to force them to a throne of grace! There, those children have more power, than if they were to summon to their aid the armies of the world! If God be for them, who can be against them? What are the insolent threats of the proudest monarch! What if his legions be innumerable, and he have inspired them with his own infuriated zeal!—See!—one solitary individual retires to the house of the Lord—there he bows before the altar of God—there humbles himself—there pleads—there points to the honor of God insulted—his power defied—points to Jerusalem, where his covenant people dwell, and asks, "Lord, wilt thou not spare thine own consecrated city—and thy people whom thou hast chosen?" It is enough. His prayer is heard. The doom of thousands is sealed. The salvation of king and people is determined. And one messenger of the Lord of hosts is sufficient. One angel can destroy! How he effects it, I cannot tell; perhaps by pestilence—perhaps by some Nubian blast. No matter how; it was done—done by order of the Lord Almighty—and done in answer to prayer!

Learn a lesson of confidence in God. Learn that dependence upon Him is far preferable to dependence upon human wisdom or human strength. Jehovah reigns; and his power, his will, his providence, his promise—all are on the side of those who put their trust in Him. The prayer of Hezekiah has more power than the armies of Judah; more than the thousands of Sennacherib. With such proof of the efficacy of prayer, what need the child of God fear—be he a monarch on a throne, or a subject on the footstool? Said the Psalmist: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"

041. Prayer For The Continuance Of Life.

Prayer For The Continuance Of Life.

2 Kings 20:1-3, etc.

“It is appointed unto men once to die;” and, therefore, all may know that, sooner or later, they will be brought to “the house appointed for all the living.” Yet a few have been exempted from death, as Enoch and Elijah; and a few have had revealed to them the time and the manner of their death, as Aaron, Moses, Hezekiah, and, probably, Paul.

We have before us the annunciation made to Hezekiah by the prophet, that his end was at hand. What peculiar reasons existed for a divine revelation in his case, we are not informed.

It would seem, however, that he did not understand the sentence to be irreversible; otherwise, he could not consistently have prayed for recovery. He was sore sick, and the natural tendency of his disease was to death; and he might have understood that, without the miraculous interposition of God, it would prove fatal.

Death, however, at this time, was most unwelcome to Hezekiah. “To account for this,” says Dr. Scott, “it has been said that believers under the Old Testament, having dark views of the eternal world, might be expected to die with more regret than those under the New. But facts by no means support this supposition, for Abraham, Jacob, Aaron, Moses, Joshua, David, and others, seem to have left the world with as much composure, if not joyfulness, as did Paul himself. We must, therefore, ascribe Hezekiah’s reluctance to die, either to his state of mind, or to the circumstances of his family or the nation. Nothing appears peculiarly to have distressed him, in the view of his immediate death, as to the state of his soul; but the circumstances of his family, and the state of affairs in Israel, seem to solve the difficulty.”

If, as some conjecture, this was before the defeat of the Assyrian army, but near the time of their invasion, the kingdom was in imminent danger. There might have been no one to take his place. At this time he had no son—Manasseh having been born three years after—and hence, the peace of the kingdom might have been in danger, and, in Hezekiah’s view, even the promises to David likely to fail. But, whether these, or others, were the true reasons of his reluctance to die, is perhaps immaterial. Strong reasons did, in fact, exist, why he wished for the continuance of life, and such as led Hezekiah to pray most fervently, therefore, and to accompany his supplication with tears unto Him that was able to save. On receiving the message, therefore, he turns himself on his bed towards the wall, either to conceal his strong emotion, or the better to prevent interruption, and now pours forth his desires for the prolongation of life.

I cannot think, with Dr. Clarke, that, in the arguments he used, there was a “want of humility, or of a due sense of his own weakness.” Hezekiah was not pleading for eternal life, but simply for the continuance of his natural life; and, as Dr. Scott rightly observes, “the Lord knew, and Hezekiah could appeal to him, that he had walked before him in sincerity and uprightness of heart; having

used all his authority and influence, with zeal and earnestness, to suppress idolatry and wickedness, and, by every Scriptural means, to promote the worship and service of God; and that he had done what was good in his sight, being an example to his people. The consciousness of his integrity gave him confidence, and he begged the Lord to remember the fruits of grace which had been produced, and to spare him, that he might be yet more fruitful and useful." And this plea prevails. Before Isaiah has left the royal residence, he is directed to return to Hezekiah, and assure him that the Lord has heard his prayer, and seen his tears, and would add fifteen years to his life.

"If we would have promised mercies, however, we must observe instituted means." An application is prescribed of a lump of figs, which, although it might tend, according to natural laws, to his recovery, must have derived its chief efficacy from virtue directly imparted.

And, moreover, a sign is given for the encouragement of his faith. He begged it, we may believe, not in any distrust of the power or promise of God, but because he looked on the things promised to be of great importance, and worthy to be confirmed; and, may be, he remembered how much God was displeased with his father, for refusing to ask a sign. Isaiah 7:10-12.

It may be added, to Hezekiah's credit, that, on his recovery, he expressed his gratitude in a "writing," beautiful in conception and expression, in conclusion of which he says: "The Lord was ready to save me; therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instrument all the days of our life, in the house of the Lord." The preceding narrative may serve to awaken solemn reflections in the bosoms of those whom God, either through their own supplications, or through the prayers of pious friends in their behalf, has spared, but who have not made requital, as they have promised. Who has not seen persons on a sick couch startled at the prospect of dying? And, as nature has grown weaker, and an increase of disease has given warning of approaching death—what anxiety! what prayers! what vows! How often, in such seasons of alarm, friends have been conjured to intercede at a throne of grace; and the minister has been summoned to add his importunity also. Oh, if they might be spared a little longer—if God would have mercy—if they might recover—how assiduously would they devote themselves to his glory; the world should see how faithful they would be to their vows.

God has spared them, and both He and the world have seen how faithful they have been. In a few weeks, or months, they have left their couch of pain and languishing. They have, perhaps, gone up to the house of God, and returned public thanks. They have, for a time, appeared grateful, and thought they should sing songs unto the Lord all the days of their life. But mark them, a few months or years onward! How absorbed in the cares of life! How eager in the pursuit of its objects! No time now, scarcely, for reflection; no time even for private prayer, and communion with God. Where—ye spared monuments of the mercy of God—where are those solemn and reiterated vows, which were poured forth to God in the presence of your agonized friends?

Take another case. Observe those parents, sitting beside the cradle of a beloved, and, perhaps, only child. It is sick, and nigh unto death; and, with inexpressible anguish, they are watching its little bosom, as it heaves, feeling its fluttering pulse, and marking its dying moan. Listen to the aspirations of its almost frantic mother: "O God! spare, spare my child! It shall be devoted to thee!—nay, merciful God! not only my child, but also myself will be thine—only spare my child!" In a few weeks, the little prattler is again at play, sporting around its fond parents, joyous as a morning

sunbeam; and the parents' eyes, especially the mother's, beam with delight, and her heart beats with joy, as she sees this idol of her soul once more exulting in all the excitement and animation of childhood. Is that child consecrated to God, as that parent promised? Does she, more than ever, bring it up for God, because it has been re-lent to her, in answer to her tears and prayers? And, moreover, has the mother remembered her vows, made in relation to herself, and given her heart to God? Alas! how many hundreds of instances occur every year, in which such vows are made only to be forgotten!

Better, doubtless, for some, if prayers offered for them by pious friends were unanswered. They have been spared; but longer life, instead of proving a blessing, has proved only a curse. They have lived but to evince the ingratitude of their hearts, and to add to the aggravation of their final doom.

Friends! Whoever you may be, whose eyes fall upon these pages, have you received such mercies as we have named? Have you prayed, or others prayed for you, and you promised? Oh, by the worth of your soul—in the name of gratitude—duty—life everlasting—fail not to do as you vowed unto the Lord, in the day of your trouble.

042. 1 Chronicles.

1 Chronicles.

043. Prayer Of Jabez.

Prayer Of Jabez.

1 Chronicles 4:9-10.

“If we had to fix upon a portion of Scripture,” says a writer, “which might be removed from our Bible, without being much missed, we should probably select the first nine chapters of the first Book of Chronicles. They seem, at first sight, a mere record of names, a catalogue of genealogies, over which the eye glances rapidly; and we are inclined, like the traveler whose journey lies through the sands of the desert, to hasten on, as if there were nothing worthy of examination. Yet, amidst those sands, there is, now and then, a verdant spot; some oasis where we may pause and refresh ourselves; and, perhaps, some spring at which we may slake our thirst.” In like manner, interspersed with the names which crowd these nine chapters, there occur, here and there, brief, but pungent notices of persons and things, which are both interesting and instructive. The passage before us is a remarkable case in point. Here is a chapter made up of genealogies and names. Let me skip it, might be the feeling of the reader; what good can I get from learning that Penuel was the father of Gedor, and Ezer the father Hushah? But, if he were to skip it, he would miss one of the most beautiful and interesting passages in the Bible; that which is now the subject of our contemplations.

We do not know the particular reasons which influenced the mother of Jabez to call him by that name, a name which means “Sorrowful.” Perhaps she brought forth this son with more than common anguish; perhaps the time of his birth was the time of her widowhood; so that the child came, and found no father to welcome him. But whatever may have been the cause, whether personal anguish, domestic affliction, or public calamity, we may consider her as having bent in bitterness over her new-born child, having only tears to give him, as his welcome to the world.

And, yet, child of sorrow that he was, he proved “more honorable than his brethren.” They, too, may have been excellent, and perhaps as much is implied; but Jabez took the lead, and whether or not the youngest in years, surpassed every other in piety and renown. Oh, if the mother lived to see the manhood, the integrity, the piety of this son, she must have regretted, and, perhaps, reproached herself for giving him, in some hour of despondency, the gloomy and ominous name which he bore. But let us turn to the prayer of Jabez. “And what did he pray for? For great things; great, if you suppose him to have spoken only as an heir of the temporal Canaan; greater, if you ascribe to him acquaintance with the mercies of redemption. ‘Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed!’ Lay the emphasis on that word, ‘indeed.’ Many things pass for blessings which are not; to as many more we deny, though we ought to give the character. There is a blessing in appearance, which is not also a blessing in reality; and, conversely, the reality may exist where the appearance is wanting. The man in prosperity appears to have, the man in adversity to be without, a blessing; yet how often does

God bless by withholding and withdrawing! more frequently, it may be, than by giving and continuing. Therefore, 'Oh that thou wouldst bless me indeed.' Let me not have what looks like blessing, and, perhaps, is not; but what is blessing, however unlike it may appear. Let it come under any form— disappointment, tribulation, persecution—only 'bless me indeed;' bless me, though it be with the rod. I will not prescribe the nature of the dealing; deal with me as thou wilt, with the blow or with the balm, only 'bless me indeed! "And Jabez goes on. 'That thou wouldst enlarge my coast? Was it territory merely then; a large landed estate, that Jabez desires? We trust he had nobler wishes. Parts of the land were still under the dominion of the Canaanitish natives and their idolatry; and, consequently, a dark, deep, and soul-destroying superstition reigned. Jabez desired possession of a territory thus benighted, that he might introduce into it the worship of the true God."

Christian! you may use the same prayer. You may ask that your coast may be enlarged. What Christian has yet taken possession of one half the territory assigned him by God? We speak of a present inheritance; "a land flowing with milk and honey," which is ours in virtue of our adoption into the family of God, but much of which we allow to remain unpossessed, through deficiency in diligence, in faith. Our privileges, as Christians; how are they undervalued, and therefore neglected? "What districts of unpossessed territory are there in the Bible! how much of that blessed book has been, comparatively, unexamined by us! We have our favorite parts, and give only an occasional and cursory notice of the rest. How little practical use do we make of God's promises! How slow in our progress in that humbleness of mind, that strength of faith, and that holiness of life, which are as much a present reward as an evidence of fitness for the society of heaven! What need then for the prayer, 'Oh that thou wouldst enlarge my coast!' I would not be circumscribed in spiritual things. I would not live always within these narrow bounds. There are bright and glorious tracts beyond. I would know more of God, more of Christ, more of myself. I cannot be content to remain as I am whilst there is so much to do, so much to learn, so much to enjoy. Oh, for an enlargement of coast, that I may have a broader domain of Christian privilege, more eminences from which to catch glimpses of the fair, rich land hereafter to be reached, and a wider sphere in which to glorify God, by devoting myself to his service. It is a righteous covetousness this, for an enlargement of coast; for he has done little, we might almost say nothing, in religion, who can be content with what he has done. It is a holy ambition, this, which pants for an ampler territory. But are we only to pray? are we not also to struggle for the enlargement of our coast? Indeed, we are: observe how Jabez proceeds. 'And that thine hand might be with me.' He represents himself as arming for the enlargement of his coast, but as knowing, all the while, that the battle is the Lord's.' Be it thus with ourselves; we will pray, that during the coming year, our coast may be enlarged. Oh, for more of those deep havens where the soul may anchor in still waters of comfort! Oh, for a longer stretch of those sunny shores, whereon the tree of life grows, and where angel visitants seem often to alight! But, in order to this enlargement, let us give ourselves to closer study of the word, to a more diligent use of the ordinances of the gospel, and to a harder struggle with the flesh. Only let all be done with the practical consciousness that, 'except the Lord build the house, their labor is lost that build it.' This will be to arm ourselves like Jabez for the war; but, like Jabez, to expect success only so far as God's hand shall be with us."

There is one more petition in the prayer of him, who, named with a dark and unauspicious name, yet grew to be more “honorable than his brethren”—“that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me.” It is not an entreaty for actual exemption from evil; it were no pious wish to have no evil whatsoever in our portion: “Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” Jabez prayed not for the being kept from evil, but kept from the being grieved by evil. And there is a vast difference between the being visited by evil, and grieved by evil. He is grieved by evil, who does not receive it meekly and submissively, as the chastisement of his heavenly Father. He is grieved by evil, whom evil injures, in place of benefits; which latter is always God’s purpose in its permission or appointment. He is grieved by evil, whom it drives into sin, and to whom, therefore, it furnishes cause of bitter repentance.

You see, then, that Jabez showed great spiritual discernment in casting his prayer into this particular form. We, too, should pray, not absolutely that God would keep us from evil, but that he would so keep it from us, or us from it, that it may not grieve us (Melville’s Sermons).

044. Prayer Of Asa.

PrayerOf Asa.

2 Chronicles 14:11.

Asa, son and successor of Abijam, king of Judah, was among the few monarchs on the throne of David, who displayed the virtues which adorned the life of that eminent saint, and who aimed to practice upon those principles, in the administration of the government, which had guided the man after God's own heart.

Early after his accession, Asa began a thorough reformation of the manners and morals of the people. He removed from public stations the advocates of idolatry, and reformed the infamous practices which had grown up with idol worship. He deprived his own mother, who had erected an idol to Astarte, of the dignity of queen; and her idols he caused to be burned in the valley of Hinnom. He carried into the house of the Lord the gold and silver vessels consecrated by his father Abijam. He fortified and repaired several cities in various parts of the kingdom. And when these several objects had been effected, he levied three hundred thousand men in Judah, armed with shields and spears; and two hundred and eighty thousand men in Benjamin, armed with shields and bows.

About this time Zerah, king of Ethiopia, a country of Arabia, marched against Asa, at the head of an army consisting of one million of men and three hundred chariots of war. This immense force took port at Mareshah; while Asa, advancing to meet them, encamped in the plain of Zephathah. The advantage of numbers was greatly against the king of Judah; but his cause was the cause of God. His people were God's people; a glorious reformation had recently been effected among them. The worship of God in its purity had been restored; and, once more, after a lapse of years, the city of David was a "city of righteousness."

Asa and his army might, therefore, well repose confidence in God. They might anticipate the divine interposition and cooperation in the mighty conflict approaching. But that interposition and cooperation were to be sought in humble and fervent prayer. Many a pious Israeli soldier, doubtless, supplicated the aid of the God of his fathers. Asa himself, we are informed, while the armies were preparing for battle, cried unto the Lord of hosts. His prayer, which has been preserved, and has a place in the inspired volume, was most appropriate.

He appeals to God, as his God, and the God of his people; he recognizes the power of God, as able to deliver the weak from the strong; he rests himself upon the divine arm; places his cause in the hands of God; and in his name goes forth against the multitude. "O Lord, thou art our God," says he; "let not man prevail against thee;" against thy people; thy worshipers; thy cause.

Asa is graciously answered. God gave his troops the advantage over the enemy. The latter were soon broken, and scattered in confusion and dismay. They were pursued, and despoiled of vast treasures; with which Asa and his army returned in triumph to Jerusalem.

Favored is that nation, indeed, which, when aggression upon its rights is attempted, has a prince or president at its head, who acknowledges the providence of God, and who is willing to let his people and his armies know that he prays. In a righteous cause, such a one may expect to succeed.

And, should not every Christian nation select, as far as possible, men of religious principle? Men of prayer, not only to preside over their national affairs, but also to lead their armies? Such men would seek the guidance of God in the management of the nation's foreign relations, and would shun, as far as is consistent with national honor and national safety, all grounds of war; or, if war could not be avoided, they would have an interest in the love and protection of God. But we are nearer, we trust, by some thousands of years, to the day when wars shall for ever cease, than was the hero of Zephathah; so we devoutly hope. Oh, It is time that this scourge of nations; this savage art of butchery and bloodshed; this wholesale mode of making widows and orphans, were driven from the earth. We must, indeed, find inscribed on the records of history, the story of those butchers and murderers of mankind; the Alexanders; the Caesars; the Tamerlanes; the Napoleons; who have made their way to power through the groans and blood of millions. But let us pray that the future page of history may be stained by no such other names, and that future generations may execrate them as cordially as, once, thousands lauded them; and may turn with disgust from the perusal of the tragic scenes of Austerlitz, Borodino, and Waterloo. Let us pray for the advent of the Prince of peace. "Come then let this prayer linger on our lips, as we close our eyes to sleep, and be our early morning aspiration:

Come, then, and, added to thy many crowns, Receive yet one, the crown of all the earth, Thou who alone art worthy!

We may not live to see the day when, under the perfect reign of Jesus, the sword shall be converted into the plowshare, and the spear into the pruning-hook. But it will come, and it will be a happy day. Our children, or our children's children, may be so blessed. Even now, I seem to myself to catch a glance of those golden times, sung by the "harp of prophecy:" The lion, and the libbard, and the bear, Graze with the fearless flocks; all bask at noon Together, or all gambol in the shade Of the same grove, and drink one common stream:

Antipathies are none. The mother sees, And smiles to see, her infant's playful hand Stretched forth to dally with the crested worm, To stroke his azure neck, or to receive The lambent homage of his arrowy tongue. In the heart No passion touches a discordant string, But all is harmony and love.

045. Ezra.

Ezra.

046. Prayer Of Ezra.

Prayer Of Ezra.

Ezra 8:21-23. The seventy years' captivity of the children of Israel has ended; a portion of the nation, under Zerubbabel, have returned to the land of their fathers' sepulchers; the temple has been rebuilt and dedicated; the worship of God has been renewed, and the usual sacrifices resumed.

Following these events, Zerubbabel, the pioneer in this great work of restoring the Jews to their own land, and their former privileges, and Jeshua, the high-priest, who had cooperated with him, had both gone to their rest and reward. And now, what shall become of the cause of God, and of Israel? The Lord has provided a successor in Ezra, who, though born and educated in Babylon, has a heart full of affection for the welfare of his nation, and is ready to espouse her cause. The interests of the returned Jews needed, at this time, looking after; and especially did they need a reinforcement from that part of the nation which had continued in the land of their captivity. On application to Artaxerxes Longimanus, the emperor, with reference to such a reinforcement, a commission is issued to Ezra to repair to Jerusalem, with such of his countrymen as desired to return. More than one thousand heads of families were disposed to take advantage of this license, and, accordingly, enlisted for the expedition. Their treasures, principally the gift of the emperor and his nobles, are computed to have been worth one hundred thousand pounds sterling, or nearly half a million of dollars, besides the sacred vessels, which were also of great value.

It was a four months' journey which they had in prospect; and, moreover, "their way" says Dr. Scott, "lay chiefly through a desert; and, as they were encumbered with families and possessions, they could make but slow progress, and a feeble defense, in case of assault. They carried large treasures with them, which would invite the attacks of the Arabian freebooters, and others, who infested that neighborhood. In ordinary cases, it would have been very proper to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen for their defense, which, no doubt, would, readily have been granted; but Ezra, wishing to impress Artaxerxes with a proper sense of the power and perfection of Jehovah, and being afraid lest the king should not understand the distinction between using means and confiding in them, he determined to travel without a guard, except that of the Almighty."

Accordingly, we have here an account of the religious services observed before the expedition set out. And what more proper than the solemn fast which Ezra invited the people to observe? What more rational and dutiful than, by public and united prayer, to seek the blessing of that God, who, alone, could preserve such a number during a long and hazardous march? The form of prayer used by Ezra on this occasion is not recorded; but who can doubt that it had its foundation in the heart, and was prompted by a sense of dependence upon, and confidence in, the God of their fathers? Nor can we wonder that an expedition, with such an object in view, preceded by such religious services, was crowned with success. "Indeed, few enterprises, good in themselves, begun and conducted in this way, finally fail." The intelligent reader, we doubt not, will be reminded by our description of the foregoing expedition, of another expedition, undertaken more than two

thousand years afterwards—that of the pilgrim fathers to the shores of New England. This, also, was a religious expedition—one involving the honor and glory of God; and, as it has resulted, of incomprehensible importance to the cause of civil liberty and the rights of conscience. No man can estimate, or even imagine, the blessings to the world which are to grow out of the removal to the western shores of a small band of pilgrims in 1620. This expedition was undertaken by men of piety, and under the auspices of the God of heaven. The pilgrims, as is well known, resided, for a number of years, in Holland. But their situation, in several respects, at length became uncomfortable, and their attention was directed to a removal to America. The question was considered and debated; but, previous to the final settlement of it, and with reference to such a decision as should secure the approbation of God, a day of fasting and prayer was observed, to seek divine direction. The pilgrims, encamped on the banks of the Ahava, fasted and prayed, “to seek of God a right way for them.” The pilgrims at Leyden fasted and prayed, with a similar object in view, and both under a conviction of the truth of what the pen of inspiration had recorded years before the first expedition: “In all thy ways, acknowledge God, and he shall direct thy paths.” And when, at length, the Leyden pilgrims had decided to stretch forth on the stormy main, for an unknown western wild, they again fast and pray; and, as the time of final embarkation arrived—the night before having been spent in holy and sweet Christian converse and communion—they went on board. It was indeed a time of tears. Sad and mournful are all such partings in this world. But that parting had its joys and alleviations. God was there to comfort and assure. Many Dutch friends flocked to the shore, to express their sympathy and kind wishes; but, more than all, did it soothe the troubled hearts of those who were going, and of those who were remaining, to join, as they all did, in a devout prayer, in which the aged and venerable pastor Robinson led.

What son of New England does not love to look back upon such incidents in the history of our fathers? Who does not bless God for sending here a praying people? Who marvels, when he learns their reliance upon God for aid, and the dutiful manner in which they sought it, that their plans succeeded? Who can wonder that New England has been and is to be blest? Who, looking up to God in the heavens, is not prepared to say, in the language of song:

Thy kindness, to our fathers shown, Their childrens' children long shall own; To thee, with grateful hearts, they raise The tribute of exulting praise.

Great God, our guardian, guide, and friend!

Oh, still thy sheltering arm extend; Preserved by thee for ages past, For ages let thy kindness last!

047. Nehemiah

Nehemiah

048. Prayer Of Nehemiah.

Prayer Of Nehemiah.

Nehemiah 1:4-11.

We previously noticed the successful expedition of Ezra, and of the Jews who accompanied him, on their return to Jerusalem. The arrival of that reinforcement, especially the presence of one so discreet and efficient as Ezra, was of great importance to the small band who had gone thither, at a prior date, under Zerubbabel. It gave them strength and consideration in the eyes of their Samaritan adversaries. The attention of Ezra being chiefly directed, however, to the improvement of religion, and the reestablishment of the Jewish church, their civil condition remained, in several respects, gloomy and distressing. They were often reproached and insulted by their adversaries; "the wall of Jerusalem was broken down, and the gates thereof burned with fire."

Such was the state of the returned Jews at the time, that one of their number, Hanani, visited Shushan, the royal city of the Persian monarch, Artaxerxes Longimanus. At this time, also, there was residing in that city a Jew, by the name of Nehemiah, whose ancestors were of the captivity. Like Ezra, he was distinguished for his piety and patriotism. He held an important and responsible office, that of cup-bearer to the king; yet, "neither distance of place, nor dignity of station, could alienate his affection from Jerusalem." On his arrival at Shushan, Hanani makes known to Nehemiah the depressed condition of his countrymen at Jerusalem. Saddened by this intelligence, Nehemiah addresses himself to the necessities of their case. Artaxerxes, the king, had the power to grant them all that assistance which their wants required; but, how to approach him, Nehemiah, for a time, was at a loss. In his perplexity, however, he did as a good man should do; as one may do, who has power with God, and no power with man, but through the divine influence. He could fast and pray, and, in this way, propitiate the divine favor; and, that being secured, God could impress the heart of a heathen monarch, and thus prepare the way for a successful application for aid, whenever that application should be made. Says Henry: "Let those who are forming any good designs, for the service of the public, take God along with them, from the conception of them, and utter all their projects before Him: that is the way to prosper in them."

Nehemiah well understood the secret of success. Accordingly, we find him at a throne of grace, as the most direct means of securing the object of his sympathy and patriotism. In the first place, he expresses his awe of the divine majesty and glory; at the same time evincing a holy confidence in the covenant mercy of God. Next, he pours out his soul in a penitent confession of his own sins, and the sins of the people of Israel. He and his father's house had sinned, in common with the nation, for which God had scattered them. A long and dreary captivity had been the result of their sins. But God had also promised, upon their repentance, to gather them again, and "bring them unto the place where he had chosen to set his name." That he had also done; but they were poor, afflicted, and persecuted; and now his prayer was, that God would kindly dispose the heart of the king to aid him in the succor which he contemplated for his afflicted brethren. "Prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man." Nehemiah held to the doctrine

of Scripture, as well as of reason—that all hearts are in God’s hands, and that the surest way of influencing some hearts, is to secure the divine influence upon them. Nor does he forget an additional argument, of great force—one which has been employed by the good in all ages. It is this: where God has done much for an individual, or a people, that may be urged as a reason why he should do more. God had redeemed Israel, with great power, and by a strong hand, Nehemiah 1:10; surely, therefore, God would not now forsake them.

Thus the prayers of Nehemiah are before the Lord. He had confidence, doubtless, that they would be heard, and would be answered; yet he seems to have carried a sad countenance before the king. Whether he designed this as a mode of attracting the notice of the king, I cannot say; but so it turned out. The king inquires the cause, and Nehemiah responds. But, mark the wisdom of the man! Before he replies to the question of Artaxerxes, he mentally prays God that he would help him, at this critical juncture, to manage his cause before the king. The appeal to Artaxerxes is successful. Most honorably does the king listen to the proposals of Nehemiah; and most kindly and liberally does he aid him in extending protection to the people of God, at Jerusalem, and in building up that city of ancient renown. The preceding narrative suggests several important truths pertaining to prayer, which, however, the reader will naturally deduce for himself. The writer will, therefore, only briefly observe, that irreligious men, in high stations, often have it in their power to advance the welfare of Zion; and that, when such is the fact, the most probable means of securing their aid, is to pray for them. An appeal to them, without some preparation of their hearts, might serve only to excite their prejudices, and strengthen their opposition. It is not necessary, and, in some cases, not even desirable, that they should know that the good are praying for them. Artaxerxes was doubtless ignorant of the supplications which Nehemiah was daily pouring out before God in his behalf; but the hearts of princes and presidents are in God’s hands, to move them according to his pleasure. The friends of God may, therefore, plead—nor are they likely to plead in vain—that he would cause “kings to become nursing fathers, and queens nursing mothers to his church.” The writer recollects to have heard an aged lady observe, that, in her youth, far more prayer was offered to God in the family, and in the sanctuary, and, she believed, in the closet, for the rulers of the land, than at the time the observation was made. Years have since elapsed; but has there latterly been any increase of prayer, in respect to such men? Indeed, within the writer’s own recollection, there has been a noticeable decline of public prayer for public men. They are, it is admitted, on the Sabbath, brought before a throne of grace in the sanctuary; but how often, apparently, in a formal manner, and in general terms! Is there not less pleading for them than formerly; and far less than the interest of the nation, and the welfare of Zion demands? In the social prayer-meeting, seldom is there even an allusion to them; and, in the closet, it is to be feared that the neglect is still more common. The writer will not affirm it; but he may venture to ask, whether the spirit of party does not so pervade even the good men of the nation, as to prevent them from those earnest and importunate supplications for rulers which they would otherwise offer? It may be easier, and more delightful, to pray for rulers, whose political biases are similar to our own; but, if we believe the tendency of the principles and administration of rulers to be in opposition to the best interests of the nation, should we not pray still more earnestly for them? And is not such the dictate of our holy religion? Shall we pray ardently and importunately only for those whose doctrines and principles accord with our own?

049. Job.

Job.

050. Prayer Of Job For His Friends.

Prayer Of Job For His Friends.

Job 42:7-10.

It is related of a child, that, while being taught the Lord's prayer, on coming to the words, "Thy will be done"—said, "No, I'll not say that." "Well," said its mother, "how would you say it?" "Not thy will, but my will be done." And something of the spirit of that child, it would seem, mingled in the controversy between Job and his friends. Each had his peculiar views and opinions, and each maintained them with great pertinacity, if not with occasional obstinacy. Each believed himself right, and the friends, at least, united in condemning Job, and in imputing to him a wish to have his own way, and retain his own will. They were all good men; with many just notions, and some errors, and with the common partialities and strenuousness of disputants. And, as in other controversies, there were in this some harsh speeches; some wrong positions, and not a few unjust imputations. But when did a controversy, so warm and spirited, ever terminate more happily? In most controversial disputations, the parties, on separating, are wider asunder than when they began. They are confirmed in their opinions; or, if, perchance, in heart convinced that they are wrong, there is a will that forbids them to acknowledge it. And quite possibly the controversy between the man of Uz and his friends, would have terminated in like manner, had not God interposed to settle it himself. The controversy, in brief, was this: Job is suddenly overtaken with signal calamities. His friends, not distinguishing between the evil with which God tries those whom he loves, and the afflictions with which he punishes the wicked, accuse him of having indulged in some secret impiety, and urge him to return to God by repentance, and humbly to submit to the divine justice, since he suffered only according to his demerits.

Job, conscious of his own innocence, maintains that his sins are not the cause of his sufferings, but that God sometimes afflicts the righteous to try them; to give them an opportunity of manifesting, or improving their pious dispositions, or because it is his pleasure, for reasons unknown to mankind. Elihu takes the middle path, referring strongly to the sovereignty of God. At length, God appears to terminate the controversy, and a most happy termination it has. The decision is in favor of Job; but, as he has uttered some harsh expressions, he is properly rebuked. Job confesses, and is forgiven. His friends were in greater wrong, both as to opinions and irritating expressions, and they are treated accordingly.

And, now, we see how the good can act. They must ask Job to pray for them. This must have cost them an effort. Men are not fond of humbling themselves, and especially may those friends have been reluctant to ask one to pray for them whom they had regarded as holding great errors, and towards whom they had felt the opposition naturally excited by dispute; and, moreover, their reluctance might have been strong in proportion to the strong ground they had taken, and the pertinacity with which they had defended their views. But they yielded, and yielded like good men; like lovers of truth. They solicit the prayers of Job, and a sacrifice to God in their behalf. And Job, on his part, acts equally honorable. He indulges in no reproaches, and affects no superiority. He

prays for his friends; probably they knelt together, and with mutual kindness, and, with a purer love than ever, sought the forgiveness of God and his blessing on one another.

It is quite natural, in this place, to inquire, whether controversialists, at the present day, pray for one another? Under gospel light and influence, especially with the example of Jesus before them, they might be expected to pray even in the very warmth of controversy. Surely they ought to conduct all controversy and conversation on all subjects on which they differ, in the spirit of meekness; but we will content ourselves with asking, whether they pray for one another when, at length, their arms are grounded?

We might, with propriety, ask certain theological combatants, whether their polemical warfare is conducted in such a spirit of meekness, and with such a pure desire for truth, that they can, honestly and affectionately, pray for their antagonists? We have not space for examples. But, judging from the manner in which controversies are conducted, in which the biting sarcasm; the angry retort; the vindictive spirit are manifested, we should judge that controversialist's not only do not pray for one another, but not always even for themselves. It is a reproach to men who occupy high places in the church, that in their contentions for the truth, they so often exhibit the spirit of worldly combatants.

There is one world in the universe, however, where there are no controversies, and no conflicting interests, views, or feelings. Heaven is a region of love and disinterestedness, from which even the semblance of animosity is for ever excluded. But, were two celestial spirits to differ in their opinions, how would they both view the subject of their difference? With the calmness of a summer's eve; with the tranquility, which sometimes reposes on the placid lake. And the listeners, gathered round—they might feel a deep interest; but it would be an interest, not in reference to victory, but in reference to the truth. They might take sides, but it would invariably be with him who was right. And when they had finished, whether they agreed, or still differed, they would—in communion sweet, Quaff immortality and joy. This they would do in heaven. But when shall we see the prevalence of such a spirit on earth, even among the followers of Jesus?

051. The Book Of Psalms.

The Book Of Psalms. In a Bible History of Prayer, it would seem, both natural and proper, to give the Book of Psalms a prominent place. It is, certainly, a remarkable portion of the inspired volume; and the more remarkable in regard to prayer, inasmuch as that, while there are but few instances of prayer in the books of the Old Testament, which have not for their immediate, and, we may add, exclusive object, some temporal benefit; there are, comparatively, few such examples in the Psalms; the latter generally having reference to spiritual blessings. The other portions of the Old Testament are chiefly historical, or prophetic; and while, in these, we often see how good men felt and acted in regard to spiritual matters, we needed one book which should embody the spiritual exercises—the hopes and fears—the joys and sorrows—the thoughts and desires—the conflicts and victories—the prayers and praises of an eminently pious man. And here we have them drawn out, in a most interesting and delightful form. Other saints of the “olden time,” doubtless, had similar exercises; but the experience of the Psalmist might have been richer and more varied. Certainly nothing is here wanting. The pious Mr. Hooker has justly observed: “Let there be any grief, or disease incident to the soul of man—any wound, or sickness named for which there is not, in this treasure house, a present, comfortable remedy, at all times ready to be found.” And, in respect to prayer, what can be imagined, whether as to adoration, or praise, or penitence, or confidence, etc., more appropriate and expressive? What child of God ever found language better adapted to express his affections towards his heavenly Father than the following? “As the hart panteth after the water-brook, so panteth my soul after thee, O God!”—“My soul followeth hard after thee.”—“My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments, at all times.”—“Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none on the earth that I desire besides thee.” Or who, oppressed with a sense of sin and demerit, ever framed for himself a more appropriate appeal than is to be found in the fifty-first Psalm? “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions.” And a little further on: “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free spirit.”

I cannot live without thy light, Cast out and banished from thy sight; My God, thine holy joys restore, And guard me, that I fall no more;

We are safe in saying, we think, that this book has been more read, more pondered, and more loved, by the pious, than any other portion of the Old Testament. In the language of this divine word, the prayers and praises of the Church have been offered up to the throne of grace from age to age. It has furnished ministers and laymen more appropriate expressions for the utterance of their spiritual exercises than, perhaps, all the rest of the Scriptures.

While, therefore—to repeat a remark already, made—it would seem natural to dwell long and particularly on such a book as the Psalms, of which prayer and praise constitute so large a part—the author feels compelled to speak of it only in these brief and general terms. To do justice

to the Psalms would require a volume by itself. Besides, he trusts that the great principles, objects, etc., of prayer, will be sufficiently developed, notwithstanding this omission; while the hazard of an unprofitable repetition will be so far avoided.

Another consideration diminishes his reluctance to this course, which is, that some notice may properly be expected, in a work of the present nature, of those prayers which are found in the Psalms, and other parts of the Bible, of an imprecatory character. To a brief explanation of these, therefore, he proposes to devote a few pages.

052. The Imprecations In The Scriptures.

The Imprecations In The Scriptures.

Every reader of the Bible has, doubtless, noticed that David, in numerous passages, imprecates divine vengeance upon his enemies. To cite a few examples: "Give them according to their deeds, and according to the wickedness of their endeavors: give them after the work of their hands; render to them their desert." Psalms 28:4. "Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quick into hell; for wickedness is in their dwelling, and among them." Psalms 55:15. "Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous." Psalms 69:28.

We find similar language used by other of the sacred writers. Says Paul: "If any man love not the Lord Jesus, let him be Anathema, Maranatha." 1 Corinthians 16:22. And again: "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works." 2 Timothy 4:14. This language of David, and of other inspired writers, has often perplexed the pious. It seems to breathe a spirit which a truly good man cannot indulge. "And it must be confessed," says the author of the Christian Expositor, "that, at first sight, these imprecations appear cruel and vindictive; irreconcilable with the gentle spirit of piety and religion; and some unhesitatingly assert that they are indefensible, on any Christian principle." But, then, on the other hand, can it be credited that one so distinguished for tenderness and benevolence of heart, as well as for preeminent piety, as was the psalmist, could utter any thing in direct opposition to those feelings of mercy and forgiveness, which he both highly recommended and exhibited in his own practice? Independently of this, we may rest assured that no unmerciful and revengeful sentiment was ever suggested by the holy Spirit, or ever found entrance into a work of inspiration.

How, then, shall we vindicate the psalmist, and those other inspired writers, who imprecate evil upon their adversaries, and pray for the divine vengeance upon them?

"It has been suggested," says a writer (*Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol. I. p. 100. Art. "Imprecations in the Scriptures."), "by some interpreters, and among them the venerable Dr. Scott, that many of those passages which appear, in our English version, as imprecatory—as expressing a wish or desire for the infliction of evil—should be rendered as a simple affirmation, or as merely declaratory of what will take place in regard to the wicked; on the ground, that the verb, in the original, is in the future tense; whereas, our translation has given it an optative, or imprecatory signification—the Hebrew language having no peculiar form to express the various senses of the optative.

"But what shall be said of the numerous passages where the verb is in the imperative? For example: 'Pour out thine indignation upon them; let thy wrathful anger take hold upon them.'

"What shall be affirmed in relation to the texts, where those are pronounced blessed who take vengeance upon an enemy! 'Happy shall he be who rewardeth thee as thou hast served us! Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones!'

“In what manner, again, shall we vindicate those passages, where the righteous are described as looking with complacency—feasting their eyes, as it were, upon the calamities of their oppressors! ‘The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance; he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked.’

“It would manifestly, therefore, be of no avail, if we were permitted to render certain passages in a declaratory or prophetic sense, which are now rendered as indicating a wish, or desire, whatever might be the truth as to other passages. The difficulty would exist in regard to certain passages in its full extent.”

Other methods have been adopted, for the purpose of obviating a difficulty, sufficiently perplexing; none of which, however, give any satisfaction. The writer, already cited, has suggested a mode of interpretation, entitled to great consideration, and which will, it is believed, in a good measure, account for this usage of the sacred writers. The principle alluded to will be best illustrated by reference to a recent atrocious murder, committed in a small village, near Auburn, in the state of New York. A man, by the name of Freeman, recently liberated from the Auburn prison, where he had been confined for several years, for stealing a horse from a Mr. Van Ness, presents himself, at night, at the door of the latter, after the family had retired, and requests admittance. Ignorant of the name and character of the applicant, Mr. Van Ness opens the door; upon which, the murderous assailant kills him instantly, by stabbing him. He then proceeds to the bedroom of Mrs. Van Ness, whom he also kills, together with her child. Mrs. Wykoff, the mother-in-law of Mr. Van Ness, is next attacked, and murdered; and, finally, a hired man, Van Arsdale, is dangerously, if not mortally wounded. Having thus glutted his revenge, the murderer makes his escape. The morning following disclosed to the inhabitants a deed of darkness, more atrocious, probably, than any which had before stained the annals of their village. Every one was horror struck. Every spectator of the tragedy, for the time, held his breath. And, as the news of the shocking deed was heralded abroad, the same feeling possessed every bosom that heard it. One sentiment pervaded the state and the nation. What is the nature of these emotions? A primary element is indignation. Before we have had time to reflect, there is an instant, a spontaneous gush of the emotion of anger toward the evil doer. We cannot prevent it, if we would. It is prior to all deliberation. In its first out-break, it is above control. It is outraged nature, that will have vent.

Another element is compassion towards the injured party. We have an instinctive pity for those who have been suddenly assaulted and murdered. Our hearts rush towards them with the warmest compassion.

Another, and a principal ingredient, is a sense of justice. We instinctively wish the author of the crime might be immediately taken. Every hour's delay is felt as a fraud upon justice. Every heart is ready to pray the Omniscient Jehovah to discover his retreat. Every one is ready to go forth to the search.

And, although this be, as to the indignation and compassion, a feeling of comparatively short duration, not so our sense of justice. It grows stronger with the lapse of time. The more we revolve the circumstances—the deeper we look into the atrocity of the outrage perpetrated—the more we desire the infliction of a just penalty upon the guilty perpetrator of the deed. This appears to be an original principle of our nature; it is a simple and ultimate fact. In the first place, it is instantaneous in its manifestation. Its movements are as rapid as the light. It gives no notice of its coming; neither

can we stay it. In the second place, it is universal, and, therefore, original. It has shown itself in all ages; in every state of society, and period of human life; among the rudest, and most refined. Wherever the voice of a brother's blood has cried from the ground, it has found an answering echo in every bosom, no matter whether in the midst of the most polished community, or the remotest outskirts of pagan society.

Let us advance one step farther. This feeling is not necessarily accompanied with any malice or ill-will toward the criminal. We wish that he may be taken. We ardently desire, and pray that he may suffer punishment. But all this is not because we desire to witness the sufferings of a human being, or because those sufferings, in themselves, are pleasant to contemplate. We have no malice, or private revenge, to gratify. But our feeling is, that it is right that he should suffer. The good of society requires it. There is something within us that is not satisfied; at least, not until a wrong has been repaired.

"The connection of this original principle of our nature," remarks the writer already referred to, "with the imprecations in the Psalms, and other parts of the Bible, is obvious. If it does not account for all, it still lies at the foundation of a large portion of them. In other words, these imprecatory passages are justified by a primary and innocent feeling of our nature. Were we placed in the condition of the sacred penmen, we should feel, and properly feel, as they felt. Let any right-minded reader look at the lives of Antiochus Epiphanes, of the first Herod, of some of the Roman emperors, or of the leaders in the French revolution, and fail, if he can, to rejoice—yea, exult—when the same cup is wrung out to them, which they had mingled for others. The feeling in the minds of those who penned the fifty-fifth and sixty-ninth psalms was not malice; it was indignation, excited by cruelty and injustice, and the desire that the crimes should be punished. They doubtless followed the precept, 'Be angry, and sin not.' If we were acquainted with the circumstances which called forth the imprecatory psalms, we should doubtless find, as the cause, or occasion, striking cases of treachery, practiced villainy, and unblushing violations of law."

053. Proverbs.

Proverbs.

054. Prayer Of The Wicked.

Prayer Of The Wicked.

Proverbs 15:8.

Suppose a wicked or impenitent man puts the question to me—"Sir, is it my duty to pray?"

Now, as a minister of Jesus Christ, authorized and required to point out his duty, according to the Scriptures, I should reply, "Most certainly. It is your duty, and the duty of all other men, to pray. It is a service enjoined, both by the light of nature and the voice of revelation."

"But," says he, "I am considered to be an impenitent man. Can it be the duty of such a man to pray?"

"Yes," I reply, "as truly his duty, as the duty of the Christian. Why not?"

He objects: "The Scriptures declare that 'the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord.'—'The Lord is far from the wicked; but he heareth the prayer of the righteous.'—'He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.' Do not these passages forbid me to pray?"

"And, if so, my friend, are you not forbid to plow? Another scripture says: 'The plowing of the wicked is sin.' Proverbs 21:4. Will you, therefore, consider yourself as forbid to plow?"

"That I must do," he replies; "the necessities of myself and family require it. Besides, it is enjoined upon a man to provide for his family."

"And yet, every furrow you turn, as a wicked man, you sin. And every prayer you offer, as a wicked man, you sin. Yet you must plow, and you must pray."

"Then I must sin."

"By no means. You are not shut up to any such necessity. Suppose you pray, and suppose you plow with a right heart—with a penitent heart?"

"But I have no such heart," he replies.

"No, you have none now. But is it not your imperative duty to possess such a heart? to make yourself such a heart? 'Cast away from you all your transgressions,' says the Word of Inspiration, 'whereby ye have transgressed: and make you a new heart, and a new spirit.' Ezekiel 18:31. Do this, and your prayers will be acceptable. Do this, and your plowing, your reaping, your eating—whatsoever you do—will be done to the glory of God, and, therefore, be acceptable to Him. You will then be a 'righteous man;' and 'the fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.'" But, perhaps, he replies, "I have no such heart as you describe; and no disposition to make myself such a heart as you aver it is my duty to make. What, then, shall I do?"

I answer: "You are a subject of God's moral government; and, under that government, you are able to choose, or refuse to do your duty. Prayer is your duty; and, when offered, should proceed from an humble, penitent, and obedient heart. If it proceed from any other heart, prayer will be, and must be, an abomination to God. You can thus pray, if you please; but then you must expect the displeasure of God. If you neglect prayer—and this you can do—you will be condemned for neglecting a known and positive duty. You are shut up, then, if you would meet the approbation of God, to one course; and that is, to pray with a right heart."

055. Isaiah.

Isaiah.

056. Duty Of Watchmen In Respect To Prayer.

Duty Of Watchmen In Respect To Prayer.

Isaiah 62:6-7. The speaker here is Jehovah; and by watchmen are meant those whom he has appointed to be instructors of his people—prophets—ministers of religion. These should be ever vigilant in the high and holy duties of their calling; instructing and warning the people; directing them to the appointed ark of safety, and pressing them to enter while entrance is possible. The watches in the East are, to this day, performed by a loud cry, as the watchmen go their rounds. So ministers should lift up their voices, crying day and night: “Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation.” “The day is far spent; the night is at hand.” “Escape for thy life.”

“And give him no rest.” The idea is, keep not silence yourselves; nor let him rest in silence. Pray without ceasing; do not intermit your efforts while a soul under your charge lingers in the tents of wickedness; while there is a spot or wrinkle in the garments of any child of God. The truth taught here is, that it is the duty and privilege of ministers to pray unceasingly for the welfare of Zion. The trials of ministers, in one respect, are, however, but little known. Like other Christians, they are tempted to relax their efforts. A chilling influence comes up from the world, and they are in danger of feeling it; but in greater danger are they, when the church itself has become cold and insensible. A minister pray then? How difficult! and yet how mightily has the importance of prayer—ardent, humble, holy prayer—increased! Look, at such times, into the minister’s closet—you will find him there, if he be one of God’s faithful watchmen—and he will pray. O how would it relieve his heart could he weep! He does say: “Oh that my heart were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears!” But, often, while he longs for such melting tendencies—a breaking up, perhaps, of a long and dreary winter—a warm and generous gush of feeling, as he has sometimes seen a fountain pour forth its liberated waters—he finds all chill and cold, as if his heart had never known any thing of the warm and impulsive love of Jesus.

And, perhaps, at this very time, he is called to follow to the grave some one of his flock, who has departed for another world without hope. Perhaps, his appointed prayer-meeting has arrived; or, the Sabbath has come, and his people are already within the sanctuary, waiting his arrival; and, though dull and formal, they are expecting him, by his fervid eloquence and ardent supplications, to rouse them to appropriate life and animation.

What minister cannot relate experience like this? And, often, while, as to other trials and troubles, he can claim the sympathy and support of his friends, here he seems alone. He feels alone. It is difficult for him to disclose himself to his people, as they can one to another.

Well, so it has been. But, need it be so? Would not ministers have less occasion to mourn over a cold and formal state, if they prayed more? This is the grand, spiritual panacea; the sovereign antidote against that depression which so disheartens; and which, too often, diminishes the usefulness of the watchmen in Zion. Let the ministers of Jesus then pray more; and, as sure as “praying-breath was never spent in vain,” they will find themselves animated, when all around

them are dull and formal; and joyful, when others are sad and dispirited.

057. Jeremiah.

Jeremiah.

058. Good Men Sometimes Forbid To Pray.

Good Men Sometimes Forbid To Pray.

Jeremiah 7:16.

(See also Jeremiah 11:14, and Jeremiah 15:1.) When Abraham stood before the Lord, pleading for Sodom, he received the gracious assurance that, if ten righteous persons could be found in the city, it should be spared for their sake. Signal as God's condescension was, in respect to that city, the cry of whose sin had gone up to heaven, an instance of similar favor is recorded in the history of his covenant people. For a series of years, anterior to the reign of Zedekiah— during which, the Jews were carried, captive to Babylon— they had provoked God by their sins. In consequence of which, he had, on several occasions, inflicted severe judgments, and threatened those which were still more signal; especially a captivity, which would take them from their father's sepulchers, and leave their beautiful city a desolation. Yet, such was his reluctance to cause "the daughter of Zion" to be despoiled of her beauty, that if they could find one righteous man in Jerusalem—meaning, probably, a righteous magistrate—he would spare them all. "Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth, and I will pardon it." Jeremiah 5:1. "This," says Dr. Scott, "probably referred to the time immediately succeeding Josiah's death, when their wickedness burst forth, the more impetuously, for the temporary restraints which, by that prince's regard for the divine honor, had been imposed upon them." Then occurred that tragic scene of stoning to death Zacharias the priest, for faithfully warning them—an evidence of their guilt so signal, as to have received the special notice of Jesus Christ. Luke 11:51. Nay, so general was the wickedness, that those set for the administration of the laws, were destitute of even common rectitude. "Judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter." Isaiah 59:14. Had the nation, at the proper time, repented and reformed, God would have saved them from their terrible overthrow. Had there been those of the citizens, who were willing to "stand in the gap"—who, lifting up their voices, had cried: "Spare thy people, O Lord!"—and who, to prayer, had added their influence to effect a reformation, they would have been saved. This we infer from the declaration of God, by the prophet Ezekiel, Ezekiel 22:30-31. After the judgment had befallen them, and they were gone into captivity, God assigns as a reason why he had inflicted it, that not one had been found to stand in the gap, and intercede for them. "And I sought for a man among them that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none. Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath; their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord God."

Jeremiah, and other prophets, and their immediate associates, would, and doubtless did, pray. Indeed, we have the lamentations of the prophet of Anathoth in view of the desolations which he was commissioned and required to announce. But, irrespective of them, the entire people were in revolt from God, and in the practice of wickedness, which, as a righteous sovereign, he could not

and would not tolerate.

And, at length, the measure of their iniquity was full and overflowing. They were ripe for the terrible judgment which had been sounding out from the prophetic oracle for years.

There was, therefore, now no longer room for supplication in their behalf. Jeremiah must cease to plead for them. God had decided to cast them off; and, therefore, he would not hear his prophet for them: nay, were Moses and Samuel, whom he had so much honored while they were living, by answering their prayers, to stand before him, they could not prevent his casting them out of his sight. And, if to their prayers were added those of Noah, Daniel, and Job, they would not avail more than to deliver their own souls by their righteousness. Ezekiel 14:14. Much as God was disposed to favor his covenant people, especially when their cause was plead by his honored servants, their destiny was sealed—the day of forgiveness was past—the day of rebuke and chastisement had come.

There is a limit we see to the divine patience, in respect to nations, as well as individuals. In regard to both, God waits just as long as the welfare of his kingdom and the honor of his name will permit. The pious of a nation may by their prayers for a time, and, in some instances, for a long time, avail to retard national judgments. But they cannot prevail with God, nor ought they to desire it, to tolerate wickedness, or to save men in their sins. When a nation continues to wax worse and worse, notwithstanding the favors and mercies of God on the one hand, and his warnings and judgments on the other; and, especially, when they insult and persecute his prophets, he may, in his own good purpose, seal their doom: and then there is no redemption. The prayers of his people will have no other effect than to secure to themselves the divine blessing. They will reap the benefit of every humble supplication; while the more they pray, especially if the wicked nation know it, and do not repent and reform, the more signal will be their destruction.

Gloomy is the state of a nation, when God says to his own people: "Pray not for them, for I will not hear you." Let us hope that such a day will never come, in respect to the descendants of the pilgrims. Who would have predicted such a doom for the covenant people of God; so honored; so favored with divine manifestations in their behalf for centuries? And are we more secure than they were? Will God tolerate in us that which brought down his direst judgments upon them? Let us not presume; let us remove those sources of wickedness, which tend to demoralize and corrupt the nation; let us guard our public councils from the influence of men of corrupt and licentious principles. Then will God throw around us the everlasting arms of his protection. And, as years revolve, the tide of our national prosperity will flow broader and deeper. In the beautiful language of inspiration: "Our sons will be as plants grown up in their youth, and our daughters as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace." "Happy is that people whose God is the Lord."

Long as the morn her course shall run,
Or men behold the circling sun,
Lord, in our land support
thy reign!

Crown her just councils with success,
With truth and peace her borders bless,
And all thy sacred
rights maintain.

059. Ezekiel.

Ezekiel.

060. Promised Blessings Must Be Sought.

Promised Blessings Must Be Sought.

Ezekiel 36:37. The Lord never forgets his people. He may find it necessary to rebuke, to afflict, and even scatter them among the heathen—under whose oppressions they may suffer calamities the most terrible—but his “loving kindness will he not utterly take from them, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail.”

We find, in this chapter, the foregoing gracious assurance. It contains two distinct, but cheering prophecies; both having reference to an improved condition of the Jews—the one temporal, the other spiritual.

They were now in Babylon, in captivity; and there God had decided they should remain some forty or fifty years longer. Yet the day of deliverance would come. “The mountains of Israel should yet yield their fruit to the people of Israel,” Ezekiel 36:8; the “cities” should be “inhabited;” the “wastes” should be “builded;” the “old estates” should again be “settled.” But these temporal blessings were not a moiety of what God had in store for them. Rich spiritual mercies should flow in upon them. “I will sprinkle clean water upon you;” by which imagery, God expressed the spiritual blessings he designed for them—“and ye shall be clean from all your filthiness; and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you,” Ezekiel 36:26 : “And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.” Ezekiel 36:28. That these promises had primary reference to the return of the Jews to Judea, at the expiration of the Babylonish captivity, admits of no doubt. And they were fulfilled. The Jews were restored; and many of them may have been renewed and sanctified; and all were, from that time, preserved from idolatry. But great numbers still lived in a state of alienation from God; nor was the outward condition of the Jews so prosperous, after the captivity, as it had been before that catastrophe; and yet, according to these prophecies, and especially that in the following chapter, (Ezekiel 37) we should expect that it would have been far more prosperous.

It seems, therefore, unavoidable, that we should refer their complete fulfillment to some future event—to an era when they shall be restored to their own land—there to flourish to the end of time. “Say unto them, thus saith the Lord God,

Behold I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land. And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall no more be two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all: Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwelling-places, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so they shall be my people, and I will be their God. And David my servant shall be king over them; and they shall have one shepherd: they also shall walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, to do them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given

unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they and their children, and their childrens' children, for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever. Moreover, I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And the heathen shall know that I the Lord do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore." Exodus 37:21—28.

These passages, and those of similar import, strengthen the opinion that, after the Jews shall be converted to Christ, as they will be, for they shall "be grafted in again," and shall serve "David their king," they shall be restored to their own land. (The author is well aware that interpreters of Scripture are divided on the question of the literal return of the Jews. He has here followed the popular belief.) "Then," remarks Dr. Scott, "these promises will be fulfilled to them in their fullest sense; and the subsequent parts of the prophecy will be literally accomplished, in the sight of all the nations. And the Jews are, no doubt, preserved a distinct people, on purpose to make way for this great display of the Lord's power and truth; and thus to demonstrate to all the world the divine original of the holy Scriptures."

But, "Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." Of the nature and variety of the instrumentalities, which God will employ, by which to accomplish these glorious designs, we are, in a great measure, left in ignorance. But there is one here specified—and a powerful one it will prove—namely: prayer. At the proper time, God will pour out his spirit upon them. They will begin to turn their thoughts upward to the God of their fathers. They will think of their fathers' sepulchers, and the land which contains them; of Zion, "beautiful for situation—the joy of all the earth;" of Jerusalem, their once "happy home;" and, as they once sat by the "rivers of Babylon," and "wept, when they remembered Zion," so, in all lands, where they are scattered, they will weep—they will lift up their voice in supplication to their fathers' God. And God will hear; he will direct them to "David their king;" he will turn their thoughts and affections to Jesus—long despised, and long rejected—and they will own him; and, with the wondering and admiring Thomas, they will open their eyes upon his beauty and glory, and exclaim, "My Lord, and my God!"

And, at length, converted to Christ, they will return to their own native hills. The rose of Sharon will be again seen, in all its pristine beauty. Carmel will exult in the fatness of its olives; and Lebanon glory in its cedars. And then, in those streets, where the shouts of the blind and infuriated mob cried, "Away with him!"—"Crucify him!" shall be heard the ransomed sons and daughters of Israel, crying, "Hosanna! blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!" And, as to Jerusalem, the poet has described her glory:

See Salem built, the labor of a God!

Bright as a sun, the sacred city shines;

All kingdoms, and all princes of the earth, Flock to that light; the glory of all lands flows into her; unbounded is her joy, And endless her increase. Thy rams are there, Nebaioth; and the flocks of Kedar there; The looms of Ormus, and the mines of Ind; And Saba's spicy groves pay tribute there.

Praise is in all her gates. Upon her walls, And in her streets, and in her spacious courts, Is heard salvation.

Such is the consummation of the promises of God towards his ancient covenant people. And this consummation is to be the result, among other instrumentalities, of prayer. By prayer, they are to be prepared for it; and, by prayer, it is to be prepared for them. And, without those supplications, here alluded to, and here required, not one prophecy will be fulfilled, nor the blessings of one promise realized.

Here, then, is a great and important truth involved; and one which the children of God would do well to learn, and practice upon. The Scriptures abound with promises of good to the pious; there is no limit to the spiritual mercies they may have; but then God will be inquired of to bestow them. There is an established connection between means and ends; and a compliance with the condition .ensures the end, as a matter of course. We see this in the natural world: we may enjoy fruit, but we must plant our trees; we may reap wheat, but we must first sow our fields. So in spiritual things: if we would find, we must seek; if we would receive, we must ask.

How happy it would be, if these plain truths were more recognized by the children of God! Oh, if they would pray more—if they would, in this way, “prove” the Lord—they would as much rejoice over their spiritual blessings, as they now weep over their leanness. Can we speak in too strong terms? Are we in any danger of exaggerating the importance and efficacy of prayer? The Scriptures allow us to take almost any position we please; no matter how elevated it is. And the experience of those who have really tested prayer, adds its blessed confirmation to all that the Scriptures have said. Men do not pray enough; they do not pray sufficiently in earnest. There is a wrestling with God, which amounts to agony—a pleasing, yet painful agony, Which none but he that feels it knows. A longing of the soul, which goes up to the throne, if I may so express it, like the waves of the sea—one wave urging on another—and each one rising still higher than its predecessor. A longing, which admits of no denial; which cries, like the horse-leech, “Give! give!” and, as God gives, cries, “More, more, Lord!” and, as he adds one measure of grace, or joy, to the soul after another, it exclaims, “Yet not enough! more, more, O Lord!”

There are such longings of the soul; and blessed is the nation which has many in it, who thus long for the salvation of God. Blessed is the church, whose pastor thus longs for the grace of God for himself and people. Blessed the church, whose members cry. and blessed the individual, who himself cries, “More of thy grace. O Lord, impart!”—“As the hart panteth after the water-brook, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.”—“My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.”—“My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgment at all times.”

061. Daniel.

Daniel.

062. Prayer Of Daniel.

Prayer Of Daniel.

Daniel 2:19; Daniel 2:23. The grace of God is not confined to country or station. Yet it is not common to see bright spiritual luminaries shining out in a far-distant heathen country; and, perhaps, still more rare, to find a prime minister to a proud and idolatrous monarch, maintaining an altar of prayer, and asking counsel of God. in times of danger and perplexity.

Yet, the period of the Babylonish captivity furnishes several such men, distinguished for their piety; bright, beautiful examples of faith in God, and of pious and consistent attachment to truth and religion. Among them, Daniel and his companions are prominent.

These “children of the captivity,”—Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah—were carried to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, during the reign of Jehoiakim. Daniel is supposed to have been, at this time, about twenty years of age. He and his companions were probably eunuchs. It was customary with the Eastern monarchs then, as now, to employ eunuchs in their palaces and about their persons; and, not unfrequently, they were advanced to the highest offices and dignities in the kingdom. In the providence of God, it was so ordered, that Daniel and his companions were selected and educated, with reference to important duties in the royal service. At the expiration of three years, they were examined by the king himself, touching their talents and acquirements; and in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm. Daniel 1:20. Not long after, in the second year of his reign, reckoning from the time his sovereignty attained its full extent, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed a dream, which left upon his mind an impression of its great importance, and, perhaps, of its prophetic significance. But he was unable to recall it. In his perplexity and disquietude, he summoned various soothsayers, and wise men of the realm, whom he required to tell both the dream and the interpretation of it. To a demand so unreasonable, the Chaldeans replied that no man could tell the dream; but, if the king could recall it, they would show the interpretation. Incensed by this reply, which he construed into a combination to affront him, Nebuchadnezzar issued a decree to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. In this most unrighteous sentence, Daniel and his companions were included; and immediately they were sought for by the royal guard, who were commissioned to execute it. But Daniel, “with counsel and wisdom,” applied to Arioch, the captain of the guard, to know why such haste was manifested. This seems to have given Daniel an opportunity to seek an interview with the king, in which he requested time; and which, if allowed, the dream and interpretation should be made known. Was this presumption? No; for Daniel was a man of prayer. His companions, also, could plead at a throne of grace. And well did Daniel know how often God had been sought, in the day of peril and extremity, by his forefathers. Well did he know what promises were made to those who should call in the time of trouble. And now he would venture, in reliance upon divine wisdom and grace, to pledge the revelation of that which the magicians were compelled to acknowledge to be beyond their power. He wished to let the proud heathen monarch of Babylon know that there was a God in heaven,

who was able to unlock all secrets, and to reveal all mysteries; and in whose hands was the destiny of monarch, as well as subjects.

Daniel, having obtained his object, hastened to his house, where he made known to his companions the important pledge he had given, and the fearful doom which awaited them, in case of failure. The hours which followed, we may well imagine, were hours of deep solicitude. At the request of Daniel, his companions retired for prayer; he, also, betook himself to a throne of grace. There was intense pleading—not merely life at stake—but the honor of God was deeply concerned. What would the heathen say? What the jealous and scoffing magicians and astrologers say? How they would triumph! How would the arrogant monarch himself taunt them, and, perhaps, wreak his vengeance upon the other Jewish captives! There was prostration before God; perhaps

Such as earth Saw never: such as heaven stoops down to see; And it was prevalent prayer. That night, God answered Daniel and his companions, by revealing to the former both the dream and its interpretation.

What an hour of rejoicing must that have been, when he communicated to his friends that their supplications were not in vain! Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Nor will it be deemed improbable, that, in his expressions of gratitude and praise, he was joined by his interested and equally grateful companions.

It is not necessary to our purpose to pursue the narrative to its issue. We shall, therefore, only add, in relation to it, that it was most happy. Daniel and his friends were spared. Important revelations were made, and Nebuchadnezzar was forced to acknowledge—though it does not appear that he renounced his idolatry—that the God of Daniel was a God of gods, and a revealer of secrets. Nor was this all. Daniel was made ruler of several provinces of Babylon; and his companions were appointed to important trusts under him. No humble, sincere, and confiding prayer is ever offered by a child of God, which is not heard and accepted, and, in some way, answered. Nor have we reason to question, but that the prayer of Daniel—had there been no friends to join him—would have prevailed. But there is great and obvious propriety in soliciting our friends to unite with us in seeking for blessings; especially when they are equally interested in them. Perhaps, when we know we are alone, we may plead more strongly; but, when we know that others are engaged in seeking the same mercy, we feel strengthened; our confidence is strengthened; our hopes are livelier; our faith more vigorous; and hence, God may perceive a greater fitness in his granting a blessing, at the request of many, than of one. Thus, Queen Esther seems to have reasoned: “Go!” said she; “gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me; and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day; I, also, and my maidens, will fast likewise: and then will I go in unto the king, which is not according to law; and if I perish, I perish.”

It has often been objected to the propriety of prayer, that God governs the world by general laws; and, therefore, to ask Him to interpose, in any such manner as would imply a special or particular providence, or interposition, on a given occasion, seems arrogant. But what, in point of fact, shall be said, in reference to this dream of Nebuchadnezzar, and Daniel’s interpretation of it? Was this the work of chance? Rather, must it not be resolved, in the special providence and overruling agency of God? Can any thing be clearer, or better established? A late writer (President Appleton’s Works, vol I. p. 149) thus draws out a masterly argument, in favor of a “special

providence,” which may, with propriety, find a place here; and to which we invite the attention of those who deny a doctrine of vast moment to believers in the efficacy of prayer:

“Whether an insect shall deposit her eggs in the bark of a young oak, or in some other place, would seem an incident as unworthy the providence of God, as any conceivable. This deposit, however, after a few months, becomes a worm, which corrodes the tree. This tree, when many years have brought it to maturity—the defect not having been noticed, and truly estimated—is used as a part of the timber of a large vessel. In this vessel, let it be supposed, are sent dispatches; which, if duly received, would prevent a national war, affecting the fortunes, lives, and morals of thousands. While employed in this service, the defective timber gives way; the leak is not discovered till it is too late to prevent the loss either of the vessel or crew. An event, comprehending not only this loss, but a national war—perhaps a national revolution—may, therefore, depend on a circumstance, the most casual and trifling. It follows, then, that if the Deity exercised a providence over this great event, he could not have been wholly inattentive to those smaller circumstances which were connected with it.

“When the Jews were under the Persian government, a plan was concerted (See Esther) to extirpate the whole nation. But the great event of their preservation was connected with the king’s vigilance on a certain night; the seemingly odd fancy in the choice of his amusement; and the particular volume and section which were opened by the person in waiting. Had the king slept, as usual; or had he chosen to divert his mind in a different manner; or had the contents of a different leaf been read, the whole realm of Persia would probably have been stained by the blood of the Hebrews. Now, if the preservation of a numerous people was worthy the care of God, it was worth his care to determine the means by which it should be effected. To mention a more recent instance: When a plan was matured for the delivery of West Point to the British army, in the Revolutionary War, the design, for aught that appears, might have been executed, had Major Andre answered, with a moderate degree of self-possession, the first interrogation made him by his captors. Had he exhibited his passport, instead of asking an improper question, the independence of our country might not, till this day, have been effected. What vastly important consequences were connected with a momentary perturbation!”

063. The Duty Of Family Prayer.

The Duty Of Family Prayer.

Daniel 6:10. The tyrannical Nebuchadnezzar, and the sensual and impious Belshazzar are no more. The empire of Babylon has yielded to a foreign power. Darius, the Mede, occupies the throne. On his accession, Darius remodels the government, dividing the kingdom into one hundred and twenty provinces, over which he sets as many princes or governors. These were under the direction of three presidents, of whom Daniel was chief, or prime minister. This servant of God was now occupying a most responsible station. He was next to the king, by whom he was greatly honored. Fortunate if his administration shall escape the censure of the envious; fortunate if his enemies do not assail his political reputation, and deprive him both of his office and its honors. The attempt is made; but, it signally fails. Spies are employed to observe his management, and to discover, if possible, some one instance of maladministration. Daniel, however, proves himself honorable and loyal in all the duties of his station; nor can his enemies find whereof to accuse him to the king.

Thus foiled, his enemies might have contented themselves to suspend their acts of hostility. But their ill success seems to have increased their desire to secure his downfall. They next attack his religion. He was a worshiper of the true God, and a man of prayer. No law, at this time, existed among the Medes and Persians against religious liberty. Daniel, in common with others, was permitted to worship according to the dictates of his conscience. But Darius was susceptible to flattery, and might be overreached. Accordingly, under pretext of honoring him, a proposition was made to him, to prohibit any one asking a petition of any god or man, for thirty days, except of the king himself. Ignorant of the object of this decree, Darius entertained it, and it received the royal signet. This accomplished, the enemies of Daniel retire in triumph; their malicious purpose is being fulfilled. The doom of the minister is sealed. So they thought. The object of his enemies, and the decree which they had obtained, could not have been concealed from Daniel. He saw the precipice on which he stood; the dangers which lay before him. But trusting in God, his line of conduct was soon marked out. He had a duty to perform—a fair opportunity of honoring the God of his fathers—and to do these, he was ready to peril life, family, and fortune.

He had been in the practice of praying with his family, three times a day. This, the decree of Darius forbade. But, now, should he forego that duty? Should he honor man, or should he honor God? Whatever difficulties others might have found in answering these questions, they were easily answered by this servant of God. He would pray just where he had done—as often—and with his window open toward Jerusalem.

It is not important, to our purpose, to pursue the narrative in its details. Suffice it to say, that as Daniel honored God, so, in turn, God honors his servant. The decree of Darius must, indeed, take its course, and Daniel must be exposed to the rage of exasperated lions. But God could stop the mouths of those lions, and quell their rage, so that his servant should escape unharmed. At length, Daniel walks forth from the cavern where his enemies were rejoicing to believe that he had met a

death, which would relieve them of one whom, while they admired, they feared and hated. Daniel occupies a still prouder position, while the doom intended for him becomes the doom of his foes.

We have here the example of a man of eminent talents, and of great distinction; a statesman honored by four of the proudest monarchs of ancient times, in favor of family worship. (Henry says, he prayed alone and in his family.) Most men, in his circumstances, occupying an exalted place among a heathen people, would have thought it their duty, if not to conform to the existing religion, not to give notoriety and distinction to religious practices directly at variance with it. Yet, we find this eminent man persevering in the maintenance of his religion, and the practice of the duties it enjoined. And now, when a direct and combined effort is made, through his religion, to undermine and destroy his authority, what does he do? Does he act the part of the sycophant? Does he attempt to conceal his sentiments or devotions? Nothing like it. He pursues the same course of life as usual, and honors God by the same acts of worship, without the least regard to the fear or favor of men.

What an example is here presented to our presidents; our statesmen; our judges; and others, occupying distinguished stations! It is, comparatively, easy to enter the sanctuary, and join in the homage there paid to Jehovah. But to erect and maintain an altar to him in the family, requires independence and sacrifice. Happily, a good portion of our men, in exalted stations, do thus honor God. It has been so from the beginning of our national existence. But too many neglect this important duty and exalted privilege; some, doubtless, from a supposed want of time; but others, it is to be feared, from an apprehension of the reproach and ridicule of worldly associates. They are lacking in that moral courage which so distinguished and adorned the pious statesman at the court of Darius. But the subject admits of a word of application; not only to men in place, but to all the neglecters of family worship. The number is large. To those who acknowledge the superintending providence of God, or who look at the reasonableness and happy influence of family worship, it is truly surprising that any head of a family should neglect it.

Some object, that there is no positive precept in the Scriptures, enjoining family worship. There is none. But, we ask, have the examples of holy men no authority in this case? The truth is, that the duty is a plain and reasonable one, without express injunction; nor can it be doubted that the pious, in all ages, have observed it. Abraham, Joshua, David, Job, Daniel, all worshiped God in the family, and our Savior confirmed the obligation; for he often prayed with his disciples, as his family or household.

But, aside from Scripture precept and example, which our limits will not allow us to urge, in this place, in all their force, let us, for a few moments, advert to other considerations, which we hope will have some influence upon those who are living in the neglect of what, we have no doubt, is a solemn duty, and certainly a most important and delightful privilege.

Let the master of a family cast his eyes round upon his circle of beloved children. What would your children become without a knowledge of the duties and obligations of religion? And where can that knowledge be so well obtained, or those obligations enforced, as in the family, and around the family altar? Surely, morning and evening prayer are eminently calculated to inspire them with a reverence for God, and their duty to honor, love, and obey him. There, too, the members of a family are drawn together in a service of the most tender and affectionate character. They are taught to love and confide in a Heavenly Father—taught to love and honor one another. Says

Cecil, of family worship: "It may be used as an engine of vast power in a family. It diffuses a sympathy through the members. It calls the mind off from the deadening effects of worldly affairs. It arrests every member with a morning and evening sermon, in the midst of all the hurries and cares of life. It says: 'There is a God!' 'There is a spiritual world!' 'There is a life to come!' It fixes the idea of responsibility in the mind. It furnishes a tender and judicious father or master with an opportunity of gently glancing at faults, where a direct admonition might be inexpedient. It enables him to relieve the weight with which subordination or service sits on minds of inferiors." But let us look a little farther. Your children must be supported and provided for. Who gives you health and strength to furnish this support? Whose rains water your crops? The light and warmth of whose sun ripens your wheat? And does not that great and kind Benefactor who presides over the elements, deserve your daily acknowledgment?—your daily supplication?

But, if provided for, who protects your family? You lie down at night.—Who saves you from the pestilence that walks in darkness and which, perhaps, is laying low the children of your neighbor? Who spares your habitation from the desolating tornado? Or, who makes another way for the forked lightning, so that it passes you unharmed?

You awake in the morning—how bright, beautiful, and glorious all nature is around you! The birds carol their morning hymn to their Preserver, from some branch which overspreads your habitation—shall you be dumb?

You separate for the day. You go forth, perhaps, to your labor in the field; to your shop; to the counting-room: your children go forth, perhaps, on excursions of pleasure and enjoyment; to the busy city, or on the treacherous water: Who shall preserve you all, and bring you back at evening, to the paternal fireside, safe, and laden with the experience of God's goodness? Does it not seem right, and a privilege in the morning, to bespeak the presence and guardianship of that great and good Being, in whose hands our life is, and all our joys?

Or, perhaps, you separate some morning, for a longer period. Your sons are going forth to embark in business, in some distant part of the country, or in some foreign clime. Who shall protect them? Who shall save them from the thousand allurements to vice and crime with which they will meet in every city in which they sojourn; in every society in which they mingle? Who shall protect and solace in her loneliness—for she may be written widow, before you see her again—that beloved daughter, who goes forth from the altar, where she has plighted her vows, to some western region, or some still more distant eastern island? Would it not comfort your heart, in case of any contingencies like those I have supposed—that, while with you, you had daily conducted them to a throne of grace, and there sought for them, and with them, blessings which none but God can bestow, and which now they so much need?

Finally, friend, you and your children must one day die. You will meet them in another world, and at the bar of God. Should it then be found that, through your neglect of their precious and immortal souls, they are on the left hand of the Judge; should it be found that you had never gathered them to a family altar; never prayed for and with them; never supplicated a Father's forgiveness and a Savior's love; what will you then say? What excuse will you render to yourself, to them, to God? But remember that apologies, whatever they may be, will be in vain. You will have no opportunity to admonish them there; no privilege of supplicating the favor and mercy of God for them; no opportunity to retrieve what you have lost—to perform what you so foolishly neglected. The writer

is aware of the objections which are often made by those who neglect this duty, and who forego this privilege. They have no time, or they have no confidence— no ability; and, more than all, they fear to subject themselves to the reproach and ridicule of the world. I shall not answer these objections. They have been met and answered a thousand times. They are poor apologies for the neglect of a service fraught with immortal benefit to immortal minds. I will only say, then, that if you have no time to pray, you will still find time to die; if you have no confidence now to ask the blessing of God in the presence of your family, what confidence will you have in asking his acceptance of you before an assembled universe? If the fear of ridicule so alarms you, that you dare to deny Christ before men, remember that he has given the solemn assurance, that he will deny you before his Father and the holy angels in heaven.

064. Jonah.

Jonah.

065. Prayer Of Jonah.

Prayer Of Jonah.

Jonah 2:1-2, etc. At the time Jonah received his commission against Nineveh, she was the metropolis of the Assyrian monarchy.

She had a vast population, and “there was no end to her stores.” Yet, she was a “bloody city,”—“full of lies and robbery.” Her aim was universal empire; to compass which, her monarch employed not only arms, but the arts of diplomacy and priestcraft. Besides, in the strong language of inspiration, she was a “well-favored harlot; the mistress of witchcrafts.” Nahum 3:4.

Justly indignant at her “wickedness,” God commissions Jonah to proceed to Nineveh, and “cry against it.” But, deterred, either through the dangers of the journey, or from fear of personal injury, should he deliver so ungrateful a message to a proud and potent city, he attempts to escape from the presence of the Lord. He flees to Joppa; where he embarks on board a vessel, bound to Tarshish. He did not ask, with the psalmist, “Whither shall I go from thy presence? Whither shall I flee from thy Spirit?” Had he suffered himself to reflect, but for a moment, he would have perceived the folly and infatuation of attempting to escape from the omniscient eye of Jehovah.

Midnight and noon in this agree:

Great God—they’re both alike to Thee. Nor death can hide what God will spy; And hell lies naked to his eye. But the prophet is on board. The vessel weighs anchor, and spreads her sails to the breeze. All things promise a safe and speedy voyage. Jonah retires to rest; while the vessel dances lightly over the waves. But, suddenly, the clouds gather—the winds roar—the waves rise—the loud cry of the mariners is heard on the gale—“the bark is foundering.” But, wherefore this sudden and appalling tempest? The question is, at length, answered; and the prophet stands convicted of a crime, for which God has thrown the elements into wide and wild commotion. To that God, the affrighted manners, heathen as they were, make their appeal. They abjure all intention of contracting the guilt of blood; but, as their only expedient, by which to appease the God of Jonah, and by direction of the prophet himself, they cast him into the noisy waters.

He sinks—they know not but to some “dark, unfathomed cave,” — while they pass on over smoother waters. But Jonah is not alone; nor is he suffered to make his bed in the chambers of the deep. A fish, appointed and prepared by God, swallows him. And there, now, concealed from the eyes of all but of Him who penetrates the depths of ocean and of earth, he pours forth his prayer unto God. From such a closet—such a footstool—what child of God had ever prayed before! Adopting the language of the psalmist, he exclaims, as well he might exclaim: “All thy waves and thy billows have gone over me.” He had “forsaken his own mercy,” Jonah 2:8; that mercy which he might have claimed, and which he could have called for, had he attempted to fulfill—though he had failed to fulfill his duty. One privilege, however, is left him: he can, and will, “worship towards the holy temple,” Jonah 2:4. And one vow he can make; one bond he can bind his soul to perform, if God will spare him; if, from the “belly of hell,” in which he is imprisoned, he may escape, he will

“sacrifice unto God the voice of thanksgiving.”—“I will pay that I have vowed.” The sin of Jonah was a grievous one; and most solemn and terrific was the testimony which God bore against it. Yet, when humbled and repentant, he cried, and was heard and forgiven. God brought him to behold, once more, the light of day; and to leave on record, for after generations, to the end of time, that glorious truth: “Salvation is of the Lord,” Jonah 2:9.

Blessed be God, that, in our deepest trouble, in which we are involved, by reason of folly and crime, we may pray. Oh, that those, who are inmates of the prisons and dungeons of the land, did know that they may pray. No matter how deep their guilt; no matter how low their dungeon, or how little they are thought of by men, they may pray; and, from their cells—dark, deep, horrid—their sincere, penitent cries will ascend to God. Oh, that there were more Howards abroad, on errands of love to the prison-houses of all lands, to direct their gloomy inmates to a God who heareth prayer!

066. Second Prayer Of Jonah.

Second Prayer Of Jonah.

Jonah 4:1-3.

“Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of,” said our Savior to James and John, who would have called down fire from heaven, and consumed the Samaritans of a certain village, because they would not receive their Master. Much less, apparently, did Jonah know what spirit he was of, when he would have rejoiced to see the fires of heaven, or some other desolating calamity, overtake the Ninevites, because they did receive him, and repented under his warning message. At first, he had refused to convey the divine admonition to that guilty city, but had fled. But, at length, humbled by a severe providential dispensation, probably inflicted upon no other mortal, he had vowed to make any sacrifice, to which God should call him. And, when a second commission comes from the Lord, he accepts it, and, through the streets of Nineveh, he makes the solemn and admonitory proclamation: “Forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed.” Unexpectedly, the inhabitants give credence to him, as a prophet of God; a fast is proclaimed; the king himself puts off his royal robe, and covers himself with sackcloth and ashes. The example thus set, is followed by the people; and even the beasts of the field must eat no food, and be clothed in sackcloth also.

Never was a message more solemn; or a judgment denounced more terrific. Never prophet was more successful. And we should expect to hear Jonah, in some song of praise and gratitude, evincing his joy at the result of his mission. But, is the prophet thus thankful? thus joyful? Ah! it has truly been said, “that, in all the Book of God, we scarcely find a servant of the Lord so very much out of temper, as he is here—so peevish, and provoking to God!”

Strange! That to verify his word, and save, as he thought, his honor, a city containing a hundred and twenty thousand infants, must be swept by some besom of destruction! Alas! that there should be in good men such remains of depravity! And he prays, through the infatuation and disappointment of his spirit, that God would let him die—nay, that he would take from him his life. But we will not longer dwell upon the painful particulars. Well might Jonah be grateful to God—and, in the sequel, we trust he was—that his prayer was not answered according to his wishes. Oh, If God should take us according to our wishes; if he should fulfill the desires of our hearts, sometimes made in moments of irritation and impatience, how wretched would be our condition!

Some may be ready to ask: “Can a man be a child of God, and betray such a spirit as did Jonah?” He may; but let it be remembered, that such a spirit cannot long dwell in the bosom of a good man; and that, when it is even briefly indulged, waters of deep repentance will flow forth from the flinty rock, when struck; and the repentant soul will cry out, with David, “Have mercy upon me, O God! According to thy loving kindness; and according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions!”

067. Habakkuk.

Habakkuk.

068. Prayer Of Habakkuk.

Prayer Of Habakkuk.

Habakkuk 3:1-2, etc. This prophet is supposed to have prophesied in the reign of Manasseh, who occupied the throne of Judah for more than half a century. During this long period, Manasseh had ample time to undo the reformation effected by Hezekiah his father; and assiduously, and successfully, did he address himself to the unworthy task. Altars rose to Baal; fires were lighted up in honor of Moloch; groves were planted for the worship of false gods. Magic, divination, and other sinister arts, were patronized; and even the idol Astarte was honored with a place in the house of the Lord. Added to these abominations, rivers of the blood of innocent persons flowed from one end of the holy city to the other. God himself testified, that Manasseh seduced the people to do more evil, than did the nations whom he destroyed before the children of Israel. 2 Kings 21:9. And terrible were the divine judgments which God threatened for these abominations. "I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish; wiping it, and turning it upside down." 2 Kings 21:13.

Such was the state of the Jewish nation, when Habakkuk entered upon his work, as a messenger from God. He announces to Manasseh and his people the approaching invasion by the Chaldeans, permitted by God, as a token of his holy indignation. So terrible would be its effects, that the ears of every one, who should hear of it, would tingle. In this third chapter, we have a prayer of the prophet, uttered in view of these impending calamities. For sublimity of thought, and beauty of diction, it has, perhaps, never been surpassed.

Before him were arrayed, it would seem, the wickedness of prince and people, and the terrible divine judgments which impended over them. In the fullness of his heart, he bursts out: "O Lord, I have heard thy speech."—I have heard thy decree, which has gone forth, that the day of divine indignation and calamity is at hand. I know that it will come— must come—yet, "O Lord, revive thy work."—Do something for the salvation of this ruined people; something for thine own honor. In the midst of these years of sin and wickedness— of blasphemy and idolatry — make thyself known. Make known "thy power, thy pity, thy providence in the government of the world, for the safety and welfare of the Church." "In wrath"—and justly art thou wroth—"remember mercy."

Thus pleads the patriotic prophet. And, from thus pleading, he proceeds, in thought and language of wonderful sublimity, to a rapid view of the divine past providential interventions, in behalf of Israel. This he does, by way of encouraging himself, and those who were faithful to God. And as their Divine Protector had done so much for them, would he not do more? Wonders had been added to wonders. Should they now cease, and all be lost?

We cannot follow the prophet as, in most sublime thought and language, he adverts to the descent of God upon Sinai, at the giving of the law, when his glory was as devouring fire; nor to his driving out the nations of Canaan—measuring the land for his people—dividing the sea and the rivers, that they might pass over—causing the sun and moon to stand still in the heavens: such wonders did God do for his people. The review of these, while they caused the prophet to tremble, as

indications of what God in his power could do, comforted him, because they were wrought in behalf of his people. And, though now wicked and apostate, might he not hope for the exercise of that same sovereign and omnipotent power for their salvation, under the sway of Almighty Goodness? The pious soul sometimes sinks, for a season, under an oppressive view of even the just judgments of God. It deprecates them — shrinks away from them — and prays against them. But, in times of calamity, whether national or individual, there is one grace which is called into exercise, and is even strengthened and confirmed, faith, or holy confidence in the rectitude and ultimate kindness of God. Come what calamities may; rise what storms; blow what gales; beat what tempests upon us, or upon our land—God never forsakes his friends. This confidence is to the soul as an ark, into which it may retire until the indignation be past; a rock, on which it may rest till the raging billows are hushed to peace.

How beautifully does the prophet express the confidence of his soul in God! Here, at last, he reposes himself! Here, hope carries him above his despondencies! Here, he rejoices, even in view of the storm which would desolate the land, and send her sons and daughters into a long and gloomy captivity. “Although the fig-tree shall not blossom; neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will joy in the God of my salvation.”

We know not what betides our own now happy and beloved country. May she still go on, increasing in her busy and happy population, and flourishing in all that contributes to national prosperity and national renown!

But, should storms hereafter arise; should her rulers seduce her from the observance of the divine ordinances and institutions; should civil anarchy fill her with blood, or some foreign foe desolate her fair and beautiful cities, let the righteous within her borders confide in God; let them look back upon her past history, in no small degree like to that of God’s ancient people; let them plead the promises; let them “rejoice in the Lord,” as did the pious prophet, and “joy in the God of their salvation;” let them say, and sing:

Loud may the troubled ocean roar, In sacred peace our souls abide;

While every nation, every shore, Trembles, and dreads the swelling tide.

069. Old Testament Summary

Old Testament Summary

Results.

Thus we have passed, in review, the most striking examples of prayer which occur in the Old Testament. These, it will be perceived, are quite numerous. They stretch through a period of several thousands of years. They were offered by persons belonging to different ages—different nations—different tribes, and different families. By monarchs and subjects; by patriarchs and prophets; by the learned and the illiterate; the known and the obscure. They were offered on a variety of occasions, and for widely different objects. But there are certain general truths, or remarks, which may be predicated of them, and which we proceed to state:

1. They are generally short and simple.
2. They are particular and direct. Particular, as to the object sought; and direct, towards that object, and no other.
3. They are expressed with great earnestness. And if, for any reason, the blessing sought be delayed, the supplicant proceeds to importunity.
4. There is an obvious expectation of receiving a blessing, and the identical blessing sought.
5. The petitioners ask—not demand.
6. They act in consistency with the supplications they have offered.
7. Having preferred their requests, and urged and renewed them, and said, “we will not let thee go except thou bless us,” they add, bowing with reverence and humility, “Not our wills, but thine, be done.”

070. New Testament.

Introductory Remarks.

Said Peter, on the mount of transfiguration, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." And good, I trust, it will prove, readers, for us—in time present and time to come—to enter and survey the field that now lies before us. Of the truth of one position—but that a most interesting and important one—we may find further confirmation, but no higher evidence, than has been furnished in the Old Testament, viz: that God hears prayer. The history of every generation of his people, assures us of this truth; and the many recorded instances in the Old Testament, in which prayer was fully, and often immediately, answered, has left us, it may be said, scarcely any thing further to wish on this point. No humble servant has been sent away empty, and no proper petition, preferred, in submission to the divine will, has failed, at length, of an appropriate answer.

But, if the New Testament contains no ample proof of a truth so confessedly important, it, nevertheless, contains matters, touching the duty and privilege of prayer, which are new, and of intense interest. It was, indeed, to be expected, that a later and richer revelation would evolve new truths: it was the design of the gospel to make an advance upon preceding disclosures: a brighter light was to shine: the duties and relations of men were to be more clearly unfolded: their privileges were to be enhanced: types, and shadows, and promises, were to receive their accomplishment: heaven was to descend nearer to earth; or, rather, earth was to be raised nearer heaven: the tabernacle of God was to be more emphatically with men, and their privileges and blessings enlarged, as "sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty."

But, restricting our remarks to the more immediate subject of these pages, we may inquire, what advantages, in respect to prayer, do believers enjoy under the gospel, over the Old Testament saints? To this inquiry the reader will find a fuller answer in the progress of the work; but certain truths, it is deemed important, should be impressed upon him, before entering the field which we are about to survey. They will serve to enlarge his views of the grace and condescension of God; they will enhance his estimation of the gospel; they will warm and strengthen his love to Jesus Christ; they will impress him with a sense of his high obligations to improve those superior advantages which are furnished him for intercourse and communion with God; and thus he will be better prepared to profit by the perusal of the pages which lie before him. My first remark is, that the New Testament abounds with directions to pray for, or seek after, spiritual blessings. Independent of the Psalms of David, there are few, if any, such directions; and few examples of such prayer in the Old Testament. (Should it be thought that the writer's statement here is too strong, the reader, after due examination, will please qualify it, to conform it to what he may find to be the fact in the case.) In that portion of the divine word, the examples of prayer relate particularly, and almost exclusively, to secular or temporal blessings. Whatever spiritual favors they might involve, these were not the objects directly and specifically sought. The explanation of this remarkable fact—and it will probably be deemed satisfactory—is, that it was not the design of God, in the Old Testament, to give the spiritual history, either of nations or of individuals. We

know, however, that in every age there were some, and in some ages many, individuals of deep, fervent piety; those whose faith reached and influenced the arm of Omnipotence; whose example shone out upon the moral darkness of the early ages, as stars upon the gloom of night. And, moreover, we know, that faith never exists solitary and alone. She has sister-graces, which she binds by her influence; which she inspires and animates; and by which she is strengthened and animated in turn. The graces, therefore, which belong to, or are distinctive of, true piety, existed, in greater or less degree, in all the Old Testament saints. Nor can it be doubted that they sought and obtained spiritual blessings by means of prayer. We have, in part, the spiritual history, or exercises, of one saint—that of the Psalmist; and, though he lived centuries before the light of the gospel shone out in its full splendor, how rich and instructive his experience! Whose piety now is stronger, or more fervent and active? Whose supplications are more importunate? Whose confessions of sin could be deeper, or more sincere? As to spiritual communion with God, his pantings are like those of a hart after the water-brook. “As the hart panteth after the water-brook, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.” “Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none on the earth that I desire beside thee.”

Let it not be supposed that David, man of God that he was, was the only saint, in ancient times, of fervent and exalted piety. He may have been in advance of others; but had we the spiritual history of others, we should, doubtless, find that there were many whose piety was of the same pure and heavenly character. Indeed, from incidental passages in the lives of some, which we find in the sacred narrative, we may be sure that in them abounded, and in their example shone forth, those virtues, which are strongly inculcated in the gospel, and for which saints of modern days are taught importunately to pray. The growth of believers, then, under the former dispensation, was by a process essentially the same as under the gospel. Among other means of obtaining spiritual blessings and growth in holiness, they prayed, and doubtless with fervency and in faith; but they seem to have done so without those special injunctions, and without so plain and explicit assurances of success, as the believer finds in the pages of the New Testament. The gospel, then, places believers on vantage-ground, much higher than believers enjoyed anterior to those fuller revelations, made by Jesus Christ and his apostles. Our spiritual wants are, as it were, drawn out, and spread before us; so that the believer cannot innocently be ignorant of them. And, moreover, specific directions are given how, and upon whom, to call for spiritual gifts and graces; and promises and assurances are made, calculated to inspire the most timid with confidence. A second advantage, which the Christian enjoys over the saints of the earlier revelation, is, that he may ask in the name of Jesus Christ. “Ask,” says he, “in my name.” “Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name.” That the ancient saints were accepted through the future propitiatory sacrifice of Christ, and that they had the “spirit of faith” in a suffering savior to come, is manifest; but it is equally clear that they did not pray in the name of Jesus; nor, up to this moment, had the disciples themselves. They had gone out, indeed, and preached in Christ’s name; and had been commissioned to heal the sick, cleanse lepers, and raise the dead; and, returning, they had announced to Jesus that even the devils were subject to them. But as his atonement was not complete till he had hung upon the cross, its full merit could not be pleaded till after that event. Then the disciples, and all the followers of Jesus, in after years, were to ask in his name. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you” As if he had said, “When you go to the door of mercy, and knock, make use of my name, and you shall gain admission. Make it known that you belong to me, and my Father will treat you as belonging to

him. Make it known that there is a mutual affection, a close and indissoluble friendship subsisting between us, and my Father will take you into his favor, to his heart. Tell him that my name is dear to you, and it will endear you to him; so endear you, that, ask what you will—the forgiveness of your sins, adoption into his family, the sanctification of your nature, the riches of his grace—all, all he will give you; I am so beloved by him, that, for my sake, he will refuse you nothing.”

“Now, what a vast acquisition was this to the wealth of devotion! By empowering his people to employ the argument of his name, he is, in so far, placing the fund of his merit at their disposal. He affords them the profound satisfaction of bringing it into the presence of God, and using for themselves the very same plea which he employs for them; he is, in effect, pleading for them by their own lips, as well as by his own, and thus multiplying the voice and power of his intercession. By investing them with this privilege, he is virtually clothing them with priestly vestments, placing them by his side at the altar, and putting in their hands a censer filled with incense like his own” (Harris’ Great Teacher). In this connection, it may be added, that Christ pledges himself to act in behalf of his disciples as their personal intercessor. “I will pray the Father for you.” This was a new revelation; an announcement and an assurance never before imparted to believers; a power and a resource, of which past ages had been ignorant; or, if patriarchs and prophets had had some conjectures of this tenor, they were too faint to impart strength and animation to their devotions. Nor, in point of fact, could Christ have been such an intercessor before, as after, his death. From and after that momentous event, his residence—as God—Man—Mediator—was to be in heaven. There he was to reside, as the victorious Son of God; the conqueror of those powerful enemies of man, sin, Satan, and death; as one who had actually “traveled in the greatness of his strength; and, by the shedding of his blood, had purchased a people for himself.” “The merit of his death would no longer be prospective, but actually existing; fund of infinite value and inexhaustible resource, which he had created for them, and which, like incense and an acceptable memorial, would continually ascend to God in their behalf. He himself would be on the throne with the Father, and would personally attend to their interests. He would bear them on his heart; he would receive their supplications from off the wings of faith and love, and, mingling with them the merit of his sacrifice, he would present them to God. Thus, by proclaiming himself our intercessor, he would have us to know, that the entire merit of all that he did is contained as incense in his golden censer, that he might offer it up with the prayers of his people. Our prayers, then, in their ascent to the throne of God, mingle and blend with the ascending incense of his merit; our voice, before it reaches the ear of God, falls in and blends with the voice of him whom the Father heareth always. So that, in pledging himself to intercede in our behalf, he is, in effect, assuring us of the certainty of our success.”

What an encouragement is thus presented to Christians to pray!—far, very far, beyond what the ancient believer possessed. A power, a purchase upon the throne, has been placed at their disposal, of surpassing and incomprehensible value. Reader, if you are Christ’s, you have an all-sufficient, almighty advocate with the Father; one whom you know; one who invites your confidence; who solicits the management of your cause, and who has power with God.

“I will pray the Father for you.” Had such an announcement been made to the patriarchs and prophets of old, what an impulse would it have given to their devotions! What fervor and importunity to their prayers! The hope of success animates our efforts; assurance of it, secures it. The intercession of Christ—one of the most wonderful revelations in the whole divine record—is a

verity, which we are not permitted to doubt: a truth, which we may appropriate and employ to our largest desire; and, in virtue of which, we may make ourselves the constant and importunate clients of the Great Advocate. How poor then our cause may be in itself, with an advocate who knows so well how to manage it—with an intercessor of such exalted merit to urge its acceptance—so far from distrusting the issue of our prayers, “we may feel that the footstool is our only place of safety and hope; that, if danger impend, a sure way to avert it; or, if pardon and life be needed, a direct means to insure them, is to pray in the name of Jesus; making him, at the same time, by our faith and reliance, our advocate and friend.” In ev’ry dark, distressful hour, When sin and Satan join their power, Let this dear hope repel the dart, That Jesus bears us on his heart.

Great Advocate! Almighty Friend! On thee our humble hopes depend; Our cause can never, never fail; For thou dost plead, and must prevail. But the revelations of Jesus, on this subject, are not yet exhausted. I may add, therefore, that as a higher encouragement to the devotions of Christians, Jesus assures them that he will himself answer their supplications. “Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it” To authorize them to ask in his name, and to assure them of his intercession for them, might seem enough. But, if enough for them, it was not enough for the full and overflowing love of Jesus. He designed to roll up, and magnify the riches of his grace. He would no longer allow the question to be raised, whether prayer was to be answered. Nay, such assurances he designed to give, that the most, timid might have boldness of access; and that every one, who did pray fervently and importunately, should be able to say, exulting in the large and liberal blessings obtained: “Hear what the Lord hath done for me.” “That the same being should undertake, both to present and to answer their petitions, both to intercede for them and to confer the blessings sought, may appear incompatible; but the offices, though distinct, are perfectly consistent. In his conduct at the altar, we behold the intercessor; and, in his conduct on the throne, we behold the result of his intercession; having become the medium of prayer from man to God, he is rewarded by being made the medium of blessing from God to man; the intercessor for human penury, is constituted the almoner of infinite bounty; he is called from the altar of incense, to ascend and dispense, from the throne of God, the blessings which he has sought for us.”

One other advantage remains to be noticed; but it is one which may be said, perhaps, to form the climax of all the rest, namely: the promise of the Holy Spirit. Under the Jewish dispensation, only a limited measure of this gift, a mere earnest of this spirit, had been enjoyed. The full bestowment of that gift was reserved to the era when Jesus, ascending to his throne, should be “glorified,” and should claim the gift, which he had purchased, to pour it down upon his people.

It is a noticeable fact, that the disciples were engaged in prayer, at the very time of the first great effusion of the Spirit. That glorious Agent had, indeed, been promised; and they were to tarry in Jerusalem, till that promise concerning his advent was fulfilled. But they must pray for his coming; and only in answer to prayer would he come. They did pray, and he came—came suddenly—came with great power. And what was the result?

“The church ,” says a writer already quoted, “became one region of life, of divine vitality throughout. Believers themselves seemed converted; if sinners became saints, saints themselves became as angels: thus fulfilling the prophecy, which had said: ‘The weak shall be as David, and

David as an angel of the Lord.’ Every Christian saw, in every other, the face of an angel—looks of benevolence and brotherly love; one interest prevailed; one subject of emulation swallowed up every other: who should approach nearest to the likeness of Christ; which should do most for the enlargement of his reign. ‘The whole multitude of them that believed, were of one heart and of one mind.’ The spirit of Christ animated the whole, because the one heart of the whole community, and every particular pulse, beat in concert with it.” What a gift! How rich! How god-like!

Among the objects to be answered by the descent of the Spirit was the “convincing the world”—the impenitent portion of it—“of sin, of righteousness, and of a judgment to come.” But his mission also embraced a glorious work, in reference to the children of God. Not to specify more, he was to awaken and keep alive within them a spirit of prayer. He was to guide and aid them in reference to that great duty; to suggest to them the things for which they should pray; and to “make supplications for them with groanings, which could not be uttered.” The believer has, indeed, a guaranty that his prayers shall be heard and answered; but it is only when he prays by the Spirit. Hence, the indispensable importance of this gift. Without it, the believer’s supplications, however ardent in manner, however strong and eloquent in language, are in vain.

How, then, shall the aid of this Divine Auxiliary be obtained? Up to this point, a throne of grace is easy of access, and assurances of acceptance meet us of the most gratifying and encouraging nature. Does the grace of our Divine Master stop here? On the contrary, the same kindness; the same liberality in reference to the Spirit’s assistance, is shown us, as is shown in regard to preceding assurances.

Anterior to regeneration, the motions of the Spirit are likened to the fitful and uncontrollable wind. The wind comes, we know not whence—it goes, we know not whither. It seems to obey no laws; it seems unsteady, and even capricious. So does the Spirit seemingly act in the renewal of souls. But when that great change has once been experienced, the man is brought into new relations—comes under a new administration. Before, there is no law; at least, we know of none; regulating the operations of the Spirit. All depends upon the sovereign good pleasure of a sovereign God. But, in reference to the Christian, the rule is: That he is to enjoy the influences and aids of the Spirit, according to that measure in which he desires them, or is capable of enjoying them. “Every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth;” i.e. under the reign of grace, there is an “established connection between asking—it must be a proper asking for the Holy Spirit—and receiving it.” And a distinguished writer has expressed the opinion, that “could we appeal to all who have made the experiment, we should find that this order was never violated; that could we interrogate each of that throng, without number, who have sought the gift, they would testify, with one consent, that they all received to the utmost of their desires, and abundantly more” (Harris’ Great Teacher). And that nothing might be wanting, by way of assurance, on a point where the heart needs confidence, the Savior places an argument at the disposal of the believer, which, from his own declaration, must prevail. “What man is there among you, who, if his son should ask bread, would give him a stone; or, if he ask a fish, would give him a serpent?” Has such violence to the “instinct of parental tenderness” ever been known to exist? If not—if, on the contrary, it be a law of our nature—a law which bears sway, notwithstanding our evil nature—to give good gifts to our children—and he would be a monster, who should violate that law—“how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him.” “What a human father will scarcely ever fail to do, though he be evil, God will never fail to do, because he is

ineffably good." This is enough. He that does not believe, would not be persuaded, though one rise from the dead.

Such is an outline of the great principles in regard to prayer, found in the New Testament. Some of them are new revelations; while others are cleared from the mists and obscurities, in which they had become involved, during a darker dispensation. Let us enter this field; and, as we pass round, see if we do not find ample confirmation of their truth and importance. In every step of our progress, we shall perceive occasion, I trust, to admire "the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ; who, though he was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might become rich." Comparing our privileges and blessings with those enjoyed by believers of past ages, we shall be ready to say: "Truly the lines have fallen to us in pleasant places!" And when we have compassed the field, and understand something, as we may, of its hidden treasures; of the liberality of its great Proprietor, and the privileges and immunities of its inhabitants; we shall doubtless exclaim:

'Tis a broad land, of wealth unknown.

071. Matthew.

Matthew.

072. Prayer For Enemies A Duty.

Prayer For Enemies A Duty.

Matthew 5:44.

(See also Luke 6:28.) The Levitical law required the Israelites to love their neighbors as themselves. Leviticus 19:18. The inference drawn from it by the Jews was, that enemies might be hated; and this was a prevalent opinion among them in the time of Christ. It was, however, a perversion of the command, and Jesus here explains the spirit and intention of it. "Love for love," says an old divine, "is but justice and gratitude: love for no love is favor and kindness; but love for hatred is a most divine temper." But this is the temper which Christianity inculcates, and which our Savior avers should show itself in loving, blessing, and praying for enemies. But what is meant by love to an enemy, which leads one to bless and pray for him? Am I bound, of course, to approve his conduct? No; it is impossible to approve of that man's conduct, who, to gratify his selfish ambition, would crush a rival in the dust; or who, greedy of inordinate gain, would reduce a fellow-being to a pallet of straw. By no moral principle, can such conduct be approved; but his person need not, must not be hated; his soul must be loved, and his well-being pursued.

"There are two kinds of love," observes a writer, "involving the same general feeling, or springing from the same fountain of good-will to all mankind; but differing still so far, as to admit of separation in idea. The one, is that feeling, by which we approve of the conduct of another, commonly called the love of complacency; the other, by which we wish well to the person of another, though we cannot approve his conduct. This is the love of benevolence; and this love we are to bear towards our enemies."

"It is impossible," continues the same writer, "to love the conduct of a man that curses and reviles us, and injures our person and property, or that violates the laws of God. But, though we may hate his conduct, and feel deeply that we are affected by it, yet we may still wish well to his person. We may pity his madness and folly; we may speak kindly of him, and to him; we may aid him in time of trial, and seek to do him good here, and promote his eternal welfare."

"Pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." To use one despitefully, is wantonly and unjustly to accuse, or injure in any way. To persecute one, is to vex or oppress one on account of his religion. For such, the law of Jesus Christ is, to pray. And, as acceptable prayer can proceed only from a sincere and honest heart, the rule is, honestly and sincerely to desire God to forgive, favor, and bless those who may have injured us in any manner, or who have vexed or oppressed us on account of our religious faith and practice.

Such an exposition of the divine law went counter to the interpretation of the Jewish doctors; such a sentiment is not to be found in all the profane writings of antiquity. Rules they had for the subjugation of the passions, and the endurance of the evils of life with fortitude. But the essence of these rules was stoical indifference: men were taught to have no feeling. But Christianity admits of deep feeling—a sense of insult and injury; but bids its professors triumph over it, and, at the same

time, wish well, and do good, and pray for the person who injures. In the doctrine of the Stoics, there was nothing generous or with compassion; in that of Christianity, there is all that is noble and disinterested.

“Love your enemies,” says Jesus Christ; “bless” them— “pray” for them—“that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.”

God does as he requires of man. Upon a world of sinners, who are perpetually in hostile attitude against him, and whose hatred would dethrone him, he sends the blessings of his providence and grace; they flow as wide as that world, and as incessantly as the minutes that roll.

I might here speak of the love and prayers of Jesus for his enemies—all in perfect accordance with his directions to mankind; but, reserving remarks on this subject for another place, let me conclude by putting the inquiry—Reader, have you the evidence which springs from love to, and prayer for, your enemies, of your adoption into the family of God? Nothing is more like God than a spirit of forgiveness. Nothing is more like Jesus Christ than prayer for enemies. “He that can meet a man kindly who is seeking his hurt; who can speak well of one that is perpetually slandering and cursing him; that can pray for a man that abuses, injures, and wounds him; and that can seek heaven for him that wishes his damnation, is in the way of life. This is religion, beautiful as its native skies; pure, like its source; kind, like its Author; fresh, like the dews of the morning; clear and diffusive, like the beams of the rising sun; and holy, like the feelings and words that came from the bosom of the Son of God. He that can do this, need not doubt that he is a Christian. He has caught the very spirit of the Savior, and he must inherit eternal life.”

073. Directions Of Christ In Relation To Prayer.

Directions Of Christ In Relation To Prayer.

Matthew 6:5-8.

“There is in the nature of man, or in the circumstances in which he is conditioned” says the author of the “Philosophy of the Plan of Salvation”—“there is something, which leads him to recognize and worship a superior being.” “Man is a religious being: he will worship.”

Equally true is it that man will pray. And with the same propriety that he has been denominated a “religious being,” may he be styled a “praying being.”

It is obvious that he is in no such sense religious, as to please his Maker, as a matter of course; but there is that in his nature which recognizes some being as superior to himself, and to whom, at times, and under certain circumstances, he pays his homage.

So, also, in relation to prayer. Men will pray. They will pray either to the true God, or to some idol. There is, perhaps, not that human being, who has attained to manhood, who has not offered some form of prayer. It may have been sudden, brief, a whisper, a sigh, but it was prayer; or the natural, instinctive call of a needy and dependent nature upon some being, supposed to possess the power to aid. Cast a man—it matters not who he is, or what may be his creed, or his professions, or previous determinations— cast him into sudden and extreme peril, or cause him to experience violent and excruciating agony—place him on the deck of some foundering bark, or on the roof of some burning habitation, and will he not pray? Let him realize that death and eternity are immediately before him, and nature will speak out. As well might you hope to chide the raging elements to repose, as to silence his cries in this hour of his extremity. In his directions, in relation to prayer, our Saviour proceeded in exact accordance with these principles of our nature. In none of his discourses, does he attempt to prove prayer to be a duty. He gives ample instructions as to the manner—the frequency—the importunity of prayer; but the duty was too obvious to require any authoritative injunction from him. It was a dictate of nature; perhaps “a constitutional instinct, inwrought by the Maker;” or, if not that, it was a natural effort at relief, growing out of a sense of want and dependence. Men would pray. They might be instructed how to pray with more certainty of success; they might be taught the importance of more frequency, and greater importunity; but they needed no clearer proof of the duty itself than that furnished by the light of nature. Hence, observe how our Savior introduces the subject to his disciples, in his memorable sermon on the mount: “When thou prayest,” etc. He takes it for granted that they would pray. Not a single sentence docs he utter in regard to the duty, but proceeds at once to give directions as to the manner in which that duty should be performed.

It is apparent, from the sacred narrative, that, at this time, the Jews were not obnoxious to the charge of neglecting prayer. On the contrary, they abounded in prayer. “They loved to pray.” They made many and long prayers. But, in this service, which, of all other acts of worship, should be characterized by sincerity and humility, they were hypocritical and ostentatious. “They loved to

pray, standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, to be seen of men” They seem not to have had regard to the honor and glory of God. They seem not to have been burdened with a sense of spiritual want. Their object—supremely selfish—was to receive honor from men; to obtain a great reputation for the length, fervency, and, perhaps, eloquence of their prayers.

It was the design of the Savior, in thus rebuking the hypocrisy and ostentation of the Jews, to convey to his disciples better views of the nature of acceptable prayer. While, therefore, he is not to be considered as condemning prayer in the synagogue, but only that which was offered to be seen or heard of men, he is to be understood as recommending, and even enjoining, that such prayers as are offered by individuals, which are of a private or secret character, should be offered strictly in secret. “Every Jewish house had its place for secret devotion. Over the porch, or entrance of the house, was a small room, of the size of the porch, raised a story above the rest of the house, expressly appropriated for the place of retirement. Here, in secrecy and solitude, the pious Jew might offer his prayers, unseen by any but the Searcher of hearts. To this place, or to some similar place, our Savior directed his disciples to repair, when they wished to hold communion with God.”

What pious heart has not often thanked the Savior for this divine injunction? “When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut the door,”—shut out the world and its disturbing cares—“pray to thy Father, which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.” Yes, the closet! The calm retreat, the silent shade, With prayer and praise agree; And seem, by thy sweet bounty, made For those who follow thee.

Then, if thy spirit touch the soul, And grace her mean abode, Oh, with what peace, and joy, and love, She there communes with God.

There, like the nightingale, she pours Her solitary lays; Nor asks a witness of her song, Nor thirsts for human praise.

If there be one spot dearer to the true Christian than all others on the wide globe, it must be his closet, where he is in the daily habit of going to meet and commune with God; where he pours out his soul in penitential sorrow for sin; where he can weep, and none molests him; where he can wrestle with God, and take strong hold of the promises; where, as a parent, he can plead for his children, in terms, and with a pathos which he desires none should hear but God only; where he can wrestle for friends, as Jacob wrestled with the angel of the covenant; and where, drawn by the powerful attraction of the love of Jesus, and filled with appetizers of the glory which shall be revealed hereafter, he can only exclaim—not knowing what to say, more than the disciples did on the Mount of Transfiguration— “Lord, let me build a tabernacle here; and here let me abide, in the enjoyment of thy love, so long as I live!”

I have known Christians, who, especially in seasons of revival, seemed to think little of the closet, but every thing of the social or public prayer-meeting. It is delightful to meet the assembly of saints; to go to the house of God; to the chapel, and other places of resort, and there mingle our praises, and unite our prayers. But, while such seasons may be, and should be frequent, the Christian should learn to love his closet. The excitement and sympathy engendered by revivals are wont to subside—too soon, I allow— but the fire, the holy zeal, and holy joy, kindled up on the altar of the heart in the closet, is apt to last. While, therefore, it is pleasant—and not a few such

occasions has the writer enjoyed—to go “with a multitude to the house of God—with those who keep holy day,”—he must say— and hopes to be able to say, so long as he continues in this earthly tabernacle—

I love to steal awhile away, From every cumb’ring care, And spend the hours of setting day, In humble, grateful prayer.

I love, in solitude, to shed The penitential tear; And all his promises to plead, Where none but God can hear.

Christ further enjoins it upon his disciples, that they avoid “vain repetitions.” We may, doubtless, on suitable occasions, and in reference to blessings of great importance, repeat our requests. This is natural. The child does this. Importunity is admitted and encouraged; and this would seem to imply a repetition of our supplications. Such repetition indicates a deep conviction of our necessities; and the deeper the wants of the soul are felt, the more shall we urge our suit, and the more probable will be our success.

Christ does not here, or in any other discourse, fix the length of our prayers. He forbids the repetition of the same thing, as though God does not hear. “And it is not improbable,” observes Mr. Barnes, “that he intended to condemn the practice of long prayers. His own supplications were remarkably short.” The length of our prayers should vary according to circumstances. There are seasons when the holy Spirit leads the soul to long and importunate wrestling with God. At such times, the soul must pray. The affections are kindled into a holy ardor; the promises of God are delightful and refreshing; the fountains of life seem open, and the heart feels like drawing out large and rich supplies.

Let it not be understood, however, that it is only at such times that the Christian offers acceptable prayer. Often does he pray most effectually, when, if I may so say, he can not pray at all: i.e. he is so overwhelmed with a sense of the divine glory—the holiness of God appears so unspeakably glorious, and his own heart so sinful and ungrateful, that language fails to express the emotions of his soul. Still, he prays. God, who sees in secret, knows the real desires of the soul, and sees in that heart, which can utter only sobs, the humility, and love, and faith, which render it quite consistent for him to bless—and bless with large measures of grace.

Long prayers in the sanctuary and the social prayer-meeting, but especially in the family, are not, in general, to be commended. If, to the “gift of prayer,” be added the “spirit of prayer,”—freedom of utterance and holy intensity of soul—pertinency of expression and warmth of heart— greater indulgence is admissible. But neither the minister in the pulpit, nor the parent in the family, should extend their prayers to such length as to weary those whom they lead. Family prayer should, ordinarily, be only of moderate length. Children are easily wearied, especially with a service in which their hearts are not interested. Family devotion, the reading of the Scriptures, and the prayer which follows, should ever be made as pleasant and attractive as may be. There is not a service on earth more delightful than that of prayer. Not an attitude more lovely than that of bending before the footstool of God. Why, then, make that service repugnant? Why that attitude repulsive?

074. The Lord's Prayer.

The Lord's Prayer. This prayer is given as a model. And where, in beauty and comprehensiveness, exists its equal? Every thought is natural; every part of it simple; and yet, in these few and brief sentences, there is involved whatever is needed by mankind, whether as individuals, as families, as nations, or as a race.

It is designed to express the manner in which we are to offer our supplications to God. "After this manner pray ye." Christ would not confine us to the precise words or petitions here used. The substance of this prayer is recorded in the eleventh chapter of Luke; but it is there expressed in language sufficiently different to indicate that Christ did not intend to present this as a form of prayer to be used on all occasions, but "to express the substance of our petitions—to specify to his ignorant disciples what petitions it would be proper to present to God." Christ did not always use this prayer himself, (SecMatthew 26:39-42; Matthew 26:44) and, indeed, there is no proof that either he or his disciples ever used it exactly in this form. The "Lord's Prayer," as it is commonly called, consists of three parts: (The author, in this division, follows Mr. Bickersteth.) I. An Introduction, or Invocation.

"Our Father, which art in heaven."

II. Six Petitions; three of which have reference to the glory of God, and three to our own temporal and spiritual wants:

To the glory of God

1. "Hallowed be thy name,"
2. "Thy kingdom come,"
3. "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven."

To our own wants

4. "Give us this day our daily bread."
5. "And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors;"
6. "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

III. A Conclusion; in which the perfections of God are acknowledged, and are plead as a reason why the petitions should be granted. The reader will observe, that, in this prayer, men are not taught to ask in the name of Christ. "The reason may be," observes a writer, "that, when it was given, Christ's atonement had not actually taken place, nor his intercession, as a risen Savior, begun. Therefore, our Lord says: 'Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name: at that day ye shall ask in my name.'" John 16:24; John 16:26.

Introduction.

Matthew 6:9.

[Note: The author takes pleasure in acknowledging his indebtedness for some valuable thoughts on the Lord's Prayer to Manuscript Sermon on the same subject, by Rev. William W. Woodworth, Berlin.]

Never had the saints of the "olden time" addressed God in terms so filial and familiar as these. God had, indeed, revealed himself on various occasions, and to various individuals, as a God of kindness and compassion. To Moses, he had proclaimed himself, "the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious." The Psalmist often bears testimony to the benevolence of God: "The Lord is gracious, and full" of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy." Indeed, God had, in express terms, styled himself a "Father to Israel." Jeremiah 31:9. But, on no page, do we find the children of God, nor even the prophets, in their addresses and supplications to Him, using this tender and affectionate appellation. Rather, they seem to have been more impressed with his infinite majesty and awful glory. Even the Psalmist, whose intercourse and communion with God seems to have been peculiarly intimate and delightful, never calls him "Father." This direction, then, of Jesus to his disciples, in reference to prayer, seems, in some sort, a new revelation; at least, here was a new era in man's intercourse with God. From this time, that intercourse was to be more intimate and more frequent. The reign of mercy was about to commence in better earnest. The Messenger of mercy was now on earth, and was about to open still wider the "happy gates of gospel grace." There he would soon station himself, and make proclamation, "night and day:" "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find." There, too, the God of grace and love would himself appear; and, looking upon the face of his Anointed, would say, bending from his throne, "I will be to you a father, and ye shall be my sons and daughters." Blessed annunciation! Most delightful assurance! And may I—I, a worm of the dust—poor, insignificant, and, more than all, a vile and ungrateful sinner—may I hope for such honor? for such grace? And can this mighty King Of glory condescend? And will he write his name, 'My father and my friend?'

I love his name! | Join all my powers,

I love his word!|And praise the Lord. In a sense, God is the father of all, whatever be their moral dispositions. He has fashioned their bodies, and endowed them with rational and immortal minds; and, as his offspring, he regards them with kindness and compassion. He provides for them those temporal blessings which they daily need, and takes a deep and abiding interest in their spiritual and eternal joy. There is not that human being, how degraded and wretched he may be, who may not direct his eye to heaven, and say—and say in truth to God, "Thou art my Father:" and upon that being God looks, not with complacency—that is impossible, for what concord has holiness and sin?—but he regards him with benevolence, and would, were the wretch willing, call him "son," in a higher sense, and upon a better basis. He would adopt him into his family, fold him to his bosom, and give him an inheritance—a glorious inheritance on high.

He has done so, and is doing so, with a portion of mankind. As many as receive Christ, to them he gives power to become the sons of God. They repent and believe, and are, therefore, adopted into the family of God. These are his children in a peculiar sense; these have the privileges of sons and daughters; these have a right to call God "Father." They are no longer aliens, but friends; no more outcasts, but fellow-citizens—children—heirs. The promises are theirs; the inheritance theirs; all they can wish theirs.

Why should not such call God "Father?" And why, when he contemplates them as "one with Jesus Christ," why should he not own them—love them—bless them? True, they are imperfect now, but they are going on "unto perfection." They are far away from heaven and glory, but they are, every moment, coming nearer and nearer thereto. What a blessed privilege it is to have God for a "Father!" Thousands and tens of thousands of those who never call him so, and have no right to call him thus, in a spiritual sense, would, if they were to pause and reflect for a few moments, call him so, with all the ardor and affection of "new-born babes." I often wonder that sinners en masse do not unite and say:

We would no longer lie, Like slaves beneath the throne; Our faith shall Abba, Father, cry, And thou the kindred own. And God would soon own the relationship. Christ would welcome them. He would prove to them that all things are ready for their reception. And God would prove to them, on his part, that all things are theirs—things present, and blessings to come.

But, in addressing God as our father, it is obvious that Christ intended that we should do something more than merely utter the words. They must be uttered with feelings and purposes corresponding to their import. Particularly, we should endeavor to form just views of the character of God; of our dependence upon him; of his kindness and compassion; of his great grace and mercy in Jesus Christ.

Christ presents God to us as "our Father," and designed, doubtless, that we should address him as such; but we should never forget that he "is in heaven." True, he is here—wherever we are—especially in the sanctuary, and in the closet—but he is, also, in his majesty and glory, in heaven, as his throne. And, while we may approach him with the confidence and affection, and even familiarity of children, we should remember the reverence due unto his name. Oh, what would Gabriel think! What those pure and exalted beings, who, before the throne on high, veil their faces!—What would they think, should they listen to some prayers offered on earth! In what irreverent terms is God addressed! What offensive familiarity is manifested! What bold and arrogant demands are made upon him! Were an earthly monarch so addressed, he would spurn the suppliant from his presence. And, were it not for "the hiding of his power," and the superabundance of his patience and grace, God would often let loose his vengeance upon those, who, under pretense of prayer, are mocking him on his footstool.

"The sacrifices of God are a broken heart and a contrite spirit." Let a child of his come with such an offering, and he will be accepted. He may be ignorant; he may not know how to order his speech; his thoughts may be few and disconnected; he may be able, amidst his sobs and penitential sorrows, only to say, "My Father," but that child will never be sent empty away. And now, reader, are you an adopted child of God? And do you pray? Is it your delight daily to retire to your closet, and there, where none but God sees, do you delight to say, "Our Father which art in heaven?" Do you feel that reverence—that confidence—that love—that gratitude, which you are under obligations to exercise towards Him, who has given you being, and his Son for your ransom?

If not, as yet, let me press you to a duty paramount to all others. A duty? Yes! That indeed! But also a privilege beyond all others in value on these mortal shores! Let me open up to you a source of joy, which pours forth waters more pure and refreshing than any earthly fountain can do. "Our Father in heaven!"—Let me be able to say that in truth, and he own the relationship—what more can I want? I am sure of his presence—his love—his protection. I know then, "He will guide me

with his counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory." I shall have peace here, and fullness of joy hereafter. A Father's blessing on earth, and a Father's love in heaven. Is not that enough? Do I hear you say, My God!—O could I make the claim— My Father, and my Friend! And call thee mine, by every name, On which thy saints depend! Is this your wish? Why not, then, call him so? Can you tell me what forbids?

Matthew 6:9 Of the six petitions, which the Lord's Prayer contains, the first three have reference to the glory of God, or the honor of the Divine Character. Our Savior gave his Father's honor this prominence, because of its supreme importance. God is incomprehensibly above and beyond the highest of his creatures. His perfections are infinite. Gabriel has not yet even conceived of the length and breadth, the height and depth, either of the wisdom, power, holiness, or love of his Maker. How comparatively narrow and confined are the views of man on this footstool! Yet, Jesus has taught us to look up—to call God, the Infinite God, "our Father"—and then to honor and reverence Him as such, according to our several ability, by saying, in all our addresses to Him, "Hallowed be thy name." The Greek word, translated hallow, is elsewhere translated sanctify, which, in its primary signification, means to make holy; and in a secondary use, to treat that which is holy, as holy, or to honor it as such. Applied to God, it denotes that we are to sanctify the Lord, or to render to him the honor and reverence due his holy name: i.e. we are to think of him, feel towards him, and conduct in reference to his wishes and authority, in a manner becoming the sanctity of his infinite and exalted perfections. In offering our petitions, due care should be observed as to the use of the divine name. Such was the reverence of the Hebrews, that in reading the Scriptures, whether in public or in private, they never pronounced the word Jehovah; but wherever that term occurred, they substituted the word Adonai, the Almighty. This we are not required to do, by the most profound reverence of the Infinite God: but we are bound not make too frequent mention of the divine name, not even in prayer, and always with due veneration and solemnity. God is great; glorious in his holiness; fearful in his praises; and ever jealous of his honor. The waiter has known some ministers, and not a few lay-brethren, who made mention of the divine name, in almost every sentence of the prayers they uttered. This is always painful. It savors of irreverence. Its tendency is to lessen our respect for the Divine Being, and must ever exercise an unhappy influence upon unsanctified minds—especially upon youth.

It is doubtless proper to use, on suitable occasions, any of the divine names in addressing God: but it is worthy of remark, that in every instance in which Jesus addresses God in prayer, he does it by the tender appellation of "Father." (Matthew 27:46, if considered as a prayer, is an exception.) This is intimate indeed; but it is honorable, reverent, delightful. "Now are we the sons of God." And why should children, adopted, as we have been, for Jesus' sake, and all made one with him, not imitate him, and call God, "Father," also? My Father—God! how sweet the sound!

How tender, and how dear! Not all the harmony of heaven Could so delight the ear.

We should offer this, and similar petitions, with due humility. In the sight of Him that sitteth upon the throne, what are we? Dust! ashes! Nothing! But, besides this, we are poor, miserable, vile, by reason of sin. And, yet, God invites and encourages us to come, and make known our wants; confess our sins; and plead for blessings for time present and to come. Nay, he considers himself honored by our confidence; and honored by our sincere and humble praise. "Whoso offereth praise, glorifieth me."

How befitting, then, that to veneration we add the profoundest humility in all our supplications. Oh, how high— holy—glorious is that God whom we, unseen, adore! Had I a glance of thee, my God!

Kingdoms and men would vanish soon;

Vanish, as though I saw them not, As a dim candle dies at noon!

How is it in that world where God is seen in unclouded majesty? Isaiah tells us: “In vision, he saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each one of them had six wings. With two, he covered his face: with two, he covered his feet: and with two, he did fly. And this one called to this one alternately, and said: Holy, holy, holy, Jehovah of hosts! All the earth is full of his glory. And the foundations of the threshold were shaken with the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said, Woe is me. I am undone, for I am a man of polluted lips, and in the midst of a people of polluted lips do I dwell, for my eyes have looked upon the king—upon Jehovah of hosts.” Here is the blending of humility and reverence. Here, covering their faces in token of humility, the seraphim hallow the name of the Lord by crying, Holy, holy, holy Jehovah of hosts!

If such pure and exalted beings evince emotions so deep, at the sight of God in his glory; if they must veil their faces expressive of the humility and reverence of their inmost soul: How should we feel?—How should we bow before the footstool, in supplications to Jehovah of hosts! Is there a greater wonder in the universe, than that God should invite and urge poor, sinful, dependent man to communion with him? Yet, He, Lord of all the worlds above, Stoops to converse with you; And lays his radiant glories by, Your friendship to pursue.

If we would offer this petition acceptably, we must honor God in our daily walk and conversation.

We must love, feel, speak, act, as we pray. Men who habitually pray, seldom dishonor God by a profane use of his name; but they may dishonor him, and do dishonor him, if they are not, on all proper occasions, ready to espouse his cause and to defend his truth. I have known men, and professing men, who often doubtless, perhaps daily, said, while bending at the footstool: “Hallowed be thy name,” who had not moral courage sufficient to rebuke profanity when uttered in their presence. And, yet, in a life of half a century, the writer has personally never known the instance in which a profane person was rebuked in kindness, and apart from sinful companions, when the rebuke was not well received. Generally, the folly and guilt of the practice is readily admitted; and sometimes God honors his faithful friends by making them instrumental in converting those who blaspheme, into those who honor and exalt His name.

“Sir,” said the late Dr. Mason, to a stage-coach companion, who had, for several miles, been swearing profanely— “Sir,” said he, taking him by the arm when they stopped, and asking the favor of his company in a short walk—“I have not the honor of your acquaintance, but I perceive that your habits and feelings are those of a gentleman, and that nothing can be more repugnant to your wishes, than giving unnecessary pain to any of your company.” The stranger started, and replied: “Most certainly, sir! I hope I have committed no offense of that sort.”

“You will pardon me,” replied the Dr., “for pointing out an instance in which you have not altogether avoided it.”

“Sir,” said he, “I shall be much your debtor for so friendly an act; for, upon my honor, I cannot imagine in what I have transgressed.”

“If you, sir,” continued the former, “had a very dear friend, to whom you were under unspeakable obligations, should you not be deeply wounded by any disrespect to him, or even by hearing his name introduced, and used with a frequency of repetition and a levity of air, incompatible with the regard due to his character?”

“Undoubtedly, and I should not permit it! But I know not that I am chargeable with indecorum to any of your friends.”

“Sir, my God is my best friend, to whom I am under infinite obligations. I think you must recollect that you have very frequently, since we commenced our journey, taken his name in vain. This has given to me, and to others of the company, excruciating pain.”

“Sir,” answered he, with very ingenuous emphasis, “I have done wrong. I confess the impropriety. I am ashamed of a practice which, I am sensible, has no excuse: but I have, imperceptibly, fallen into it, and I really swear without being conscious that I do so. I will endeavor to abstain from it in future; and, as you are next to me on the seat, I will thank you to touch my elbow as often as I trespass.” This was agreed upon: the horn sounded, and the travelers resumed their places. In the space of four or five miles, the officer’s elbow was joggled every few seconds. He always colored, but bowed, and received the hint without the least symptom of displeasure: and in a few miles more, so mastered his propensity to swearing, that not an oath was heard from his lips for the rest, which was the greater part of the journey (Christian Magazine, vol. 2: p. 315).

How many, like this officer, are guilty of taking the name of the holy and glorious God in vain—daily—hourly—and almost every moment! And shall the friends of God keep silence? Shall they, who daily pray: “Hallowed be thy name,” excuse themselves from rebuking the profane, on the ground that they have no such duty to discharge?—Or that it will subserve no good purpose? That duty is imperative; it should be discharged kindly—wisely; but never, when it can be done prudently, should it be omitted. And it will ordinarily work for the good of the offender. It may even reform him. It may awaken him to a sense of his guilt, and lead him to praise his Maker with that tongue, which, may be, for years, has been full of blasphemy. It were worth a diadem—one diadem?—It were worth all the diadems which earthly monarchs have worn, or shall ever wear, to make one such conquest.

Matthew 6:10 The kingdom of God extends over the universe of matter and mind. There is not that world that rolls in space—nor that ocean, whose waters wash different and distant continents—nor that river, nor mountain, nor tree, nor flower, nor atom, either here or in worlds remote, that is not the workmanship of God, and under the government of his laws. In all the departments of life, too, from the humblest insect, up through the various ranks of the intelligent creation—man, angels, archangels, principalities, powers—God is the creator, and the omniscient and omnipotent governor. Not even the workers of iniquity can hide themselves from His presence, nor can the powers of darkness claim exemption from His control. Such is the kingdom of God, in the large or universal sense. But there is another kingdom, more limited, which has been set up in this world, and which God regards with infinite favor. It is often brought to view in the Scriptures, and is there variously designated, as “the kingdom of heaven”—“the kingdom of Christ”—“the kingdom of

God." This kingdom was the subject of prophecy for ages before Christ appeared on earth. But, at length, in the fullness of time, he came; gathered to his standard a few followers; instructed them as to the character which his subjects must sustain, and as to the principles by which their conduct must be regulated; and then, having laid down his life for them, he rose in triumph: and, commissioning them to go forth, and extend his kingdom throughout the world, he himself departed to his mediatorial throne in the heavens, to aid them in making their conquests over the sons of men, and in gathering all nations to his standard. The subjects of this kingdom are embodied in the Christian church. They live in different countries; under different human governments; speak different languages, and observe different customs. But as to cardinal or fundamental truths, they have one faith; and as to conduct, they are governed by the same great principles. They have one king, Jesus Christ; one aim, his glory; one spirit, humbleness of mind; one law of kindness, love; one object, the subjugation of the world to the Redeemer; and one result of their conflicts, trials, and toils: a common inheritance in the kingdom of glory. The Church, or kingdom of Christ, was small in its beginning. It has been enlarging for eighteen hundred years: it has made some noble conquests. Jesus has called to his service not a few, in whose bosoms has burned the love of God, and who have made successful assaults upon the powers of darkness and the enemies of the Cross. There were Paul and his companions; there were Luther and his coadjutors; and, in later times, hundreds of faithful missionaries and thousands of godly ministers and laymen, who have been abroad in the field; and they have pulled down many a stronghold of Satan, and added many to the standard of Jesus. But there is much territory yet to be possessed. The god of this world still holds his iron sway over hundreds of millions; but he is destined to be circumscribed, until at last God will himself make the proclamation: "Zion! thy warfare is accomplished!" "the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Yes: blessed be God!—

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Does his successive journeys run;
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moon shall wax and wane no more.
But how is this glorious era to be reached?
—this blessed change in man's condition to be accomplished?

There are various instrumentalities, which the King of Zion has and will continue to employ. The Bible must be sent forth: knowledge must be diffused: the flood-gates of vice closed: Missionaries, in panoply complete, dispatched by hundreds and thousands, to every nation on the globe. And is this all? All!—No: there is one instrumentality more efficient, if I may so say, than all yet named: That instrumentality is prayer. On this subject, Jesus has given direction—a laconic direction; but it will stand, while there is one nation yet un-Christianized, or one heart unsubdued among all this world's population, as a commanding duty of the Church of Jesus Christ. Surely, that duty is pressing now, with the weight of Atlas, upon the friends of Immanuel and the friends of souls. Yes: from every sanctuary, from every missionary station, from every social prayer meeting, from every closet, from every Christian's heart, should ascend the prayer—daily, hourly—"thy kingdom come"

Arm of the Lord, awake! awake!

Put on thy strength—the nations shake!

Now let the world, adoring, see Triumphs of mercy wrought by thee.

Say to the heathen, from thy throne, "I am Jehovah! God alone!"

Thy voice their idols shall confound, And cast their altars to the ground. But while we give this prominence and importance to prayer, let not the friends of Jesus think that prayer is all. Far from it. Each professor of the gospel should make a more perfect consecration of his heart to God. He should feel more and more his duty to his Lord, and more and more the value of souls. How can that man pray sincerely and affectionately for the triumph of the truth over others, when he does not wish his own heart to come under the full influence of it! How can he have the love of God supreme in his soul, and not wish that love pervading the bosom of others? or how can he pray in sincerity for these, when, of his hundreds, and perhaps thousands, he has nothing to contribute to the treasury of the Lord! When Jesus directs his disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come," he expects them to do more than simply utter the words: something more must be done, or the heathen will not be converted. Christ will not himself preach, nor will he provide funds, by any coinage of money, to sustain missionaries in the field. This duty he has committed to his Church: and when they act in accordance with their Master's wishes and injunctions, they will put in requisition every instrumentality, and then add that other and mighty auxiliary—prayer. And when in these respects the Church shall do her duty—her whole duty—each one coming up "to the help of the Lord against the mighty," then will come a day which has as yet only dawned upon this guilty world. Then—in all its fullness, and in all its glory—

Then shall that kingdom come Among our fallen race, And all the earth become The temple of his grace:

Whence pure devotion shall ascend, And songs of praise, till time shall end.

Matthew 6:10 Let us enter upon the inquiry: "How is the will of God done in heaven?"

It is done cheerfully.

"It is the very natural motion of glorified spirits," says the excellent Leighton, "to be acted and moved by the will of God. 'They excel in strength,' says the Psalmist, 'and do his commandments;' they have no other use for all their strength; that is the proper employment of it." They love to do the will of God, because it is His will; and, no sooner is that will expressed, than all heaven moves towards the object sought, as naturally and spontaneously as the planet moves around its primary. There are no murmurings, nor disputings, nor repinings; no wishes, felt or expressed, that a duty assigned to one had been assigned to another. Nor is there ever any reluctance felt to enter upon the service at the time appointed. No private business—no selfish plan intervenes, to postpone the divine work for a single moment. Each one is ever at his post. Each one is ready to lift his wing, and fly unto the uttermost parts of the world and the universe, saying, in every step of his onward progress, "I delight to do thy will, O my God!"

It is done unanimously and harmoniously.

We again adopt the language of Leighton: "There is neither an evil eye of envy among them, nor a lofty eye of pride, whatsoever degrees there may be among them in their stations and employments. The lesser do not envy the greater, nor the greater despise the less; and the reason is, because they are all so wholly taken up, and so strongly united, in this joint desire of doing the will of God." One spirit pervades the whole; one law is written upon their hearts. Gabriel never declines a service because it is beneath him; and the smallest and weakest angel and saint never object because the service is too hard.

It is done uninterruptedly. The heavenly inhabitants need no sleep—no rest; for they experience no fatigue. They are, therefore, always abroad in the field of duty, praising God in his temple, or studying his works, or ministering to the heirs of salvation, or out on some errand in some distant world, or in some remote region of space. They never need to pause, unless it be to admire the wisdom and glory of God; never need to suspend their labors, unless it be to inquire, “Lord, what further can I do?” “The chain of their obedience,” as one observes, “is never broken; but link after link of bright acts is added to that chain, stretching on, from the moment of their being in heaven, through eternal ages.” “They serve Him day and night in his temple.”

It is done submissively.

Angels, and spirits of just men made perfect, are, by no means, perfect in knowledge, whatever they may be in spirit. An infinite distance stretches between them and the infinite wisdom of God. Not Gabriel, nor his companions—those elder sons of creation—not Abel, nor Noah, nor Abraham—those early pioneers to glory—yet comprehend much of the ways of God. How should they? They are, indeed, learning, and have been learning with ease and joy; drinking at the fountains of wisdom and knowledge for ages; yet how much must they still take on trust! They may be called to perform services for the Church; for the inhabitants of other worlds—the object and influence of which may lie in impenetrable darkness; they may be required to do acts, which will tell on distant ages, and distant and yet unborn millions, yet their readiness is instant. They know it is not for them curiously to pry into the secrets of the Lord Almighty, but to fulfill his pleasure, as well when the final cause is shrouded in darkness, as when God pours upon it the light of a meridian sun. Earth sometimes gives a beautiful illustration of the manner in which things are done in heaven. The following is an example:

“Some little Sabbath-school girls were once questioned in respect to the petition of the text, ‘What is to be done?’ ‘God’s will,’ was the answer. ‘Where?’ ‘On earth.’ ‘How?’ ‘As it is in heaven?’ ‘And how do the angels in heaven do it?’ ‘They do it immediately,’ said one. ‘Actively,’ said another. ‘Unitedly,’ replied a third; and then there was a pause. At length, a little girl arose, and said: ‘Why, sir, they do it without asking any questions!’

Thus, the will of God is done in heaven cheerfully, unanimously and harmoniously, uninterruptedly and submissively; or, as said the little Sabbath-school girl, “without asking any questions and when we offer the petition, “Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven,” we pray that here, among the children of men, among all nations, by every individual, it may be done in like manner. And why should we not thus pray? Is it replied, that we can scarcely hope that our individual prayers can have the effect to influence God thus to move upon the hearts of every individual! But away with such an objection! Has not Christ enjoined such prayer? Are not his authority and injunction sufficient? Besides, if all the pious so pray, in the closet, in the family, in the public assembly, who can say that God may not consistently, at so wide and universal a call, bless every son and daughter of Adam? Who will say that the humble and fervent prayer of one righteous man may not avail for a blessing upon a world! But Christ has so enjoined. This is reason sufficient for the sincere, and humble, and obedient disciple.

How agreeable to the holy and benevolent heart so to pray! Every such heart cannot but wish that the will of God may be done. It desires that God may be thus honored by his creatures. It feels—it knows that that will is right. It knows that from such holy and perfect obedience springs the

happiness of heaven above. It knows that such obedience would transform every moral desert into an Eden; our sinful and ungodly world, into a heaven below. The will of God universally done here, our prison-houses and dungeons would soon be demolished; fraud, rapine, lust, and murder would be unknown; the gibbet and the gallows would be raised no more; and no more would be seen garments rolled in blood. The wife, abused and forsaken, would light once more the lamp of joy within her habitation; and the squalid orphan, stripped of its support by grinding avarice, would sing again, as when happy, around the paternal fireside.

What a commission has Christ given to his followers! to the Church, which he has purchased with his own blood! What a sublime and glorious object is set before us! Let us contribute to such a consummation as much as lies within our power. If prayer will help accomplish it, let us pray. If sacrifice, self-denial, let us toil, and deny ourselves. There have been mighty objects set before men in the past history of the world, but none so glorious as that of bringing all hearts in unison with those above. In those vast schemes, only the great and honorable could bear a part, as they only were expected to reap the glory; but in this of making earth like heaven—men obedient to the will of God, as are saints and angels—the humblest disciple of Jesus may be as efficient as the most distinguished; and, blessed be God, not one, whether high or low, known or obscure, will lose his reward.

Matthew 6:11

There have been those who have affected to think it “beneath the exalted and spiritual business of prayer,” to be daily inviting the attention of the great Jehovah to our temporal wants; and inconsistent with those holy desires, which should ever characterize the Christian, to be thinking of “what we shall eat, or what we shall drink, or wherewithal we shall be clothed.” And undue anxiety, in regard to these matters, is beneath rational and immortal beings. We may, perhaps, wonder Why a clod of earth was designed To enclose a heavenly star;

But, if we look a little farther, we shall see sufficient displays in these “earthly tabernacles” to call forth our admiration and praise. “We are fearfully and wonderfully made.” Why not cherish a frame which God has deemed wise to create, and upon which he has bestowed so much skill in its workmanship? We may, indeed, say of it, as has said the poet:

Weak cottage, where our souls reside— This flesh a tottering wall; And weak it is; and destined, notwithstanding all our care of it, not long hence, to be taken down. And, indeed, it is best that it should be “dissolved it is unworthy, as a permanent abode, of a soul washed in the blood of Jesus; and, as “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God,” it is even necessary that it should die. But, as it contains the elements of a nobler fabric, and is hereafter to be fashioned after Christ’s “most glorious body,” it should be properly cared for, and provided for. So Christ has himself decided. Daily are we authorized and enjoined to ask of our heavenly Father all needful temporal mercies; and, when granted, we are thankfully to use them.

“By bread, as the chief support and staff of man’s life, is meant,” says Leighton, “all needful temporal blessings, food and raiment, and health, and peace, etc.; a blessing on the works of our calling, and the seasons of the year, and all our lawful temporal affairs.” And the great reason why we are daily to pray for these blessings is, that we daily need them, and are dependent upon God for them. “Every good and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.”

“He openeth his hand, and supplieth the wants of every living thing.”

There is, indeed, much practical unbelief among men, in relation to this dependence upon God. The unsanctified heart does not relish the thought; and the arrangements of Providence are such, that men can, if they please, shut their eyes to the operations of his hand. God has, indeed, in some periods of the world, and in relation, at least, to one people, in contravention of the order of nature, directly and visibly supplied man's temporal wants. He has rained bread from heaven, and brought forth water from the flinty rock. But this is not common. Ordinarily, he works by second causes, and supplies our wants by processes, which men are wont to forget are His processes, and the results of which are as truly his, as if he wrought miracles at the instant to produce them. The truth is, we cannot do without God for a moment. Let him withhold his hand, and, that instant, the wheels of nature stop. The winds of heaven would cease to move; the clouds would gather no more, and no more rain would descend upon the earth. The springs would dry up; the grass in the fields would perish, and the cattle upon our hills would die. Not another field would wave with its yellow harvest; and not another corn-sheaf be gathered into the garner.

But, far more than this, God may continue the established laws of nature, and still our dependence is complete. Our barns may be filled, and the lightning may burn them. Our coffers may overflow, and some thief may rob them. Our habitations may be warm and comfortable, and some tempest may raze them to their foundation. Our vessels may come richly freighted to our harbors, and there the storm may sink them. There is not that temporal blessing, which we value, which God cannot, by one turn of his providence, take away. There is not that temporal want which he cannot supply; nor any, which, if supplied, must not proceed from his bountiful hand.

Such being our dependence, is it not befitting that we should acknowledge it? If our daily blessings proceed from God, is it not right that we should daily ask them at his hand, and daily express our gratitude for them? The spirit of the petition evidently imports, that we should be moderate in our desires for earthly good. “All the other petitions,” says an old writer, “are for things spiritual; and but one for temporals. Those that regard the glory of God are three to one with it; and those that concern our own spiritual good, two to one.” We may ask for bread; for that, which, according to the conditions of humanity, are essential for our support, but we are not permitted to ask for luxuries and superfluities. If God gives us earthly blessings, more in number, and of greater value, we should use them as not abusing them: if he withhold them, we have no right to murmur or repine. Says an apostle: “Having food and clothing, let us therewith be content.” These are all that we absolutely require. Riches, coveted and idolized as they frequently are, often prove a hindrance to the Christian in his preparation for that world of holiness to which he is bound. Cautious should the children of God be, in coveting that which has so often proved a snare; and which, in the sequel, has pierced many through with sorrow.

There is still another thought connected with this subject, which has often been brought to view in these pages, viz: that prayer for blessings does not supersede the necessity of labor to obtain them. The rule is, to pray for them as if they were altogether the gift of God; and to labor for them as if their supply depended entirely upon ourselves. Nor is there inconsistency in this. God provides us with wheat; but we must sow and cultivate it. He clothes us; but we must rear the sheep, whose fleece forms our raiment. He causes the springs to run among the hills; but we must dig our wells, and raise water therefrom.

But, passing from the consideration of things temporal, to things spiritual and eternal; from the body to the soul, as we should ever be ready to do—we may well be exhorted to pray more—far more—for the “meat that endureth unto life eternal!” The body will soon wear out, and cease to want. All that it will need is a few habiliments for the grave, and a place of repose, after the toils and trials of life. But the soul will live on! Its wants will continue to increase, while eternal ages continue to roll.

Let us, then, while we seek and pray—as we may seek and may pray for the comforts of life—not neglect provision for the immortal part beyond this vale of tears. Gain what we may, we can enjoy but little, and for only a brief period. It is the future which claims our chief interest; it is for eternity that we should be chiefly anxious. Happy is the man, who, taught by the grace of God, and by his own experience of the insufficiency of the world, can say: My soul forsakes her vain delight, And bids the world farewell; On things of sense, why fix my sight?

Why on its pleasures dwell?

There’s nothing round this spacious earth, That suits my large desire; To boundless joy and solid mirth My nobler thoughts aspire.

Where pleasure rolls its living flood, From dross and sense refined;

Still springing from the throne of God, And fit to cheer the mind.

Matthew 6:12

“Debt” as generally used, is a commercial term, denoting that which is due from one person to another; or, that which one person is bound to pay or perform to another, according to contract, for something which he has had. As no such transaction as this exists between God and man, the word debt, in this petition, must be taken in a different sense. It is obviously used in a figurative sense for sin, or transgression. So Luke has it in the parallel passage, Luke 11:4. In the fourteenth and fifteenth verses of this chapter (Matthew 6:14-15), the Savior uses the word “trespasses” as synonymous with debts. The original word is elsewhere translated transgressions. We might, therefore, read: “Forgive us our sins, or transgressions, as we forgive those who have sinned against us, or done us injury.” The term “forgive,” in general, means to overlook an offense, and to treat the offender as not guilty. Applied to a literal debt, it means to cancel that debt; or, to release the debtor from his obligation to pay. To forgive a sin, or transgression, is, as Leighton remarks, “to acquit the sinner from the curse, or punishment of sin, and to restore him to all the privileges which he had forfeited by his transgression.”

Now, when, and on what terms, or conditions, are we thus to forgive those who have injured us?

I answer, immediately on their giving evidence of penitence: “Forgiveness implies that we are restored to the same state of mind with regard to the author of an injury, as if the injury had never been committed. That the forgiveness be complete, wanting nothing, we should look on him, not only with the same sense of security, and the same desires for his welfare, but with the same moral complacency, as if he were a faultless man in respect to us; viewing him with the same confidence and esteem, as if the offense had been blotted altogether from our recollection; or, as if he had never been an offender.” This is the condition on which God forgives sinners; and on no less, and on no other condition, does he ever forgive. Penitence is required of each and every one,

whether he be young or old; whether guilty of few or of many sins. "Repent or perish," is a rule which admits of no alteration. In like manner, we are not under obligation to forgive one who has injured us, unless he be penitent. In relation to a literal debt, we are not bound to cancel it, without payment. Yet, even here, we may not be overbearing and oppressive; we must forgive, or cancel it, if it cannot be paid; or, if it will greatly distress a wife and children, or the widow and the fatherless. But it is impossible to forgive, in the legitimate sense of that word, one who has wronged us, without the evidence of penitence. But how are we to treat such a one as does not give evidence of penitence? May I injure him in turn? No. May I persecute him?

No,—by no means. In certain cases, the good of society—the peace and welfare of community—may admit, and even require, though, perhaps rarely, and then never with feelings of revenge, that I prosecute the man who has done me wrong. But I have no right to render evil for evil. I may not hate an enemy, i.e. his person, however much I may abhor his wickedness; but I must love him, and be ready and anxious to do him good. Says Christ: "Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you; and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; that you may be the children of your Father, who is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." And, says an apostle: "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

While such are the inculcations of the gospel, touching our feelings and conduct towards those who have wronged us, it no where enjoins forgiveness without penitence. On the contrary, it makes the latter, a condition of the former. Says Christ: "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him: and if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again, saying: I repent, thou shalt forgive him." There are, indeed, passages, in which the duty of forgiveness is enjoined, while the repentance of the offender is not specified as a condition; but that condition is, of necessity, implied; for it is utterly impossible that I should have the complacency and confidence in one who has done me wrong, which true forgiveness implies, while he is not penitent. Until he is penitent, he rejoices in the wrong done; and, therefore, is unworthy my confidence. In such a one, it is impossible to take delight, or to regard him as if he had never committed the wrong. To sum up the whole—"the measure by which we may expect forgiveness, is that which we use in reference to others. But as we are not required, and, indeed, cannot forgive, in the full import of that term, those who have injured us, without penitence on their part; so we are not to expect, nor have we a right to ask, God to forgive us, without being penitent ourselves." But there are several things which we are to do, in reference to those who have injured us, or we cannot hope to be forgiven of God. I will mention but two:

We must be willing to take the lead in effecting a reconciliation with the one who has wronged us.

Some might be willing to forgive, provided the offender come to them, and express his penitence. This he should indeed do; but the gospel requires us to make the advance, if that be necessary;—"go and tell him his fault,"—do it in the spirit of brotherly kindness, and with a sincere desire to gain him. Upon this principle, God has acted in reconciling the world unto himself. While we were yet enemies, God moved towards us; and, had he not done so, not one sinner would ever have repented; not one would ever have been reconciled to him. Until we are willing to imitate the divine example, in reference to a reconciliation with the man who has injured us, we should never

offer the Lord's Prayer; especially the petition: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."

We must be willing to make sacrifices to effect a reconciliation.

God has made one sacrifice, the like of which we can never make, in order to break down the wall of separation between himself and a world in hostility. He has freely given up his Son for us all; his coequal and well-beloved Son, to the death of the cross. And shall we not sacrifice our pride—our false honor, for so noble a purpose as effecting a peace between ourselves and a fellow-immortal?—One whom we hope to meet in a Father's house on high, and with whom to join in songs of praise for ever and ever? Is this too much? But the sacrifice, great as we may deem it, is required; and, if we are not willing to make it, we should not hope for forgiveness from God.

Matthew 6:13 The Divine Oracles have decided this one important point, thereby refuting a charge made by generation after generation; that, for the purpose of leading men astray from the path of virtue, or inducing them to sin, God never tempts them, either by "putting evil into their hearts, suggesting it to their thoughts, or necessitating them to the commission of it." The perfections of God forbid it. Says the apostle James: "Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man."

Temptations do, indeed, exist, and even abound. We meet them in every path we tread, and every society in which we mingle. But they are not of divine origin, in any such sense as to implicate God in the guilt of those, who yield to them. Yet they exist, it must be admitted, by divine permission, and have the effect to make trial of men's hearts, and tend to discover what dispositions prevail within them. "That I may prove them, saith the Lord, whether they will walk in my law or no." God knows when and where men will meet with temptations, and for wise reasons he allows them to be tried by them. But in no case does he, by any direct agency or influence, cause men to fall into sin by yielding to them. On the other hand, the petition does not authorize us to pray God to preserve us from all temptations, of every kind and degree; for then, as an apostle says, we "must needs go out of the world." No man can spend a single day in discharging the common duties of life, or in mingling in the ordinary business transactions of life, without meeting with temptations. And as this is impossible, and it being obviously no design of Christ to instruct us to pray God to take us out of the world, we must seek for some meaning consistent with other scripture, and with common sense. What, then, is the true interpretation?

There are two kinds, or classes, of temptations, besides those temptations which are common and unavoidable.

1. There are temptations which come in upon us like the waves of the sea. They are sudden and unexpected; powerful and tremendous. We are not, at the moment, prepared for them; and, if there be no succor at hand, we are overwhelmed. Or, to vary the figure, these temptations are like the "fiery darts" of the wicked one. They are shot from a bow which sends with surprising swiftness, and at a time when, may be, we are off our guard; and, unless some friendly hand ward them off, we are seriously, if not fatally wounded.

2. There is a second class of temptations, which may be denominated the seductive. These, if slower in their approach, are, perhaps, not less dangerous. They steal upon us insidiously, and take us captive, ere our sense of danger is awakened. Like as the incautious mariner is insensibly

drawn by the distant whirlpool towards its fatal center, nor perceives he his danger till too late—so smoothly and silently does he move—so temptation may allure us on, step by step, nor we perceive our danger, till retreat is impossible, and ruin inevitable.

Oh, how many thousands of our race—not merely those in the morning of life, upon whom temptation might be expected to exert a more baleful influence—have been cast down wounded! Strong men and mighty men have fallen; those who thought themselves “strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.” The Scriptures present us with some melancholy examples; and the annals of the Church with still more. Without the constant care and grace of God, no man is safe. We may rise happy and joyful in the morning—the light of God’s countenance beaming in upon us, and we may go forth to our business or our pleasure, and if God leave us but for a moment, we are caught in some snare set for us—or, laid prostrate by some enemy’s hand outstretched against us. Night sets in upon us, and finds us wretched and forlorn—perhaps solitary in our closet, pouring out our sorrows, and saying: Our sins, alas! how strong they be, And, like a violent sea, They break our duty, Lord, to thee, And hurry us away.

It is against such temptations, that the Savior enjoins us particularly to pray. We may not, indeed, be safe against any temptation, but certainly not against such as come upon us so insidiously as some do—perhaps in the garb of a friend; nor safe against others, which rush out upon us from behind some ambush, and lay us prostrate ere we are aware of an attack. Our only safety lies in the grace of God—restraining our enemies from making their assaults upon us; or, in case of an assault, hastening to our rescue. “If God be for us, who can be against us?” If, in the hour of our danger, he appear for our deliverance—

Satan may vent his sharpest spite, And all his legions roar;

Almighty mercy guards our life, And bounds his raging power. But is prayer against temptation our only duty? Does he fulfill the injunction of our Lord, who, to prayer, does not add watchfulness? With what sincerity does he offer this petition, who, the next hour, needlessly, exposes himself to those sources of temptation against which he has prayed? Is it wise for the reformed inebriate to go from the footstool to the tavern or the dram-shop? Is it safe for the young man to venture near to her “whose house inclineth unto death?” Shall the profane pray for non-conformity to the world, and then rush into scenes of gayety and folly, with the expectation of being preserved uncontaminated, because he has so prayed? We may not tempt the Lord our God. We must act in consistency with our supplications. We have ourselves something to do. It is not sufficient to pray to be kept from falling; we must avoid, as far as practicable, the occasions which lead men to fall. And if such be our resolutions, and such our practice, we may trust God to any extent we please; and he will either enable us to overcome, or make a way for our escape.

We must be watchful ev’ry hour, And pray, but never faint.

Matthew 6:13

Commentators generally have considered this, and the preceding clause, “lead us not into temptation,” as one, and the sixth petition of the Lord’s Prayer. Dr. Doddridge takes this view of the petition, which he paraphrases thus: “And do not bring us into circumstances of pressing temptation, lest our virtue should be vanquished, and our souls endangered by them: but, if we must be thus tried, do thou graciously rescue us from the power of the Evil One, that he may not

triumph in our sin and ruin.” The word “evil,” in the original, has the article, and hence, has been supposed to refer to the Evil One, or Satan. In this view, the idea would be: Deliver us from the snares or temptations of the Evil One.

And, surely, considering the representations of Scripture of the power and malignity of Satan, we have need not only to watch with daily and hourly circumspection, but to pray constantly for the divine protection against this enemy of our peace. The terms in which he is spoken of in the Bible, evince the greatness of his power, and the extent and subtlety of his influence. He is styled “the god of this world,”—the “prince of the power of the air,”—“a roaring lion,” — “the angel of the bottomless pit,” — “the great dragon,”—“the old serpent.” And he is said to “blind the minds of such as believe not;” “as working in the children of disobedience;” “as taking men captive at his will;” “as seeking whom he may devour;” “as deceiving the whole world.”

Against the wiles of such an adversary, we may well watch: we must constantly pray. He is not like an earthly enemy, whose approach may generally be seen; but he moves around, invisible to mortal eyes. And well does he know when the child of God has laid aside his armor; and when he is mingling in the gay and tempting world. He knows when, of a morning, he has not visited his closet, and has not there humbly sought the protection of his heavenly Father. And he is ever ready to take advantage of such a one; and of one, also, who may have strayed from the fold. The savage beast of the forest never pursues his prey with more determination; nor does the eagle ever dart upon the lamb of the fold with more delight than does Satan pursue and attack the unwary child of God.

Paul has a passage in his Epistle to the Ephesians, which confirms all we have said of the power and malignity of this arch enemy of believers: “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For ye wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”

Ah! is the contest, then, not against “flesh and blood?” We elsewhere read, Flesh, ’tis a dangerous foe to grace; And this accords with other representations: “The flesh lusteth against the spirit;” “to be carnally minded is death “fleshly.lusts war against the soul.” But the apostle has truth, nevertheless, on his side. The children of God have carnal appetites and propensities, against which they are to wage a daily warfare; but the apostle would seem to represent, that, strong and violent as the conflict is with these, the Christian has more powerful and dangerous enemies, against whom to fight; so much more deadly, that he might, in truth, say: “Brethren, ye wrestle not against flesh and blood! mighty as these are, ye have other enemies mightier still!—ye wrestle with principalities and powers!” The great contest is with the invisible rulers of the darkness of this world. And who, in his observation and experience, has not found the truth of this? How many sad examples does the history of Christians furnish of those who have fallen—fallen through the power of Satan, working upon the lusts and propensities of the flesh! How many have had occasion to put on the whole armor of God—to breast themselves, with all the power of faith and grace, against the “fiery darts” of the wicked one! How many have wept very sore, and could not be comforted, because they have been cast down wounded! For a time, Satan has triumphed. They have yielded to his overwhelming power, or his seductive influence; and the consequence has

been, that they have gone mourning for days and months.

Oh, we do need, as the apostle says, to be “strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.” Nothing short of this, will enable us to stand against the wiles of the devil; nothing else will give us the victory. If this be so, then— My soul, be on thy guard!

Ten thousand foes arise! And hosts of sins are pressing hard, To draw thee from the skies!

Oh, watch, and fight, and pray! The battle ne'er give o'er;

Renew it boldly every day, And help divine implore.

Nor think the vict'ry won; Nor once at ease sit down;

Thy arduous task will not be done, Till thou hast got thy crown.

But, while we thus give prominence to the idea that Satan is our great adversary, and, as such, is the evil against which we are specially directed to pray, it cannot but be our duty and privilege to pray against sin. This is an evil which we should avoid; and against which we are to watch and pray at all times, and in all places, and in all forms. To avoid sin is, in fact, to triumph over the Evil One—that being the great object which he has in view, in all the arts and temptations which he practices upon the children of God. But there are sins, doubtless, which the Christian is liable to commit, independent of any agency or influence of the

Great Adversary. His lusts and appetites may war against the soul, when Satan is not present to inflame them; the world, in the happiness of its scenes, in the ambition of its pursuits, in the intoxication of its pleasures, may tempt and ensnare the heart, and draw it away from God.

Against such evils, we cannot watch too faithfully; we cannot pray too earnestly and constantly. Sin is the Dagon of the soul; it is the canker which is ever eating; it is this which paralyzes our spiritual strength, and destroys all our spiritual beauty; it is this which has introduced “death and all our woe into the world.”

Sin, like a venomous disease, Infects our vital blood; The only balm is sovereign grace, And the physician, God.

Happy is it, if of this we are so sensible, as timely to secure the interposition of the great and almighty Physician in our behalf, to work grace within us, as a preventive against sin; or, if we have sinned, to deliver us from the evil consequences of it, through the atoning blood of Jesus. And this brings us to a brief consideration of another great blessing involved in this petition, namely: deliverance from the consequences of sin.

These are summed up in the word suffering. All men, even the pious, suffer in the present world, more or less, in consequence of sin. Against all suffering we may pray, in subordination to the will of God; or rather against any particular suffering: for, in order to be exempted from all suffering, it is probable that we “must needs go out of the world.” “Man is born unto trouble,” says Job, “as the sparks fly upward.” “In the world,” said our Savior to his disciples, “ye shall have tribulation.”

And, in truth, none, of all the sons of men, have been exempt from maladies, both of body and mind. And, while it is desirable to be delivered from that pain of body, and that agony of mind,

which overwhelm and unfit the soul from improving under such distressing visitations of trouble; and, while we may strongly and earnestly pray for deliverance from them, it is not well, perhaps, to wish or to pray for deliverance from all trouble, nor from all suffering. Says Job: "Behold! Happy is the man whom God correcteth; therefore, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord." "Blessed is the man," says the Psalmist, "whom thou chastenest, O Lord."—And, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray; but now have I kept thy word." "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous," says an apostle; "nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." This is the experience of thousands. Afflictions are not desirable in themselves. But they are often, by the grace of God, far more beneficial than prosperity. Uninterrupted prosperity has seldom, if ever, brought men to glory: severe and long-protracted sufferings have done it in a multitude of instances. Let us, then, pray to be delivered from the evil of misimproving afflictions, rather than to be delivered from the trials themselves. Let us remember, for our comfort, the words of Inspiration: "Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth;" or, what the divine poet has made a God of truth say:

Let not my children slight the stroke I, for chastisement, send; Nor faint beneath my kind rebuke, For I am still their friend. But there is one evil, against which we should pray by night and by day—the suffering for sin in the future world. But even that we may not pray against, excepting as we pray that we may become holy. Holiness is a condition of eternal life. God has established an eternal connection between sin and misery—between a life of wickedness here, and a life of suffering hereafter. No prayer for a dis severance of these can ever be answered: no one has a right so to mock God, as to pray for it. Nor is it desirable. Any different principle of procedure, on God's part, would confound virtue and vice; would shock the moral sense of the holy universe; would shake the moral government of God to its very foundation.

Hence, then, he that would be delivered from final and eternal suffering, must forsake sin. Against this, as an evil in itself, and an everlasting evil in its consequences, we should pray—pray as solemnly, as fervently, as unceasingly as the evils are great and enduring, which we would avoid, and the opposite blessings are vast and incomprehensible, which we would secure.

Matthew 6:13 The authenticity of this doxology, or conclusion of the Lord's Prayer, has been doubted by some eminent divines, for the reason that it is wanting in some ancient manuscripts. But, as Dr. Doddridge, and other excellent writers have observed, "it admirably suits and enforces every preceding petition." Besides, it is in exact accordance with other portions of the sacred canon, about which there is no doubt. And, moreover, it is not certain that it was not uttered by the Savior: and, if so, it is a legitimate part of this excellent model of prayer. It well agrees with the blessing with which David blessed the Lord, before the congregation of

Israel: "Blessed be thou, Lord God of Israel, our Father, for ever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty, for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine: thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all."

We have styled this a doxology. And, surely, ascription of praise may well be added to every prayer we offer; or rather constitute a part of it. Well may we rejoice that God reigns, and that "the kingdom, and the greatness of the kingdom, under the whole heaven," is His. Well may we praise

and thank him for those infinite and glorious attributes which constitute his character; for those blessings which daily flow forth from the inexhaustible treasures of his providence; for that grace which he has manifested, and will continue to manifest towards the guilty children of men.

Ascriptions of praise abound in the Scriptures. We are not surprised that they do abound. They are the natural out-pouring of the pious and grateful heart. In more than one instance, we find the Psalmist beginning with expressions the most sorrowful, and ending with praises the most joyful: "How long," says he, "wilt thou forget me, O Lord? For ever? How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?" But, before he closes the psalm, his harp is taken from the willows, and we hear him singing joyfully: "My heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me." Perhaps no one ever knew better how to praise than did the Psalmist. And who, of all the saints of the earlier dispensation, so abounded in this joyful exercise? Nor was it enough for him to praise God himself: he calls upon all intelligent beings to join in, with "sweet accord;" and even the brute creation, and various objects of nature, must help swell the chorus to the skies. The one hundred and forty-eighth psalm is a beautiful specimen of his skill in summoning the whole creation to unite in an anthem of praise to Jehovah. Every creature—angels—men—sun, moon, and stars—fire and hail—snow and vapor—mountains and hills—beasts and creeping things—all must so unite, and then:

Birds, ye must make His praise your theme;

Nature demands a song from you:

While the dumb fish that cut the stream, Leap up, and mam his praises too. Did our limits permit, we might cite numerous examples of praise, drawn from the writings of the apostles, which would show how well both dispensations—the old and the new—agree, in inculcating and producing that love and gratitude in the heart, which must find expression in open praise to God. Indeed, in all periods of the world, there have been some, and, in some periods, many, who have delighted to exalt and praise God on the throne; and their songs, in not a few instances, have partaken much of the glowing zeal and rapture of those who sing before the throne above.

Great as our joy is, still greater should it be in view of the glories of the Infinite Jehovah! He dwells in light which is inaccessible. He pours forth the beams of his glory to the ends of the universe; and, though those displays have been from eternity, so bright and wide-spread, they will continue on for ever. Those fountains will never cease; those tides of glory will never ebb. God's kingdom is an everlasting kingdom; and the subjects of that kingdom will continue to swell their anthems of praise when earthly temples—where they have sung sweetly, joyfully, rapturously— shall have crumbled to ruin. And who will not say for himself—

I'll praise Him while he lends me breath; And when my voice is lost in death, Praise shall employ my nobler powers: My days of praise shall ne'er be past, While life, and thought, and being last, Or immortality endures. But this conclusion of the Lord's Prayer is not only a doxology, but also a plea; and a plea founded upon the best of all bases, the glory of God. "It is connected with the prayer by the word 'for' to signify that all these things—the reign, power, and glory of God—will be manifested by granting these petitions. It is not because we are to be benefited, but that God's name and perfections are to be manifested. His glory is, then, the first and principal thing which we are to seek when we approach him. We are to suffer our concerns to be sunk, and lost sight of in

the superior glory and honor of his name and dominion. We are to seek temporal and eternal life, chiefly because the honor of our Maker will be promoted, and his name be more illustriously displayed to his creatures. He is to be 'first, last, supremest, best,' in our view; and all selfish and worldly views are to be absorbed in that one vast desire of the soul, that God may be 'all in all.'" In such a spirit, and with such desires for the honor and glory of God, should we spread our prayers before him. And, if His glory be the paramount desire—the ruling passion of the soul—there is no danger that we shall urge our suit too strongly; and there need be no fear that we shall plead in vain.

God is jealous for his honor. His glory will he not give to another. His children may pray: they may plead for blessings for themselves, and for others, but it must be in subordination to the glory of God. That is a good reason why we should solicit favors from God: that we are in want; that we are in trouble; that we need pardon—sanctification—eternal life. But it is a better reason—the best of all reasons which we can name, or think of—that, by granting these blessings, God's glory will be advanced. That glory is the sum of all good; the chief in value of all the desires which the human bosom can either conceive or cherish.

Never was a prayer offered to God, by a child of his, in any age or country, in vain, where a desire for the divine glory prompted that prayer; and where such desire was uppermost in the heart whence it proceeded. When we have attained to such a state of the heart, and the affections, as a permanent principle in our intercourse with heaven, we may hope, with some confidence, that we are nearly ready to participate in the song there sung: "Not unto us, O Lord! not unto us! but to thy name, be all the glory."

O happy souls that pray Where God appoints to hear!

O happy men that pay Their constant service there!

They praise thee still; And happy they, That love the way To Zion's hill.

075. The Savior's Devotional Habits.

The Savior's Devotional Habits.

Matthew 14:23

See also, Mark 6:46.—John 6:15.

We find Jesus again upon a mountain, and alone—for what purpose? “To view the Judean landscape?” asks a writer; “while the setting sun was flushing the lake of Gennesaret, and flinging his yellow radiance over the adjacent wilderness? No.” Was it “that he might watch the rising of the evening-star, and mark the lamps of heaven kindling in clusters and constellations throughout the hemisphere? No.” Was it to enjoy repose? That he might well covet, after a day spent in imparting bread to hungry thousands, and in ministering relief to the sons and daughters of woe, Matthew 14:14. But it was not thus that he pleased himself. He ascended the mountain to pray—to hide himself from the multitude, who, under the influence of gratitude and admiration at the stupendous miracles he had wrought, were desirous of proclaiming him king—i.e. the Messiah, whom they had expected; with the further view, doubtless, of constraining him to assume the character and titles of an earthly prince. John 6:15. From human honors, so coveted by the ambitious of the world, Jesus shrunk and retired—retired for private prayer—thus setting a noble example for all who are pressed with ill-timed human honors and applause. “Nothing is better,” it has been well said, “to keep the mind humble and unambitious, than to seek some lonely place; to shut out the world, with all its honors; to realize that the great God, before whom all creatures and all honors sink to nothing, is round about us; and to ask him to keep us from pride and vain-glory.” “Devotional solitude,” says Philip, “is commended by the high example, and commanded by the high authority of the Savior.”

Cold mountains, and the midnight air, Witness'd the fervor of his prayer. And we learn, from his example, not that we must of course ascend a mountain to pray. He resorted there from necessity—not from choice; because, as Son of Man, he had not where to lay his head; no home, no closet. To those who have both, his command is: “Enter into thy closet.” And his example teaches us that inconvenience must not prevent secret prayer. Here was the Savior upon a lonely mountain—exposed to the winds and dews of night—the ground damp beneath his knees, and the air chill around him; and yet he prayed—prayed long: the morning-star often finding him where the evening-star had left him. We have no such inconveniences to surmount. What is a cold room in winter, or a close room in summer, compared to the hoary side of a bleak and dreary mountain at midnight? And yet, how often are cold and heat allowed to hinder or hurry our secret prayer!

“The Savior's example proves that fatigue of labor must not prevent secret prayer. He had spent the day, until the evening, in active exertions among the multitude that followed him into the wilderness. During all the time, he had been under a burning sun, in a sandy desert; and had, afterwards, to ascend the mountain alone. And there, neither shelter nor refreshment awaited him; but, although thus exhausted and exposed, he closed the labors of the day by prayer. Now, his

example ought to have all the authority of a law; all the influence of a charm upon his disciples. We do not come home more fatigued than he was. He had no house—no domestic comforts; neither shelter, nor pillow for his sacred head: and yet, he went apart to pray. He will remind the prayerless of this fact.

“The Savior’s example proves that even deeds of charity, and great exertions for the poor and afflicted, must not set aside secret prayer. He closed a day of mighty effort on behalf of suffering humanity, by going apart to pray. And, surely, if serving others must not prevent devotional solitude, serving ourselves must not be allowed to do so: if acts of charity will not excuse neglect, the labors of industry cannot: if giving money to the poor, be no plea for the omission of prayer, making money is not a valid one. Accordingly, while ‘diligence in business’ is expressly enjoined, ‘fervency of spirit’ in prayer, rests upon the same high and unalterable authority. Pray or perish is the alternative set before us in gospel.

“The Savior’s example proves that no strength of character or of grace, can render devotional solitude unnecessary.

He who had the spirit without measure—who knew no sin— who was full of grace, and in whom Satan could find nothing to work upon—He went apart to pray. He held neither the fullness of his Godhead, nor the perfection of his humanity, as a reason for restraining prayer. And, surely, nothing we have ‘attained,’ can render us independent of secret devotion! ‘The servant is not greater than his Lord.’ If, therefore, Satan, or sloth, or pride, say we may do with less prayer than the first, let us hear the insinuation as we should the assertion, that we can do with less glorying in the cross than we began with.

“Solitude is also peculiarly suitable to the worst frames of a Christian’s mind. The tones and terms in which backsliding, or, indeed, any sin, can be deplored in the domestic or social circle, are both too general and tame for the emotions of a contrite spirit. David was alone when he said:

‘I have gone astray like a lost sheep.’ Asaph was alone when he said: ‘I was as a beast before thee.’ Ephraim was alone when he smote upon his thigh, and acknowledged that he had been as ‘a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke.’ And our secret sorrows and shames are not fit even for the ear of our families. They might be misunderstood and misinterpreted by others; whereas, He who heareth in secret, can heal in secret. And what a sanctuary is solitude for the expression of all those feelings which, even at home, can only be breathed in general and gentle terms! It will not do to utter before our families all our fears of death, nor all our anxieties for them. It will not do to unburden and unbosom all the heart to any one but God. God seeth and heareth in secret. What a mercy! What a wise and kind arrangement! ‘It is good for me to draw nigh unto God, alone!’” (Philip’s Guide to the Devotional.)

076. Mark.

Mark.

077. Prayer Of Christ In A Solitary Place.

Prayer Of Christ In A Solitary Place.

Mark 1:35.

(See also Luke 4:42.)

It has been beautifully said of the Redeemer, “that often, at the close of a laborious day, when his wearied frame required repose, the children of affliction besieged his retreat, and implored his help. And did they ever seek in vain? Wearied and worn as he was, ‘he pleased not himself;’ he went forth, and patiently listened to all their tales of woe; tasted their several complaints; raised each suppliant from the dust, nor left them till he had absorbed their sufferings, and healed them all.”

Thus had he been employed one Sabbath evening, after the day itself had been spent in preaching, and in kindred acts of kindness and compassion. Not a single sufferer had departed unrelieved. The raving demoniac of the morning might, that evening, be seen seated with his friends—perhaps with his wife and children—calm, rational, and happy; and those who, for months and years, had not tasted the sweets of repose, extinguished their lamps, and slept sweetly “till morning light.” By most, such a day and evening of toil, especially in works of love, would have been followed, not only by a night, but a day of rest. But how was it with the Redeemer? Foreseeing that what he had done would immediately open a wide field of duty, into which he must enter, and for which he would be prepared, he casts off sleep, and, while the day was just dawning, [1] he leaves his disciples, yet slumbering, and goes forth into a solitary place to pray.

[1] Mark says, “a great while before day.” Luke says, “when it was day.” The original in Mark means, “while there was yet much appearance of night.” This is true at day-break, the time to which Luke refers—when it was daylight, or just at daybreak.

Jesus was himself holy, and, therefore, needed not, as we need, to pray for repentance, or for the forgiveness of sin. But he had temptations, against which to struggle, and enemies, with whom to contend. He had, also, a work of incomprehensible importance to accomplish, and which was now opening before him in all its magnitude. To fulfill this duty, he needed the direct and constant aid of his Heavenly Father. It was befitting him, therefore, that he should seek that aid, as did the children of men, by prayer. But, may be, he also coveted a season of retirement, when he might hold high and holy fellowship with God, away from human observation, and free from worldly interruption. Thus, would his thoughts maintain their proper elevation above the world; thus, would his holy affections receive a new and divine impulse; and thus, his confidence in God be confirmed, and his soul and body be strengthened for the fresh toils which lay before him. Besides, he doubtless designed to set his disciples an example, not only of secret devotion, but of devotion in the morning, and, may be, of devotion on the morning following the Sabbath. This last remark may serve to introduce to the notice, of our readers a neglect, which the Savior’s example rebukes, but which, it is feared, is common among Christians—the omission of secret devotion on

Monday morning. It is easy to assign reasons for this omission, although they are, by no means, either a justification, or even palliation of it. That morning commonly brings with it a more than ordinary share of business. Domestic concerns, in a measure neglected during the Sabbath, require additional care. The wheels of business, within and abroad, are again to be set in motion. The mind and body, invigorated by rest, feel new life and animation, and are the more ready to follow out the unfinished plans of the by-gone week, or to originate and enter upon new schemes. The men of the world are on the alert; and the temptation to the Christian, engaged in business, is strong to hasten his preparation to enter the field, the store, or the workshop, as early as his neighbor. The consequence of this worldly feeling, in some families, is, that not only is family prayer omitted, or signally shortened; but, what is probably more common, and equally, if not still more injurious, the closet is either not visited at all, or its devotions are so hurried, that God is as greatly dishonored as if the service were not performed at all; and the soul itself is even more injured. The conscience may, indeed, seem to be quieted, but its sensibilities are blunted; and no marvel, if, before Monday evening, that neglect of a throne of grace should be followed by wounds still more grievous. Nay, this neglect, thus once begun, the soul commences its descent, as it were, upon an inclined plane; and happy, thrice happy, if some providence, some friendly admonition, or some religious meeting occurs, during the week, by which that descent is stayed. It is dangerous for the Christian to feel, on a Monday morning, that he is "rich, and increased in goods;" that he has received spiritual food sufficient for he week; that the momentum imparted will keep the spiritual bark in motion, against worldly currents, without further impulse. The Christian, who thus feels and reasons, is no credit to his profession; is making no progress in the divine life, and does not find his religion, as it might be, a source of "joy unspeakable, and full of glory."

Such Christians, the example of the Savior rebukes. He had a day of toil before him; and, though it was to be spiritual toil, yet, as it would open early, he was up, and ready to attend to the annunciation of his disciples—"All men seek for thee." The poet has said:

Few bring back at eve, Immaculate, the manners of the mom. With equal, and, perhaps, with more truth, he might have said this in relation to the close, compared with the beginning, of the week. A morning begun without prayer, is usually followed by a day devoid of spiritual improvement and spiritual joy; or, as a writer has better expressed it: "the pious feelings, the religious enjoyment through the day, will be according to the state of the heart in the morning; and can, therefore, be measured by our faithfulness in early secret prayer."

Christian reader! Are you rebuked by this example of your Lord? Receive it, I pray you, in the spirit of meekness, and profit by it. Your first, your last, your highest business, is to seek the glory of God in the fulfillment of duty. "Seek first the kingdom of God." Do all for the glory of God. And mark it, and remember it, as a truth, to which there is no exception—there never was, and never will be, to the end of time, an exception—no individual, and no family, were ever the poorer—none ever the less thriving, for being faithful to God in prayer.

There is one class of Christians, who, I fear, are particularly obnoxious to the charge of neglecting morning prayer:

I mean those who reside in large cities, and who, through the forms and customs of society, keep so late hours, that, through midnight weariness and fatigue, they are compelled to trench greatly upon the hours of morning for needful rest; and, consequently, after rising, all is hurry and bustle,

in preparation for the business of the day. Such Christians, I fear, make their visits to their closets, if they visit them at all, as short and ceremonious as are their fashionable calls upon their acquaintances. "How different was the conduct of the Savior from such! He knew the value of the morning hours; he rose, while the world was still; he saw, when the light spread abroad from the east, with fresh tokens of his Father's presence; and joined with the universal creation in offering praise to the every-where-present God." The good rule to adopt, and practice upon, is that so beautifully expressed by the Psalmist, as versified by Watts:

Early, my God, without delay, I haste to seek thy face;
My thirsty spirit faints away, Without thy cheering grace.

078. Luke.

Luke.

079. Prayer Of Zacharias And The Multitude.

Prayer Of Zacharias And The Multitude.

Luke 1:10-13.

About four hundred years had now elapsed since Malachi, the last of the prophets, had uttered that remarkable prediction:—"Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me." Malachi 3:1. During this long period, the Jewish church had experienced a variety of fortune. Party divisions had sprung up, and the bitterness and intolerance of party were rife. False and pernicious doctrines were prevalent. Traditions had been invested with undue importance. Ceremonies, unmeaning, and even immoral, had been introduced. A lamentable departure from the pure and spiritual worship of God, was generally to be observed. Yet, the true church was existing, and the temple-worship was continued. There were a few, also, who were waiting for the "consolation of Israel;" and who were looking out with intense anxiety upon the spiritual horizon, for the rising of some sign of the coming of the "messenger of the covenant." Indeed, that anxiety, it is thought, had, for some time, been increasing; and, at length, so general was the expectation of the speedy fulfillment of the prophecies, touching the coming of the Messiah, that the faithful in the church were praying for the event with unwonted fervor. When God would signally bless his people, he imparts a spirit of supplication for the blessing; and, now, that the greatest of blessings was in the divine councils near at hand, it was befitting that the church should be correspondingly engaged in supplicating its bestowment. At length, it fell to the lot of Zacharias, a priest of the course of Abia, to officiate a week, in the morning and evening service of the temple. The Scriptures make honorable mention of both him and Elisabeth his wife. "They were righteous before God," and distinguished for their faithful observance of the "moral commands, as well as ceremonial ordinances and institutions," of the Lord. In former years, they had ardently desired the blessing of children— a blessing generally coveted by pious married Jews; but the time had now passed when they longer hoped to be permitted to rejoice as parents. For that joy, it seems, they had often prayed; but, as their supplications in that respect had not been favorably answered, they had resigned themselves to the good pleasure of God, and were contented. But God was yet designing to fulfill their wishes; and, though he should answer their requests seemingly late, it would be in season for his own plans, and for the proof that Praying breath is never spent in vain. The duty of the priest, ordinarily, consisted in burning incense on the golden altar, within the sanctuary, morning and evening, while the people collected without, in the courts of the temple, silently offered up their prayers to God. In the performance of his duty, Zacharias, one evening, entered the temple. A concourse of people had assembled— so great as to be called, by the sacred historian, "a multitude;" which, being unusual on ordinary days, Dr. Lightfoot thinks it was the Sabbath, when a greater number would likely be in attendance. But is it not more likely to have resulted from some special impulse of the Spirit, moving upon their hearts, and inclining them in greater numbers to the temple, to pray for the signal blessing which was to be announced; and, also, to be witnesses of the marvelous scenes which were to transpire? Be that, however, as it may, a "multitude" was there. The hour had arrived. Zacharias enters the sanctuary, and the

smoke of incense rises upon the altar of God. ("Praying without at the time of incense."—This, observes the pious Doddridge, was the foundation of that elegant figure, by which prayer is so often compared to incense; See Psalms 141:2; Malachi 1:2; Revelation 8:3-4; and, perhaps, one reason for ordaining incense, might be to intimate the acceptance of those pious prayers which were to accompany it.) He betakes himself to devout and solemn worship. The people without, at the same time, bend in deep and silent devotion. And what was the burden of those supplications?—that of Zacharias?—that of the multitude? We are left to conjecture; but it is no improbable conjecture, looking at the result, that they were led, by the same Spirit, to pray for the speedy accomplishment of the promises, regarding the appearance of the Messiah. We shortly after read of some who were anxiously looking for the "consolation of Israel." The Jewish nation was suffering more and more, under the tyranny and oppression of Herod; and what more natural than that they should give vent to their grief before God, and pray for the speedy appearance of their expected Deliverer?

Suddenly, an angel is observed by Zacharias, standing on the right side of the altar. But what means this unexpected interruption? Whence, and on what errand, has this celestial messenger come? The excited fears of Zacharias are soon allayed, and his mental inquiries answered. "Thy prayer is heard." What prayer? That which he had at this time been offering? Yes; but it was not a prayer for a son. That blessing he had ceased to hope for; but he had been preferring his supplication (in unison, we think, with the "multitude" without) for the redemption of Israel—for the appearance of the long-expected Messiah. Yes; thy prayer is heard;" the day hastens when the "messenger of the covenant shall come to his temple;" but his "messenger" must first come; and I am commissioned to announce him to you in a son, which Elisabeth thy wife shall bear to thee. Thou hast often prayed for a son; thou hast now prayed for the advent of Israel's deliverer—this, thy prayer, shall be answered: but it involves in it an answer to thy prayer, often uttered, for the birth of a son—a son in thine old age: "and thou shalt have joy and gladness, and many shall rejoice at his birth." The faith of Zacharias is staggered, and a temporary, but signal rebuke follows, in token of the divine displeasure. But the weakness of his faith sets not aside the promised blessing. In due time, he clasps in his arms a blessing long sought, a son—the herald of Him who was to appear as the "Light of the world." He names him, and instantly his tongue is loosed; and, inspired by the Spirit, he utters a prophetic song of surpassing beauty.

There is much that is delightful in these historical incidents, in regard to prayer. We learn not only that the true Israel of God were a praying people, and that, probably, during the long period which followed the cessation of prophetic communications, but also that, notwithstanding the unconditional promises of God that the Messiah should come, they deemed it their duty, and their privilege, to pray for the blessing. It has always been thus, and thus it will continue to the end of time. God promises blessings, and his people pray for them. God designs to send them down, but the house of Israel must inquire and seek after them. They must pray for them; they will pray for them. Between those promises and those prayers, there is an established connection. The latter not only draw them down, but prepare the heart to appreciate and improve them.

It is a quaint, but, nevertheless, just, and even forcible remark of Henry, that "prayers of faith are filed in heaven; and, though not presently answered, are not forgotten. Prayers made when we are young, and coming into the world, may be answered when we are old, and going out of the world." Many a youth, doubtless, who has yielded his heart to God, and been faithful and persevering in

prayer, in the morning of his days, has not only then, but through life, found special favor with God. His supplications—not one of them has been forgotten before God. The day of his espousals—the kindness of his youth, have been remembered; and, while his ungodly companions and friends have passed on through a prayerless and ungodly life, and have found the closing years of that life rendered dark and gloomy by clouds and storms, the evening of his days sees his sun going down, mild and unobscured. It was his prayer in his youth, and in the meridian of his days:

Cast me not off when strength declines,— When hoary hairs arise; But round me let thy glory shine, Whene'er thy servant dies. And so it proves. It may further be observed, that blessings prayed for are sometimes deferred until others are sought; in granting which latter, the former are also conferred. Zacharias had often prayed for a son. This is, indeed, not forgotten; but not until his prayer for the redemption of Israel is answered, is that former blessing bestowed. Prayers go on, rolling up, until some one prayer is answered; and, with that blessing, the gate of heaven is, as it were, opened, and a tide of blessings come pouring upon us.

How often is it, that the children of God pray for mercies; and, when God indicates to them that they are near at hand, they will not believe it. To Zacharias, it is announced, that his prayer is heard—he shall embrace a son.—“No, Lord, I cannot believe it!” The church prays for the liberation of Peter—and he stands at the door while they were yet praying; but the messenger who imparts the happy news is pronounced “mad!” Happy is it, that our Heavenly Father does not take advantage of our unbelief. He may rebuke it; but, nevertheless, the blessing is not withheld.

080. Prayer Of Jesus Before Choosing His Apostles.

Prayer Of Jesus Before Choosing His Apostles.

Luke 6:12. A measure deeply involving the interests of the kingdom, which the Redeemer was about to set up, lay distinctly before him. To prepare himself to act with wisdom, in reference to it, was his object.

Only a brief period had elapsed since his entrance upon his public ministry; but it had sufficed to awaken in the public mind a deep interest in him. That mind was roused. The inquiries were abroad: "Who is this? What doctrines are these? Could any but the promised son of David work such wonders?"

Nay, many were already believing on him; a multitude of others were daily pressing round, prepared to flow with the popular tide. The time for action had arrived. His kingdom must be set up; his standard be raised. As it was part of his plan ultimately to carry on his cause by the instrumentality of men, it was necessary thus early to select such as would enter into his views; who would feel the magnitude and importance of the work, which he was designing to accomplish; who would be willing to forsake all for his sake, and toil in his service; and with whom he might safely leave the spiritual interests of a world, when he should ascend to his mediatorial throne. A mistake here might retard, and even prove fatal to, the great object of his mission. For it is to be remembered that Jesus, as Mediator, was dependent upon the Father for wisdom to direct him. That wisdom he sought and obtained; sought it by prayer and supplication, and exercised it in relation to all his measures as dependent, and with a desire to please his Father. True, there was no doubt and no hesitation; for as his every thought and wish was to honor God, so he had the most perfect reliance upon the infinite wisdom of Jehovah, upon which he cast himself for guidance, in every emergency of his eventful life.

And, now, in reference to the selection of those who were to share his toils on earth, and whom he would leave to communicate his doctrines and spread his cause, what does he do? Lean to his own wisdom? No. Consult the friends whose kindness and confidence he had won? No. He needed the higher direction—the loftier wisdom of the Father. With this in view, he retires from the presence and interruption of the world. He ascends a mountain, amidst whose solitude he might be undisturbed, while from its top he should seek wisdom to guide him.

Here, then, behold him, as night gathers her folds about him. Does he sleep? No; he prays. The hum of the busy population on the plain below gradually ceases, and is still. The flocks rest; the shepherds repose. But the Son of God is still holding high and holy communion with his Father; nor are his ardent and importunate supplications intermitted till the break of day. He descends the mountain with a calm and assured heart. He calls his disciples to him; makes the important selection of twelve of their number; whom he names "apostles;" whom he admits to his special love and friendship, and whom he proceeds to instruct, as the future heralds of his gospel, and the subordinate lights of the world.

How many men, in high and responsible stations, art rebuked by this example of Jesus! With more wisdom than all of them, he still seeks wisdom from God. Not one measure was more important to the interests of his kingdom, than that of selecting the instruments by whom its affairs should be conducted after his ascension. Under this conviction, he takes the only, yet sure, method to secure those who would prove “faithful unto death.”

How differently would the affairs of nations and kingdoms have proceeded, had kings and governors sought the “wisdom that is above,” to aid them in the selection of officers of trust and authority! Had cabinets been formed, and ministers, secretaries, ambassadors, been selected in dependence upon wisdom sought in humble, fervent prayer—what perplexities—what entanglements with foreign powers—what wars, had been avoided! And the crown which has been worn with sorrow and anxiety, or the office which has proved only a post of bitter disappointment, would have been won and held in peace, and with honor and pleasure. Joseph is entrusted with power by the monarch of Egypt; and he proves the salvation of the kingdom. Daniel is called to the councils of the proud and imperious Nebuchadnezzar; and he renders services beyond the combined wisdom of the wise men of the empire.

It stands out, and will remain an important and glorious truth, while the world shall stand, that counsel sought of God will not be in vain. Who can estimate the value of the prayers offered by Moses for the children of Israel? Who can say that, but for the prayers of that pious and holy man, Mr. John Robinson, and his flock, on the eve of the departure of our pilgrim-fathers from their native shore, the Mayflower might not have foundered in the waves of the Atlantic? Who, that knows the fact, does not impute the success of the American arms, in our Revolutionary struggle, as much to the prayers of Washington as to the courage and bravery of our soldiers. Or, to go back to the era of the Reformation, and to that interesting crisis in its history when Luther was to appear before that august assembly of electors, dukes, margraves, archbishops, bishops, with Charles V. at their head, to plead the cause of God and truth. No one but his great Master ever had such a weight upon him.

He was cited to appear at four o'clock in the afternoon of the 17th of April. On the morning of that day, he was for a brief space almost overwhelmed. “God’s face seemed to be veiled, and his faith forsook him: his enemies seemed to multiply before him, and his imagination was overcome by the aspect of his dangers. His soul was like a ship driven by a violent tempest, rocked from side to side,—one moment plunged in the abyss, and the next carried up to heaven. In that hour of bitter trial—when he drank of the cup of Christ—an hour which to him was as the garden of Gethsemane, he threw himself with his face upon the earth, and uttered those broken cries, which we cannot understand, without entering in thought into the anguish of those deeps whence they rose to God. “Oh God, Almighty God everlasting! how dreadful is the world! behold how its mouth opens to swallow me up, and how small is my faith in Thee! . . . Oh, the weakness of the flesh and the power of Satan! If I am to depend upon any strength of this world—all is over. . . . The knell is struck . . . Sentence is gone forth . . . O God! O God! O thou my God! Help me against all the wisdom of this world. Do this, I beseech thee; thou shouldst do this by thy own mighty power The work is not mine, but Thine. I have no business here ... I have nothing to contend for with these great men of the world! I would gladly pass my days in happiness and peace. But the cause is Thine . . . and it is righteous and everlasting! O Lord! help me! O faithful and unchangeable God! I lean not upon man. It were vain! Whatever is of man is tottering, whatever proceeds from him

must fail. My God! my God! dost thou not hear? My God! art thou no longer living? Nay, thou canst not die! Thou dost but hide Thyself. Thou hast chosen me for this work. I know it! . . . Therefore, O God, accomplish thine own will! Forsake me not, for the sake of thy well-beloved Son, Jesus Christ, my defense, my buckler, and my stronghold.”

After a moment of silent struggle, he continued, “Lord— where art thou? My God where art thou? Come! I pray thee, I am ready.... Behold me prepared to lay down my life for thy truth . . . suffering like a lamb. For the cause is holy. It is thine own!I will not let thee go! No, nor yet for all eternity! And though the world should be thronged with devils—and this body, which is the work of thine hands, should be cast forth, trodden under foot, cut in pieces consumed to ashes my soul is thine.

Yes, I have thine own word to assure me of it. My soul belongs to thee, and will abide with thee for ever. Amen! O God send help Amen.” (D’Aubigne’s Reformation, vol. II. p. 223, 4).

“This prayer discloses to us Luther and the Reformation.” It discovers the secret source of his strength and courage. It reveals to us the true cause of his success, humble and despised as he was. When I read this prayer—its fervency, its pathos, its eloquence, its importunity, its disinterestedness, its mighty hold on the strength and faithfulness and promises of God—I no longer wonder that the single monk of Wittemberg was more powerful than all the crowned and mitred heads found in the memorable Diet of Worms.

Just as the author had reached this place, the public papers announced the arrival of a steamer from England, with the intelligence of a change of ministry in that country. It was a natural question, Did Queen Victoria, before authorizing the new premier to form a cabinet—did she retire to her closet, and ask counsel of God? Before selecting his apostles, the Lord Jesus spent a whole night in prayer on a mountain’s top. Oh, if our kings, and queens, and presidents, before selecting their counselors, would follow the example of the Prince of Peace, and seek the guidance of God as to their choice, what a blessing might they not prove to the world! Many a crown would have sat lighter on royal brows; many a presidential chair would have been a place of comparative ease. The fires of many a persecution would never have been lighted; the horrors of many a war would never have existed.

081. The Second Delivery Of The Lord's Prayer.

The Second Delivery Of The Lord's Prayer.

Luke 11:1-13.

"There were two occasions," observes a writer, "on which our Savior delivered that form of prayer, which is known by his name. The first was in the sermon on the mount, about the time of the Pentecost; the second was in answer to the request made him in the words recited about the Feast of Tabernacles, many months afterwards. You are not to confound the two occasions, as though the Evangelists Matthew and Luke had but given different accounts of one and the same delivery. The occasions were wholly dissimilar, separated by a considerable interval of time: on the one, Christ gave the prayer of himself, with nothing to lead to it but his own wish to interest; whereas, on the other, he was distinctly asked by one of his disciples, who, probably, did but speak in the name of the others." The form, in both cases, was essentially the same—yet not entirely. In the one, the word "debts" is used; in the other "sins." Luke says: "Give us day by day;" Matthew: "Give us this day, our daily bread." There is, however, a more important and noticeable variation—the omission in Luke of the doxology: "For thine is the kingdom," etc., which is found in the form given in Matthew. The writer already quoted, (Melville,) hence infers that the prayer in the sermon on the mount, was a form designed for public use, or temple worship; as, according to Lightfoot and others, public prayers in the temple, were wont to be concluded with some sort of doxology; and our Savior is thought so far to have accommodated the form he gave to Jewish usage. But whether this conjecture be well founded. may admit of doubt. It cannot be thought that the disciples should have forgotten that form which Christ had given them; and, strange, indeed, would it seem, if that was designed for public services, and had been only so used, that the disciples had not earlier made application for a form adapted to private use. Had they, then, not prayed in secret? If they had, what form, if any, had they used? The probability, therefore, is, that the form given by John to his disciples, to which allusion is made, so far differed from that given by the Savior to his disciples, as to attract the attention of the latter, and to excite their inquiry, whether some variation, or addition to that already given them by Christ, might not be desirable. They, therefore, on a certain occasion of the Redeemer's offering prayer—whether in private or otherwise, is not stated—proceeded to ask him, "as he ceased," to give them further and fuller instructions regarding prayer, if such were, in his opinion, important. By repeating the same form, with only some minor differences of expression, Christ, evidently, would have his disciples understand that nothing further was necessary. By varying the language in some slight degree, he, perhaps, intended to show that they were not bound to just those words, but might say them according as circumstances should require. The Savior, however, seized the opportunity thus presented to impart instructions regarding prayer, which have thrown around that duty and privilege endearments which have been, and will be valued to the end of time. In a manner the most beautiful, as well as the most forcible, he proceeds to illustrate the power and propriety of persevering and importunate prayer. Should a supperless traveler, says he, arrive at your residence late at night, and at a time when you was not prepared to entertain him, you would

naturally step to a neighboring friend to obtain bread to set before him. Your friend might have retired; and, at your call, might plead that circumstance, as a reason why he should not be disturbed. If your necessities were not urgent, you would accept this excuse, and retire; but, if imperious, what expedient would you adopt to obtain the favor desired? You would continue to knock or call; you would set forth your necessities by every argument likely to influence; and, though he might not respond, because you are his friend, or because of your various arguments, he will, at length, rise, and give you, simply because of your importunity. "The word importunity denotes perseverance in an object, without due regard to time and place, or circumstances; an improper perseverance. By this your friend is influenced. Rather than be disturbed, he rises, and gives you what you ask."

Such is the illustration which Christ gives of the power of importunity. We see its effects in relation to man; and he says it has similar power with God. He introduces it for the kind and express purpose of showing his disciples how they might obtain blessings which seemed, at first, to be denied, but which are important and essential. A thousand questions, so to speak, might here be asked—difficult to answer; powerful objections be urged—difficult to meet; but that prayer is answered we know; and equally well are we assured that blessings come in answer to fervent, importunate prayer, which would not be sent down in answer to supplications, were they not thus fervent and importunate. Let the infidel weary himself with his array of difficulties—and the skeptic, with his list of philosophical objections: the humble disciple of Jesus has a reply which satisfies him, if not them. "Christ declares by an apostle, (James 5:16,) that earnest, energetic prayer avails much; and, on looking into the oracles of God, I find recorded instances of answers to such prayers."

Christ adds: "Ask"—"seek"—"knock;" and the promise is, that what is thus sought, shall be given. Not, indeed, immediately, as a matter of course. That might be inconsistent on the part of God, and even injurious to ourselves, or others connected with us. We may not be prepared for the favor sought. But let no one despair. If it be for our good, it will not be withheld. Let us first ask aright; let us see that our minds are in a proper state; let us feel our need of the blessing sought; let us inquire whether God has promised such a blessing; and then let us persevere until God gives it, or some blessing more important. God does not always give the identical blessing asked; he may give us something better. The parent may see that the favor asked by his child might ruin him, and he withholds it; he may see that it would be beneficial, but he can bestow that which is far more important to his welfare. Paul besought the Lord that the thorn might be removed; but God knew how to bestow a greater favor, which he did, in making his grace sufficient for him. In respect to importunity for temporal blessings—such as wealth, office, honor, success in worldly enterprise—we may well manifest a becoming modesty. We may, indeed, plead for any thing lawful; but it should be in submission to the Divine will, and the more should this feeling predominate as the ultimate utility of the blessing may be problematical. I cannot know whether wealth, or office, or human honor, would subserve my spiritual, or even worldly good. But there are blessings, of whose value and importance, in respect to himself, every individual may absolutely know; and for which he may pray, and the gift of which he may urge, and with an importunity in respect to which, there is little danger of excess; although, in regard to every blessing, whether it be temporal or spiritual, and for which we are dependent upon God, we should say, "as to measure and time, not our wills, but thine, be done."

Christ encourages us to “ask,” “seek,” and “knock,” by the conduct of parents. What parent, unless he be a monster, responds to the petition of a child, by giving him a stone, instead of bread; or, what is worse, a serpent, instead of a fish? Oh no, this is not the law of parental kindness; but to listen to the wants of children, and find pleasure in gratifying them. The pity of the Lord, To those that fear his name, Is such as tender parents feel;

Nay, God is better and kinder than the most tender parent; and therefore, with what confidence may we not come as his children, and ask the blessings we need. Christ says parents are evil, i.e. are imperfect, often partial, blind, and sometimes passionate; but God is free from all such imperfections; and, therefore, ever ready to bestow real blessings upon his children, and will bestow them in answer to importunate prayer; when, without such prayer, there is no reason to believe that they would be sent down. What says the prophet Hosea of Jacob, at Peniel? “By his strength, he had power over the angel, and prevailed; he wept, and made supplication to him.” What said God to Moses, when the Israelites had greatly provoked him? “Now, therefore, let me alone, that I may consume them.” Do not pray—do not urge me. But Moses could not see his people cut off in wrath, however just their destruction would be. He, therefore, prays—pleads; and, the Psalmist says that, had he not thrown himself, as he did, into the breach, the Lord would have destroyed them. But the Lord could not destroy Israel, while Moses was thus pleading. Hence, we read: “the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.” And at another time, (Numbers 14) “I will smite this people.” “But,” said Moses, “the Egyptians will hear of it, and they will say, thou didst slay them because thou wast not able to bring them into the land which thou didst promise to give them rather let thy praise be manifold in forgiving them.” “And the Lord said, I have pardoned them according to thy word.” Thus God has, on many occasions, put on the appearance of alteration, in order to encourage holy importunity and perseverance, on the part of his people. Let the children of God imitate these holy men; let them plead—importune, as they may do—and who will dare say, that they will not prevail? Christ says they will.

082. The Importunate Widow.

The Importunate Widow.

Luke 18:1-8. A few years since, a youth presented himself before the American ambassador, resident at the court of St. Petersburg, and requested to know by what means he might obtain an interview with the emperor. The ambassador cast an eye upon him: he bore the aspect of one uneducated and unmannered, but enterprising and determined.

“Your country, my lad?” inquired the ambassador.

“I’m from America,” he replied; “and I wish to obtain an interview with the emperor.”

“It is not easy,” said the ambassador, “for any foreigner to gain admittance to the emperor; but very difficult for one who, like yourself, seems to have nothing upon which to base a claim.”

“Well,” said the youth, nothing daunted, “I must see him; and please inform me by what means I can effect my object.”

“Really,” said the ambassador, “I do not know; but, if you must see him, I advise you to apply to the chancellor of the empire.”

Ah, thought I, reflecting upon this incident, blessed be God, that though it be difficult to gain audience with the sovereigns of this world, none are debarred an audience with the King of kings. The poorest and the most abject are invited, and are welcome. And no such preparations are necessary, to be acceptable to him, as are required at earthly courts: no court-dress; no equipage; no forms and ceremonies. And, then, the interview with the earthly monarch is generally short; a few minutes only; and if a petition be preferred, may be you will not be allowed time to present it, as its importance, in your estimation, demands. But, what is of still more consequence, if you fail to secure the ear of royalty on the first application, a second opportunity is not likely to be afforded.

True, there is a preparation—a needful and important preparation, on the part of him who would find audience with God; but it is not of the exterior, but of the heart. “The sacrifices of God are a broken heart and a contrite spirit.” “He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” Nor is there but a single audience-chamber where God may be sought: but he invites us to the closet—to the grove—to the mountain; we may make a temple of any spot in the wide realm of nature, and God is there. And, then, our requests may be made to him—may be renewed—may be urged, and, if not granted, we may come again and again; we may prolong the interview; we may multiply our arguments. His language, to all and every one, is: “Come when you will; pray always—at all times—at any time; and never faint never be discouraged—no, never.” The design of the parable is to inculcate perseverance in prayer, though it should long appear to be unanswered. A widow makes application to a judge, to avenge her of her adversary: i.e. to see justice done her, in a case which she specifies. This, by virtue of his office, he was bound to do. This was his business. But, he neglects to attend to her case. He is without principle, and devoid of humanity. He fears neither God nor man. What shall she do? She

has no friends, whom she can enlist in her cause; and no means by which to employ an advocate. What can she do? She has one expedient, and but one. She may perhaps weary him by her importunity. This she resolves upon; this she tries. Day after day, therefore, she presents herself before him, saying: "Avenge me of my adversary." And every succeeding day, she becomes more importunate.

Meanwhile, his indifference continues; nay, it strengthens; perhaps rises to positive prejudice and hostility. Still, she pursues him; and while, perhaps, she sees no great reason to hope, he sees no prospect of rest. At length, she triumphs. She fairly wearies him out; and, simply to save himself trouble, growing out of her importunity, he hears her cause, and does her justice. Thus, under the most hopeless circumstances, her perseverance prevails; and the result, here represented by our Lord in the parable before us, is as natural as it is instructive. Earnest desire constrains us to be importunate; and importunity will often succeed, where there is no feature in the case that could give us the faintest prospect of relief.

Let us attend to the application of the parable. And the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you he will avenge them speedily." Jesus here argues from the less to the greater; from the fact of successful importunity in a case, where there were no favorable circumstances, to the certainty of success in a case where every thing is favorable. In every respect, God is the very opposite of the unjust judge; and if it was not in vain to importune one who had no disposition to hear, will it be in vain to importune Him who is inclined to hear before we ask? The poor widow had no encouragement in the character of the judge, to whom she appealed; but the child of God may rest assured that there is in Him to whom he makes suit, attributes of mercy and kindness, which may inspire him with the largest confidence. God loves to bless. He delights in diffusing abroad his favors. "The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion, long-suffering, and of great kindness." "The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works." The widow had no promises to plead. The judge, at no one interview, gave her any intimation that he designed to attend to her cause. But the believer has the assurance of his heavenly Father, that the seed of Jacob shall not seek his face in vain. "He will fulfill the desire of them that fear him; he also will hear their cry, and will help them." The divine promises the child of God may spread out before Him in all their number, richness, and power. He may urge them—press them with a fervency and importunity, which only the longing, unsatisfied heart can understand. The promises I sing, Which sovereign love hath spoke; Nor will the eternal King His words of grace revoke.

They stand secure And steadfast still; Not Zion's hill

Abides so sure. The widow was in no wise related to the judge, and hence could plead no ties of affinity. But the believer is a child— "born by a new celestial birth"—adopted into the family of God—bearing the divine image—interested in the heavenly inheritance. Shall such a one not be heard? Will a father forget his child? That were strange; but it may be. Yes more than that: The bridegroom may forget the bride Was made his wedded wife yestreen; The mother may forget the child, That smiles so sweetly on her knee— But God cannot forget the children of his love. He has engraven them on the palms of his hand: they are dear to Him as the apple of his eye. Not hear them! that is impossible. They are his elect sons and daughters. They are Christ's. They must be

heard. True, God “may bear long with them;” 1:e. he may for a season defer to answer them; he may for wise reasons try their faith and patience; but, in his own good time and way, he will answer. And he will do it “speedily”—suddenly—unexpectedly. Relief often comes from some unexpected quarter, at the very moment when the believer is just ready to faint and despair. The incumbent cloud—dark, thick, gloomy—suddenly breaks, and down comes the light—harbinger of a day without clouds.

Finally, the widow had no friend at hand, to aid her in pleading her cause. But the believer has an “advocate”—an “advocate with the Father”—resident at court; there at all times to attend to his cause; never neglecting it; and never at a loss how to manage it. “He ever liveth to make intercession for us.”

Great Advocate! almighty Friend! On thee our humble hopes depend; Our cause can never, never fail, For thou dost plead, and must prevail. And now say, Christian friend, can you imagine circumstances more favorable than those in which you are placed to secure the blessings which you need? What more can you wish? Are you a minister of Jesus Christ, having in charge a flock, few of whom you seem to be gathering into the kingdom? Are you disheartened? The remedy—the way to brighter days—to all desirable success, is before you. Pray more. Do you say that you have prayed—and prayed more? Well, pray more still: pray on: pray always, and never faint. Are you a professor of the gospel, and is the church around you asleep?—Are sinners descending the broad way? What shall you do? Why, pray; pray, and pray again, and keep on praying; and, in every succeeding interview with God, be more importunate. Are you a parent, and have you children, without God, and without hope in the world? Does their conduct grieve you? Do their prospects alarm you? May be, you have warned them; plead with them; prayed for them. And, now, what more can you do? What more? Let me ask, Have you prayed as much as you are able? Cannot you offer another prayer? Can you not pray, yet more fervently? —a little more, than you have ever yet done? Until you have done all these, despair not. Pray on, till God himself bids you pray no more; but while the words of Jesus stand unrevoked, “men should always pray, and never faint” the warrant is good and the prospect fair. When I hear good men say, that they can do no more, I am reminded of the story of Robert Bruce and the spider. Like a true patriot, he had espoused the cause of his country; and, in defense of her liberties, had exerted himself, as he thought, to the utmost. At a certain time, sunken and dejected, he took refuge for the night in a barn. Sleep forsook him. In a feverish and restless state, he lay till morning, reflecting on the course which he should pursue. The cause of the patriots was becoming desperate; it was already so. And what more could he do for his oppressed and bleeding country? While he lay distressed by this conflict of feeling, his attention was attracted to a spider, which was attempting to pass from one beam to another. But she fell Presently she was again ascending; and on reaching the same spot, again she fell. On the third, fourth, fifth trial, she was equally unsuccessful. But she seemed in no wise discouraged; but intent and determined. Bruce had counted the nineteenth time: all ineffectual. The movements of the spider were evidently less vigorous. She appeared weary, but still bent on accomplishing her purpose. Once more, therefore, she ascended; her pace slower; her step faltering. She reached the important gap; she seemed to gird herself up to a final, desperate effort; she gave one more leap: it was the twentieth, but that twentieth was successful. The spider was unconsciously reading a lesson of vast importance to the recumbent Scottish patriot 5 nor did she inculcate that lesson in vain. Bruce was roused. More might be done. The

fortunes of his country, desperate as they seemed, might be retrieved. He rose, more invigorated than if he had slept the entire night. He sallied forth; sought out his few and dispirited followers; and, putting himself once more at their head, fought and won the celebrated battle of Bannockburn, which gave independence to Scotland and a crown of glory to Bruce.

Years have passed since I read this story; but I relate it, I believe, substantially correct. And what a lesson it inculcates! How many, like Bruce, might be taught by an humble insect! The truth is, we should never despair, in regard to our success in a good enterprise. Never? This is strong language; perhaps too strong: but we should be willing to labor, while the last ray of day lasts, and even until every appearance of twilight has departed. In respect to prayer for any good object, I know not when we should rest. Certainly never, until the power of prayer is exhausted, or until God so plainly manifests his will, not to grant a favorable answer, that further supplication would seem to be forbidden. It is granted, that God may so clearly indicate his pleasure, that we should cease after a single supplication. Christ confined himself to a repetition of his prayer in the garden three times: Paul did the same, in respect to a removal of the "thorn in the flesh." But they ceased only when they were satisfied of the divine will. At that point, we may also well cease to pray: but until we are satisfied of this, let us not "faint." Pray on. It may be that you will pray ten, fifteen —yea, nineteen times—and if you stop there, you fail. Pray the twentieth time; and that last—most fervent—most believing—most faithful prayer, is the one which serves to move the "muscles of Omnipotence" in your behalf; and, when they move, the blessing comes.

Then earnest let us be, And never faint in prayer;

God loves our importunity, And makes our cause his care.

083. The Pharisee And Publican.

The Pharisee And Publican.

Luke 18:9-13. A writer has some where remarked, that “humility is the Alpha and Omega of a sinner’s faith and a sinner’s hopes; the commencing and crowning grace; the all in all of the spirit of Christianity.” Just so. Building upon hope and holiness rests on humility. “The building itself is a beautiful fabric of humility; and all those ornamental decorations that crown the pillar of the temple, and on which even the eye of God himself looks with pleasure, are all emblems of humility.” In like manner, the services which are rendered to God from within this building—the prayer, the praise, the homage—if acceptable, must rise from an altar, on which humility has been the first sacrifice. Humility is the court-dress of heaven. Gabriel wears such a dress under his “garments of praise:” not a saint in the kingdom of God on high but has on this indispensable “wedding garment.” How much more becoming the child of God on earth, who every day commits sin enough to banish every angel from the realms of glory! To intercourse with God, humility is as necessary as holiness was to Adam in the garden of Eden. He remained not one hour in his earthly paradise after that was extinct; and not one moment will God hold fellowship with one who comes not with a broken and contrite heart. To be accepted, he must say, with Jacob: “I am not worthy of the least of all these mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast shewed unto thy servant;” he must say, with David: “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness, according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot put my transgressions he must say, with Ezra: “O God, I am ashamed, and blush to lift my face up to thee, O God; for our iniquities are increased over our heads, and our trespass is gone up to the heavens he must say, with Daniel: “O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face: to the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against him. Neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in his laws, which he has set before us by his servants the prophets;” he must say, with the publican, smiting upon his breast, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” The design of Jesus Christ, in the parable before us, was to show the necessity of humility, in order to the acceptance of prayer before God. No arguments would have served to exhibit the truth so clearly, or to have impressed it so forcibly, as the picture of the Pharisee and publican, which Christ has here drawn. We see, at a glance, the character of the two men, and the essential difference in the nature and foundation of their worship. In the one case, there is humility and repentance; in the other, nothing but pride and ostentation. No one, who has read the account of these two men, ever, for one moment, saw a single reason why the Pharisee should be accepted, or a single reason why the publican should not be accepted.

If it be urged, in behalf of the Pharisee, that, in praying, he was discharging a duty, it is granted. But, beyond this, what is there to recommend him? What merit attaches to him, who, acknowledging the duty of aiding the poor, carries them nothing but the chaff of his wheat, or the husks of his corn? To what reception is he entitled from a pure and holy God, who comes only in the spirit of self-glorification? His object is not to honor God, but to honor himself; not to express his sense of dependence, but to magnify his deeds; not to bewail his sins, but to boast of his

worthiness. “The foundation of prayer,” says Paley, “in all cases, is a sense of want. No man prays in earnest, or to any purpose, for what he does not feel that he wants.” But the Pharisee expresses not a single want. No, not he. He comes to God, to inform him how very good he is, and what very good works he has done! how beautifully his character and actions contrast with those of others!

We perceive not one element of prayer in all this array of devotion; while his pride, ostentation, and hypocrisy stand out in all their odiousness and depravity. He does, indeed, give thanks to God that he is not as other men are; but he does not add, with Paul, “By the grace of God I am what I am.” No; the grace of God had had no concern in making him to differ from others. If he could claim the merit of not being an extortioner, unjust, or an adulterer, he could not claim not to be a proud, vain, boastful hypocrite.

If we now turn to contemplate the publican, the contrast is striking and delightful. “The sacrifices of God are a broken heart, and a contrite spirit;” and such is the sacrifice offered by the publican. He expresses the deepest penitence by what he does, and by what he says. “He stands afar off.” The Pharisee had advanced to the side of the court nearest the temple, as if that more honorable and conspicuous place belonged to him. But the publican occupies a position on the opposite side, as far as possible from the temple. He feels unworthy to approach near to the place where God has his holy habitation. The consciousness of guilt also prevents him from “raising his eyes to heaven.” But his heart ascends, and with it “a godly sorrow,” most acceptable to God. Moreover, he “smites upon his breast,” in token of a holy indignation against himself for his many transgressions, and as an expression of his anguish on account of them.

Such were the preliminaries of the prayer which he proceeds to offer. It was short. “Fear and shame,” says an old divine, “hindered him from saying much; sighs and groans swallowed up his words; but what he did say was to the purpose:” “God be merciful to me a sinner.” How different from the language of the Pharisee! Sin!—he had none to confess. Mercy!—he had no occasion to ask it. He was rich and full; pure and worthy. What should he confess? What need he implore? But the publican feels guilty, and most unworthy; he feels condemned, and sues for pardon: “Behold, I am vile, what shall I answer thee!” Would we pray so as to be accepted of God? Let us shun the vain-glory and offensive ostentation of the Pharisee: let us imitate the sincere humility, and the deep and fervent repentance of the publican: let us cry, as did the Psalmist; and then shall we be able to rejoice as he rejoiced, and praise as he praised.

O God of mercy, hear my call! My load of guilt remove;

Break down this separating wall, That bars me from thy love.

Give me the presence of thy grace;

Then my rejoicing tongue Shall speak aloud thy righteousness, And make thy praise my song.

084. Jesus In Gethsemane.

Jesus In Gethsemane.

Luke 22:39-46.

Delightful must have been that interview, which we have just done contemplating, between Jesus and his disciples. Doubtless it would have been pleasant to both, could it consistently have been prolonged. But Jesus knew that his hour was approaching. The Prince of Darkness was marshaling his forces. His betrayer had gone forth, and was gathering his assistants in the already-matured project of surrendering him to bigoted and vindictive rulers and priests.

Jesus, therefore, retired from the chamber; and, taking his course across the Cedron, invited his disciples to accompany him. But his heart was too full not to continue to flow forth in the same tide of holy love. Discoursing to them, as they went, in the same terms of gracious endearment, "he took them," it has been beautifully observed, "into a new region of truth; expatiated over fields filled with the products of infinite love; ranged over ground which they had only before beheld dimly at a distance—ground, which brought them within sight of the gate of heaven. He drew them close to himself; show them his inmost designs; showed them his very heart, with all their names engraved there, and all their interests bound up and made one with his dearest purpose, and with the glory of the Father."

What more could he say? Nothing. Love—pure, holy, ardent love—could utter nothing more affectionate. But love could do more—and this was the last and kindest effort which even the Redeemer could make in their behalf—he could pray the Father for them. And such a prayer he now offers, as they had never heard; and such as, till then, had never gone up from earth to heaven. We cannot dwell upon it; but it was a prayer, "in which he asked with the largeness and confidence of one who felt that he was entitled to ask what he would; a prayer, in which he pleaded as if he were already standing by the 'altar of incense,' above, and had actually entered on his office of Intercessor there." (The prayer, to which reference is here made, the reader will find in John 17. The fifteenth and sixteenth chapters, John 15-16, are occupied with Christ's valedictory discourse, possibly uttered on his way to the garden, and was followed by this prayer before he entered.) They had now reached Gethsemane, whither he was designing to lead them. Here was a garden, lying on the western slope of the mount of Olives, and from which the "Holy City" was in full view. He had often been there: indeed, it was his accustomed retreat, when he wished to retire from the world; or, when sad and depressed, he sought relief by contemplation, and intercourse with heaven.

They had been in the garden but a short time, before a sudden and surprising change came over him. That heavenly calmness—that divine serenity which he had manifested during the evening, gave way to forebodings the most painful—to agony the most intense. "My soul," he exclaims, "is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me." The evangelists are remarkable, as is well known, for the simplicity of their narrative. They use no embellishments;

they seem intentionally to avoid all emotion, and relate events as if they had no personal interest in them. And yet, from their simple statement, who has not inferred that the anguish and agony of the Redeemer were not most remarkable?

How shall we account for his horror—his dismay—“his strong crying, and tears”?—for that “agony,” which brought a bloody sweat upon his body, and which fell in drops to the ground? “In the ordinary course of human affairs, an innocent man, of common fortitude,” it has been observed, “resigns himself, with acquiescence, to his fate: his integrity supports him. Hence, many illustrious and virtuous men, in the heathen world, supported by the native fortitude of the human mind, poured contempt upon all the forms of death, and departed with magnanimity and with glory. In the early times of the Christian Church, the first disciples followed their Lord in a path that was marked with blood.” Even tender females braved the rage of the enemy, and the fires of the tormentor, and, with triumph, embraced every species of sufferings which human ingenuity could inflict. But Jesus trembles, and stands aghast! Wherefore this, when his death, though painful and severe, is to prove so glorious—and to be fraught with blessings upon a world, while that world shall last?

There was reason for all he felt, and for all he expressed. He had a cup of suffering to drink, from which he might well shrink. Bodily suffering, that he could endure. The taunts and mockings of his enemies, those he could sustain. But the assaults of Satan, now unbroken—for it was his hour—who could support them? But, far more than these, a sense of the Father’s wrath, added to the crushing weight of a world’s entire guilt—such a load was rolling on towards him, and he unsupported—only a few friends around him— and they now—strange to tell!—on the verge of sleep, and soon to be scattered! Who would not be “sore amazed?”

“My soul,” said he—and who can wonder at the exclamation?—“my soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death.” He felt, evidently, that he should not be able to sustain the trial through which he was going to pass. The incumbent cloud had a density and a blackness, which so oppressed his soul, that he verily believed that he should be crushed. Where, then, would be the purposes of Infinite Mercy? What would become of a race of sinners, for whom he was about to die? What a pall would be spread over a world of spiritual darkness! And would not some harps cease their heavenly strains, even in the temple of glory itself! In such an extremity, what should he do? There was one resort. Though the Father was hiding his face, and was calling unto the sword of his justice to smite, he could and would seek unto Him. Selecting, therefore, his three most confidential disciples, he retires to another part of the garden; where, leaving them, he directs them to tarry and watch with him, while he should proceed a little further, and pray.

Until now, there had been no such spectacle on earth. He, who, but a little before, on the mount of Transfiguration, had reassumed the glory which he had with the Father, before the foundation of the world—He, who had been favored with the presence of Moses and Elias from the mansions of immortality—who had slept in tranquility amid the storm—who had said to the raging billows, “Peace, be still!”—and who had entered the chambers of death, and called back to life the tenant of the grave!”

“Behold the man!” He kneels—falls on his face, and cries—still addressing God, as he was wont when he walked in the light of his countenance, by the endearing appellation of Father—“O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me!”—yes, if it be possible—if I may be spared

these readful and overwhelming agonies—if justice can be satisfied—if thine honor can be maintained—if thy government can proceed, and a face of rebels can be spared, then spare me; let this incumbent cloud, which shuts out thy smiles, roll away—let the hour of the powers of darkness terminate—“nevertheless,”— Blessed Jesus! I thank thee—and a world of sinners should thank thee—that thou didst not stop here. No! there was within thee a love which still ruled— which floods of affliction could not drown—and that love prompted thee to add: “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.”

O wonderful power of faith! wonderful triumph of love— the obedient love and regard of Jesus for his Father’s honor! That was still the ruling passion of his soul! “Let thy will be done:” so had he taught his disciples to pray, and now he himself sets them an example; he shows what filial love and confidence can do in the very darkest hour through which the Redeemer of men was called to pass.

Having thus referred his sorrows and sufferings to God, he returns to his disciples. But what a spectacle meets his eye! His disciples—his best beloved disciples—and among them the one who, that very evening, had lain, in all the confidence and familiarity of affection, on his own bosom— that, and the other disciples, were asleep! They asleep, and he wading through billows which were well nigh overwhelming his soul! “What!” said he, addressing himself to Peter—the ardent, the confident, the already-pledged Peter—“What, could ye not watch with me one hour?” “Watch?” said he. Yes; “watch!” greater trials are approaching: “watch and pray;” implore the support and aid of God, in view of the calamities which are now hourly thickening upon us.

Again he retires; it was his privilege to urge his suit; he might cry importunately, and he does. But now, observe, his prayer is altered. “O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.”

Once more he returns to his disciples, doubtless to caution them against danger; to show them what interest he had in their welfare; to enlist their sympathies amid his sufferings, and to excite them to engage in prayer for the help which they would need, as calamities poured in upon them.

But, again, they have sunk on the ground, and their eyes are fast locked in sleep! What could he think? What should he say? Should he awake them? Should he upbraid them? At this time he awoke them not; but again, betaking himself to the footstool, he repeats before his Father the supplications which he had already uttered. And was there no response from that Father, who “always” heard his Son? Yes; the Father heard, and answered. An angel was sent to strengthen, 1:e. to encourage him. The precise manner in which this was effected, is not revealed; but it is easy to imagine that that celestial messenger conveyed the assurance, that, in answer to his faith and submission to the divine will, he should not be suffered to fail. The arms of Almighty love and strength should be placed underneath and around him. The sufferings, which were upon him and before him, he must endure. Sin could be expiated in no other way, but by the shedding of blood— the pangs of the cross would alone render it consistent for God to offer salvation to sinners. But he should be sustained; he should triumph; “he should see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied.”

Thus assured, the Redeemer repairs to his disciples whom he still finds locked in sleep. Oh, it was strange! It was passing strange, that they could then sleep—and sleep on, amid the tears, and

groans, and prayers of one whom they so much adored! Once more he expresses his surprise: "Do you sleep now, and take your rest? Is it a time to indulge yourselves in sleep? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed! Rise, let us be going."

Such were some of the scenes of that solemn night, in which Jesus was betrayed. Such were his sufferings! And such his prayers! The practical lessons which are here taught, we must leave our readers to supply. But we cannot omit to remind them of their obligations of love to Him, who suffered so much on their account. O, had Jesus failed; had his nature sunk; had his fortitude forsaken him; had the fountain of his love ceased one hour to pour forth its hallowed tide—where, where had we been? What would have become of a world of sinners? Shall we ever cease to love him? Shall we ever wound and grieve him, by neglecting his cause, or growing weary in his service? No:

Love so amazing—so divine, Demands our life—our love—our all.

We can never be placed in circumstances precisely like those of the Redeemer. Such sufferings we shall never be called to endure. But we have guilt—and guilt of the deepest dye upon us; and, for which, we may suffer, God only knows how much; what deep and agonizing afflictions and pains await us, we cannot foresee. But they may come; and, if they do, the example of Jesus we may imitate. We may hie to a throne of grace. We may cry once, twice, thrice, as he did. Nay, we may pray on, day after day, and month after month, until God removes our trials; or, until, in some way, he shows us that it is his will that they should continue. But when that, in the providence of God, is our lot, we have then the standing assurance to comfort us: "My grace is sufficient for you." When troubles, like a burning sun, Beat heavy on our head, To this Almighty Rock we run, And find a pleasing shade.

How glorious he—how happy we, In such a glorious friend! Whose love secures us all the way, And crowns us at the end!

085. Prayer Of Jesus On The Cross.

Prayer Of Jesus On The Cross.

Luke 23:31.

We have just done contemplating the agony of Jesus in the garden, and those “prayers and supplications, with strong cryings and tears,” unto Him who alone was able to help. Consequent upon these, and, doubtless, in answer to them, there seems to have been a remission of his sufferings. But that remission was but temporary, only sufficient for the powers of nature to rally, and for faith and fortitude to acquire further needful strength. Such was the tenderness of the Redeemer’s spirit; such his keen sensibility to suffering, that had he not been favored with some alleviation, the lamp of life would, probably, have been extinguished ere the purposes of Infinite Wisdom had been accomplished. That unknown and amazing agony ceased. But the tragic scenes of that eventful night went on; each one contributing to, and urging forward, the momentous catastrophe which was to follow. Jesus is betrayed—mocked—arraigned—scourged—crowned with thorns, and condemned to the death of the cross. To that cross he is, at length, nailed; and there, on the accursed tree, the Savior of the world now hangs. The agony of the garden is renewed and redoubled. Darkness broods upon the face of nature; and, though deep and intense, it is but a faint emblem of that deeper darkness which overshadows his soul. Upon his agony in the garden, an angel from heaven strengthened him. But now, in this hour, when—
The waves of swelling grief Do o’er his bosom roll;
And mountains of almighty wrath, Lie heavy on his soul—
where is that heavenly messenger? Where that countenance which was wont to smile upon him? Alas, the Father is himself arrayed against the Son. From the Father proceeds those very sufferings which are drinking up his mortal spirits, and which extort from him the loud and plaintive wail: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

While the measure of his sufferings was fast filling up, and it would seem impossible that he should not be wholly absorbed in his own intense pangs, his eye fell upon one— she was a spectator of the scene; she was poor—homeless—friendless—wretched—forlorn. For the moment, he forgot his own agony; and, with all the tenderness and sympathy of an affectionate son, he commended her to the care and kindness of the “beloved disciple,” who was also near. “Woman,” said he, “behold thy son!” “Disciple, behold thy mother!” When or where, in the annals of filial love, was there a parallel to this? And, yet, in that bosom whence proceeded that filial love, there was a deeper, holier current; a tide flowing forth, and having for its object those who were now mocking his agonies, and thirsting for his blood. “Father!” said he—though that Father’s face was hid from him, and he might no longer pray for himself, nor for a mitigation of his own personal sufferings—yet he might pray for his murderers—for the mockers of his pangs—and he does pray: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

Hark, how he prays! The charming sound Dwells on his dying lips,
And every groan and gaping wound Cries: “Father! let the rebels live!”
The “Evangelical Prophet” had, seven hundred years before, foretold that he would “make intercession for the transgressors,” (Isaiah 53:12;) and here

that prophecy is fulfilled. He had himself inculcated the love of enemies—the forgiveness of injuries—and prayer for those who should spitefully use and persecute; and the rule which he had prescribed for others, he now illustrates by his own noble and sublime example. The question has been raised: Whom did Jesus embrace in his supplication for forgiveness? Two distinct classes were accessory to his crucifixion—Romans and Jews. The former were the immediate agents; the latter, the instigators. Both, however, were ignorant of the enormity of their guilt. Paul says, “that had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory.” This ignorance Jesus urges as a reason why God should pardon them. In respect to the Romans, they were really ignorant that he was the Son of God; nor had they, perhaps, any means of distinguishing between him and the malefactors who were crucified with him. But the Jews were better informed; at least, they knew that he was innocent, and they might have learned his true character. The prejudices, under the influence of which they regarded him, had the effect to render them incapable of fairly estimating the evidence which he adduced, that he was in truth the Son of God. They were, therefore, guilty, especially the rulers, who were better situated to inform themselves as to his true character. All, indeed, might have arrived at the truth—for the light shone bright and glorious, but they loved darkness better than light, because their deeds were evil.

It was, however, a time of love and compassion when Jesus was on the cross. It was right that this “morn of mercy” should be signalized by the voice of prayer, ascending from Him who was expiating human guilt. It was a glorious act—thus to antedate, if we may so speak—the application of his blood, to wash out the deep moral stains of those who were about to shed it. It was a pledge and presage of the efficacy of the atoning work of Jesus. If he could ask blessings on the heads of murderers amid the agonies of crucifixion—how might he not be supposed to intercede when the bitterness of death should have passed, and the glorious work of expiation should have been accomplished! To the men of the world, such kindness and compassion may seem inexplicable. They are governed by no such motives: are influenced by no such love: can feel no such duty. But here they may learn, from the example of Jesus, what his religion inculcates. Is it difficult so to act? That may well be granted. It is difficult. To bear reproaches and persecutions with patience; to bless those who are seeking our ruin; and, more than all, to pray in kindness and sincerity for them, is difficult. But Jesus did it: Stephen did it: Paul did it; and thousands, governed by the same love, have thus honored the sublime and glorious inculcations of the gospel.

What a different world had this proved, had the example of Jesus been strictly followed, since he presented it on the cross! Ah, those fires of revenge—intense and consuming—had never burned; those persecutions—those murders—those midnight assassinations, had never polluted the pages of our history. Those wars which have made wives widows, and children orphans, had never been waged. The walls of a thousand dungeons had not reverberated with the clanking of the chains of the incarcerated victims of revenge; nor had they started at their curses upon the guilty authors of their sufferings.

Well, disciples of Jesus, let the world pass on, and continue its revengeful fires, if it please. Let passion rage; let anger burn; but let us, taking a lesson from the precepts and example of Jesus—like him pity; like him pray; like him forgive. Is this difficult? Yes; difficult, but not impossible. By grace we can accomplish it: by grace we can do all duty and practice all self-denial. Let this prayer daily, hourly ascend to Him who has set a sublime and glorious example, and he will help us to follow it.

Make us, by thy transforming grace, Dear Savior, daily more like thee!

Thy fair example may we trace, To teach us what we ought to be!

Oh, how benevolent and kind!

How mild!—how ready to forgive! Be this the temper of our mind, And these the rules by which we live.

086. John.

John.

087. Parting Directions Of Jesus Christ.

Parting Directions Of Jesus Christ.

John 14:13-16, John 15:16, John 16:23-26. The sun had descended behind the “mountains which were round about Jerusalem;” and even the last rays of twilight were fading from the spires of her lofty edifices, as Jesus and his twelve disciples were entering an upper room of a house in one of the streets of the “Holy City.” It was a solemn and interesting occasion; being the last interview which he should enjoy with them prior to his crucifixion. On this account, doubtless, they seemed dearer to him than ever. He, therefore, took the opportunity presented by the observance of the Passover, to say some things to them, which he had reserved to the present time, but which, now, on the eve of his separation from them, it was expedient for them to know. He wished, also, to draw them nearer than ever to his heart; to show them his inmost love, and thus to prepare them for the pang of parting with their Lord, which he knew was just at hand.

They were soon seated at the table, where, having celebrated the Passover, he instituted the Supper, designed to take the place of that divine and most significant rite, and which was to continue, in all time to come, as a memorial of his love.

“Do this,” he cried, “till time shall end, In mem’ry of your dying friend;

Meet at my table, and record The love of your departed Lord.”

While thus engaged, he announced to them his speedy return to his Father. But, lest the annunciation should fill them with sorrow and apprehension, he followed it with the most kind and consolatory assurances. “He sought to prepare them for the approaching trial, by showing them that, though he died, he died with them on his heart.” He was going; but it was to his Father, and their Father—to his God, and their God. Indeed, it was most expedient for them that he should go. They would meet with trials and tribulations; but, if he went, he would prepare a place for them, and, in due time, call them home to himself. Meanwhile, he would send the Spirit—long promised, long looked for—who should comfort them, support and animate them; who would communicate to them truths of inestimable value to themselves and the world; and who would carry on, and complete within them, the work of sanctification. Nor were they to imagine that intercourse between them and himself was here to terminate. He should, indeed, see them no more in the flesh; but he would come to them, and his Father also, and make their abode with them. And, in addition to all these considerations—calculated to mitigate their sorrows, and to inspire them with joy—he had blessed truths to announce to them, in relation to another mode of intercourse with the earth and himself, namely: prayer.

“Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name.” Up to this time, they had not besought God through him, as the Mediator, but they had directly applied to him. But, now, he announces to them the new and animating truth, that, from and after his crucifixion, their requests were to be made to God in his name. Immediately following that event, “I will see you,” says he, John 16:22-23; “and in that day,” or from that time, “ye shall ask me nothing,” but ask the Father in my name. “At that day,”

and forward, “ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you.” In several instances, he had said he would pray for them: indeed, he had, on this point, given them already such assurances, that further declarations were unnecessary. “I do not say I will pray for you:” there is no need of my repeating this assurance; and, besides, the Father himself loves you so well, that whatever you shall ask, he will grant you for my sake, and because of your love to me.

Such was the valedictory discourse of the Redeemer to his disciples, touching their future intercourse with the Father and himself, by means of prayer. And there is not, and there never was, any thing more tender and appropriate, in all the annals of time. Jesus here pours out his whole soul. He opens the bosom of Infinite Love. He gives assurances of the most friendly and animating character. When he had gone up, after his crucifixion, his disciples understood the full import of his gracious words and promises: and they animated them through all their after-trials; in stripes in imprisonments—in perils by land, and perils by sea—through life, and in death itself.

These directions and assurances of Jesus were not designed to be limited to his disciples, to whom they were originally addressed, but to extend, in all their significance and value, to such as “should believe on his name.” Jesus is, at this present time, an Advocate and Intercessor in behalf of his people, and will so continue till the work of redemption closes. What a blessed annunciation! What an encouragement to those who feel that their cause is weak—and not only weak, but that they personally have no power to present it! Diffident disciple of Jesus! You have a strong cause, for your cause is the cause of Jesus; and you have a strong advocate, for he has assured you that he will plead for you; and, besides, the Father himself has set his love upon you, and is himself ready to grant your request. On what possible ground, then, can you fail?

088. The Acts Of The Apostles.

The Acts Of The Apostles.

089. The Disciples At Prayer.

The Disciples At Prayer.

Acts 1:14. In the scriptural history of prayer, we have reached an interesting and important era.

Jesus has suffered—risen—and ascended to his mediatorial throne in the heavens. He has left behind him a small company, consisting of apostles and other followers, who have witnessed his ascension. To the former, he has given special directions to tarry in Jerusalem, till the advent of the Holy Spirit—the great agent henceforth of carrying forward his kingdom in the world. Although they had enjoyed his instructions for at least three years, yet they needed a more profound knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom than they possessed, or than was expedient for Jesus to communicate to them, prior to his crucifixion. Besides, they needed to be furnished with “a higher capacity for reasoning, with a talent for public speaking, with the gift of tongues, with a power to work miracles, with zeal, courage, meekness, prudence, and unwearied perseverance:” all of which it was the appropriate office of the Holy Spirit to impart. “Without these qualifications, they would have been unfitted for the office which their Master had conferred upon them.” But what becomes of these followers of Jesus? On the occasion of his seizure and condemnation, at an earlier period, they had forsaken him, and fled—or followed “afar off.” Although sincerely attached to him, their fears predominated over their love. But the resurrection of Jesus inspired them with new courage and fresh hopes. They again ventured out, and rallied around him. He, held repeated interviews with them; expressed his kindness for them; gave them a solemn and important commission; and promised them the advent of the Holy Spirit at no distant day. And here leaving them, he takes his departure.

“This event,” observes Mr. Dick, “however honorable to their Lord, and joyful to themselves, had they understood its design, could not fail to affect the disciples in a disagreeable manner in the first moments of surprise, and while they were not acquainted with the important purposes to be served by the ascension. To his personal presence they had conceived a warm attachment, founded in esteem of his excellence and experience of his friendship. From his lips they had heard discourses, replenished with wisdom and grace; and by his hand they had seen works of the most wonderful and beneficent nature performed. He had been their counselor in difficulties, and their comforter in sorrow. To be deprived in a moment of his company; to be left alone in the midst of numerous and implacable enemies; to have the prospect of labors, and sufferings, and death, without the Master at their head; without their condescending and affectionate Savior to advise and encourage them; these were circumstances sufficient to have discomposed the firmest minds, and which would have almost excused the apostles, had they given way to lamentation and dejection. We are informed that they ‘looked steadfastly towards heaven, as he went up,’ continuing to gaze long after the cloud had concealed him. It was a look of astonishment and grief, for the sudden loss of all that was dear to them; it was a look of eager desire to be again gratified with a sight of their Master.”

While thus employed, two angels suddenly appeared, and gave them assurances that, as certainly as he had ascended to heaven, he would descend from it at the time appointed by the Father. They would then again see him, and from him no event thenceforward would separate them. Thus comforted, they leave the consecrated spot, and repair to an upper room in Jerusalem—where they had often assembled—the eleven apostles, with several devout women, who “followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him;” among whom it is natural to particularize Mary, the mother of Jesus. And here how do they employ themselves? Not in renewing anxious doubts and fears, nor in the indulgence of idle and unprofitable speculation; but they betake themselves to prayer and supplication. It was the first prayer-meeting of the disciples under the Gospel. It was a protracted meeting; for it continued from day to day. They were all of one mind, and prayer and devotion seem to have been their main business. Nor is it difficult to decide what was the burden of their pressing and importunate supplications. They were promised the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It seems to have been an unconditional promise, and yet they must pray for the blessing. They would by this exercise be prepared for his advent, and better comprehend the magnitude and importance of the blessings anticipated.

Thus early after the ascension of our Lord, do we find the disciples resorting to prayer—persevering prayer. They do not appear to have been specially directed so to employ themselves; but it was the most natural course they could pursue. Promise a Christian a blessing, and he will pray for it. Give him intimation that the Spirit is about to descend, and he is in his closet or in the social prayer-meeting at once, saying:

Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly dove, With all thy quick'ning powers!

Come shed abroad a Savior's love, And that shall kindle ours.

Then and there prayer, under the gospel dispensation, began. It was for the descent of the Holy Spirit. And from that auspicious commencement to the present time prayer, especially for this blessing, has been the occupation and business of the truly devoted servants of Jesus. No day probably has since passed—and, we trust, but few, if any hours—in which the incense of prayer for the more copious effusion of the Spirit has not been going up from the earth to heaven. And there our High-Priest and Intercessor has ever since been present, at the “golden altar” seen by John, (Revelation 8:3,) to present the prayers of his faithful ones “before the throne.”

Let prayer thus begun, and continued now for eighteen centuries, go on. Let the Holy Spirit be more and more invoked. Let Jesus and Calvary be proclaimed on every continent, in every island, and over every sea!

Waft, waft ye winds, his story, And you, ye waters, roll, Till, like a sea of glory, It spreads from pole to pole;

Till o'er our ransom'd nature The Lamb for sinners slain—

Redeemer, King, Creator— In bliss return to reign.

090. Pentecost.

Pentecost.

Acts 2:1;Acts 2:42.

“Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence,” said Jesus to his disciples, as he stood on the mount of Olives, ready to ascend; at the same time, directing them to tarry in Jerusalem till this “promise of the Father” should be fulfilled. Ten days after, on the occurrence of the Pentecost, or fifty days from the Passover, the promised blessing was bestowed. At this time, the Jews, in great numbers, were wont to be present, from all countries in which they resided, to join in the annual festivals which were celebrated. And the opinion advanced by commentators is reasonable, that this time was selected by Infinite Wisdom for the great effusion of the Spirit, that the tidings of salvation might the more speedily be conveyed to distant countries by means of the strangers who were assembled at the national feasts. On the morning of this day, the apostles, and, perhaps, other disciples,[1] were, with one accord, in one place. No intimation is expressed, that their expectations of the fulfillment of the promise, on this day, had been specially excited.

[1] “They were all, with one accord, in one place.”Prof. Dick, contrary to the commonly received opinion, thinks that the apostles only are meant, because the promise, which was now performed, and which resulted in the gift of tongues, was made to them, and seems to have been confined to them. This might be true, however, and still the one hundred and twenty mentioned (Acts 1:15,) may have been present.(See“Lectures on the Acts,” p. 21.)

They were waiting: they had been waiting. Nor is it improbable that they had continued daily to assemble for prayer, since the ascension of Jesus. It is not certain in what place they were assembled—whether in the upper room, where we left them, (Acts 1:13,) or in the temple; nor is it material to determine. We find them, however, still in the exercise of faith and prayer, as is ever befitting the disciples of Jesus, when looking for a blessing: especially the descent of the Holy Spirit. They were assembled, “with one accord,”—with one mind. There were no longer any disputings or divisions among them; no heart-burnings, or envy towards one another; no party plans; no discordant purposes: each one could say—as every Christian should say— Do I not love Thee, O my Lord?

Behold my heart, and see! And turn each worthless idol out, That dares to rival Thee.

Thus, holding the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace, and possessing a spirit of supplication, they had the best possible preparation for the visitation of the Holy Spirit; for his influences “are most to be expected, where there is the greatest unanimity and the greatest devotion.” The promise was now fulfilled; the Spirit came, with a power and energy corresponding to the mighty effects which were to be produced. The apostles were the first subjects of his wonderful influences. So copious was the effusion, that they are said to have been filled with the Spirit. New and unwonted mental power was imparted; and higher and clearer views of the Gospel scheme of salvation conveyed. Languages, of which they were before ignorant, they were now enabled to

speak with fluency; and presently they were addressing a multitude of strangers, whom the signal wonders transpiring had attracted to the place.

It does not belong to our plan to detail the marvelous events which ensued. It was the first great outpouring of the Spirit under the Gospel. It was a magnificent display of the power and grace of God. It was a glorious beginning of the New Dispensation, and a presage of the fulfillment of the promise by the “evangelical prophet:” “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied.” That night, three thousand lay down to sleep—if indeed they could rest—friends and followers of Jesus, who, in the morning, were enemies of the Cross! Then, “children of wrath;” now, “sons of God.” Then, in the “broad road that leadeth to destruction;” now, in the narrow way that leadeth unto life.” Wonderful change! Surprising grace! The remaining account of these converts is short, but entirely in their favor. Not one apostasy is recorded; nor is there reason to apprehend that any occurred. On the contrary, we read that “they continued steadfast in the apostles’ doctrine that is, attended on their teaching and instruction— “and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” Let it be remembered, that, in this account of the first revival which occurred under the Gospel, it is said the converts continued to pray. No one is born into the kingdom of Jesus who does not, from that time, pray. It is among the first duties performed; the first expression of love and gratitude. “Behold, he prayeth!” was said of Saul, as an evidence that he was a true disciple of Jesus. That convert’s hope is not worth a rush, who does not pray; that revival of religion, which is not followed by prayer among its subjects, never resulted from the operation of the spirit of God. In regeneration, a light is kindled which never goes out; a spirit of supplication is imparted which never is lost.

Prayer is the Christian’s vital breath, The Christian’s native air; His watchword at the gate of death—

He enters heaven with prayer.

091. Peter and John.

Peter and John.

Acts 4:29-31.

If the success of Christianity, on its first promulgation, was surprising to its friends, with what wonder must it have been regarded by its enemies? To the bigoted scribes and Pharisees, the crucifixion of Christ was hopefully the annihilation of all his schemes, and the death-blow, they believed, to the hopes of all his followers. But, for once, they mistook; and a great mistake it proved. In a few short weeks, the whole scene was changed. The hopes of the disciples were more than restored; a far brighter prospect presented itself than they had ever before witnessed; all the promises and pledges made to them by the despised Galilean were likely to be realized.

Jesus came forth from the grave a conqueror. Once more he collected his scattered followers. He poured into their bosoms fresh hopes; and, having commissioned them to go forth, and plant the standard of his cross in every place where the usurper had found a foothold, he ascended, in triumph, to his mediatorial throne. The promised Spirit soon after descends, and the apostles are qualified for their work. The marvelous scenes of Pentecost transpire; three thousand souls are brought under the influence of the doctrine of the cross in a single day; the whole city of Jerusalem is moved; the common people are excited to the highest degree of wonder and astonishment; the Pharisees and the Sadducees are themselves filled with amazement and apprehension. But the work was not destined to stop here. "Signs and wonders" were daily done by the apostles. In the previous chapter, we have an account of a miracle wrought by Peter and John upon a man lame from his birth. The miracle was an undoubted one, and wrought in favor of a cripple, well known to all who were in the habit of frequenting the temple. There could be no deception in the case. From being unable to help himself, in a single moment he stands—he leaps—he walks—he follows his benefactors into the temple, and mingles, with the demonstrations of his joy, the praises of God, by whose power he had been cured. The scene soon attracts the attention of the people in the temple. A crowd is collected to the spot, and the circumstances are explained. Jesus Christ is duly honored by the apostles; and the charge of having rejected and condemned him is driven home upon the consciences of the people, with all the bold and manly eloquence of which Peter was master.

Meanwhile, intelligence of these proceedings was conveyed to the men in power by some of their zealous partisans. Instant alarm seized the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, who soon made their appearance, and committed Peter and John to prison. An inquiry into the circumstances did not serve to allay their apprehensions, or lessen their indignation. That night, however, nothing could be done. In the morning, probably at an early hour, rulers, elders, and scribes, with Annas the high-priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, were assembled to consider what should be done. The prisoners were brought out, and placed at the bar, and the inquiry was put: "By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?"

It was the precise question which Peter could have wished asked; and, while he paid due deference to this supreme council of the Jewish nation—whose jurisdiction he did not deny—he proceeded to answer it; which having done, with great plainness, he himself turns accuser, and proceeds to bring a direct accusation against his judges. He felt that it was no time to flatter. It was no time to conceal. Hence, he directly and boldly charges them with the bitterest malice and the deepest guilt, for the part they took against the Son of God: You brought him to the cross! You mocked his dying agonies! You would have blotted out all the hopes of the sons of men by the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth! But what you would have frustrated, you have accomplished. The death of Christ, which you, by your malice, effected, has laid the foundation for the salvation of a world. He is at the right hand of God at this present moment; and, through his name, by faith in his name, this man has been made whole.

Peter and John were unlearned men. They were unacquainted with the subtleties of logic and the arts of eloquence. But Peter was, nevertheless, eloquent—too eloquent—too bold—too truthful, for the ease and comfort of his auditors. To the address of Peter, there was no reply. The facts were as he had stated them. The miracle had been wrought. The explanation was comprehensible, and could not be denied. The proud doctors of Jerusalem were silent and confounded in the presence of the fishermen of Galilee. But what should be done? Temporarily dismissing the apostles, they consulted together about some expedient for extricating themselves from their present embarrassment. They had, however, nothing to do, and could do nothing, but only expostulate with the apostles, and threaten them. This they now did; commanding them not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus. The apostles, however, had gathered still more strength. They saw and appreciated the confusion of their judges. They also knew whose ministers they were, and upon whom they might depend in the hour of their need. They made, therefore, the immediate and explicit declaration to the Sanhedrim, that they would not obey. They were apostles of a triumphant and an enthroned Redeemer, and his authority they should respect; they should and would preach in his name. The apostles were safe. Exasperated as the council were to the highest pitch, they could do nothing more than dismiss them. The popular voice was in their favor; hundreds and thousands were in the process of believing, and turning unto the Lord. Five thousand had joined their standard.

They went forth, therefore, from the Sanhedrim, with the maledictions of rulers and priests upon their heads. But they went in triumph—filled with holy admiration and gratitude at their deliverance from the eminent peril in which, for the cause of Jesus, they had been involved. They returned to their fellow-disciples; they reported what had befallen them, and the grace of God which had enabled them to vindicate the cause of their Master.

It was an hour of joy—of solemn joy. It was a time for thanksgiving for mercies received; a time for prayer for future help in similar trials which might come upon them. They spent a season in prayer—prayed for themselves—prayed for their enemies—prayed for the cause in which they were engaged. Nor did they pray in vain. God gave them immediate evidence that he did hear, and did accept them. The place where they were, was shaken by some sudden and remarkable convulsion, like that of an earthquake, or the rapid and violent movement of the Spirit of God. But whatever it might be, there was an exhibition of great power; and such power as carried the delightful conviction to their bosoms, that God was on their side, and would protect them. Moreover, they had the further evidence that God heard; for they were all filled with the Holy

Ghost, and were endowed with new power, by which they were enabled to speak the word of God with still greater boldness. The heralds of the Cross, at the present day, may not anticipate such miraculous interposition, in times of peril and persecution, as these apostles enjoyed, if on such times they fall. But the glorious assurance has been made them: "Lo, I am with you unto the end of the world." And, in accordance with this assurance, Christ has ever watched over and supported his faithful servants. They have not, indeed, been exempted from opposition, or even persecution. Nay: many of them have been appointed to services which, with all their prudence, have involved them in severe trials and intense sufferings. Not a few have been called to yield up life for the name of Jesus. What then? Such sacrifices have redounded to the honor of their Master, and to the triumph of his cause, while they have added to the eternal joy of those who have thus cheerfully taken up the cross. Struggle on, then, ye servants of the living God! Toil as you have strength! Resist the machinations of the arch adversary, and thwart, while you are able, the evil counsel of the adversaries of the Cross; and, by so doing, you will secure to yourselves a victory as glorious as it will prove lasting!

092. Prayer of Stephen.

Prayer of Stephen.

Acts 7:59-60.

Among the first converts in Jerusalem, there seems to have been many in necessitous circumstances. Their wants, however, were cheerfully and liberally supplied by the more wealthy believers; who “sold their possessions, and laid the price at the apostles’ feet, that distribution might be made to every man according as he had need.” Some Grecian widows, however, were neglected in the daily ministrations. To prevent a recurrence of such neglect, the apostles proposed the institution of a new order of men, whose duty it should be to look after the poorer disciples, and make provision for their wants. This proposal was unanimously approved, and was executed without delay. Seven men, qualified for the office, were selected, who were set apart for that service by prayer and the imposition of hands. In passing, we may remark, that the disciples adopted no important measures without seeking the divine blessing. Prayer mingled in all their movements, and gave life and spirituality to all their conduct.

Among the seven deacons selected, Stephen seems to have been preeminent—“a man full of faith and the Holy Ghost who did great wonders and miracles among the people. These attracted the notice of the adversaries of the Church, who challenged him to a public disputation about the new religion, in the hope that they should be able to confute his arguments; or, at least, to draw from him some unguarded words, for which they might accuse him to the rulers. But they were unable to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. His antagonists were confounded. They could obtain no advantage over him. But where argument failed, malice succeeded. Under a pretext of zeal for the glory of God, they charged him before the Sanhedrim with speaking blasphemous words against Moses and against God. To substantiate this charge, they hired witnesses, and instructed them what to swear. It was further affirmed, that he had been heard to say that Jesus of Nazareth would destroy that place, (Jerusalem,) and change the customs which Moses delivered them.

Stephen had every thing to fear from the furious zeal of his judges. They were Jews, imbued with all the bigotry and prejudice of their nation, and exasperated at the success of the new religion, which they had confidently believed had perished with its founder. The confidence of Stephen, however, did not forsake him, nor was his tranquility disturbed. “All that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face, as it had been the face of an angel.” There was doubtless something preternatural in his countenance—a divine splendor, perhaps, similar to that on the face of Moses, when he came down from the mount—a manifest token of the presence and approbation of God. He was as a rock in the midst of the ocean, upon which the tempests blow and the waves dash in vain.

Stephen having liberty to reply to the charge against him, addressed the Sanhedrim at length; but his speech seems only to have increased the hatred and the rage of his accusers. They were cut

to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. Like infuriated beasts of prey, they were eager to devour the man who had dared to attack them. On the other hand, Stephen was filled with the Holy Ghost, and was vouchsafed with a view of the glory of God—such a view as is seldom granted to mortals—of that glory, as it shines in unclouded splendor in the temple of God; and also was granted to him a view of Jesus, standing on the right hand of God—of Jesus, risen, as it were, from his throne, to observe the courage, the faith, and patience of his disciple—risen to meet and welcome his spirit, as it should escape his mangled body, and to introduce him into the presence of his Father, and to a crown of unfading glory.

Such a vision was granted to this faithful servant of God, now ready to be sacrificed by his cruel persecutors. Nor could he be silent in regard to it. He must speak of it; he must thus honor the Savior, who was so honoring him. “Behold!” exclaimed the martyr, “I see the heavens open, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God!”

These words settled the fate of Stephen. The passions of the mob burst forth with ungovernable fury. They cried out, with a loud voice; they stopped their ears; they ran upon him with one accord; they cast him out of the city; and here they stoned him, calling upon God, and saying: “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” “Father!” said Jesus, as he died, “into thy hands I commend my spirit.” “Lord Jesus,” said the proto-martyr, “receive my spirit.” And, like his divine Master, who, as he expired, cried: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do;” so Stephen utters the unnatural and sublime prayer: “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge!” We say unnatural: for, in such circumstances, human nature is not apt to harbor such sentiments, or utter such language. Our natural feelings would rather invoke revenge: blood for blood; life for life. “Lord!” cries exasperated nature, “Lord, reward them according to their deeds!” “Lord,” says the heaven-born soul, “lay not this sin to their charge!”

We are aware that such language as Stephen uttered is not now uncommon. “Almost every profligate,” observes a writer, “who is brought to the scaffold for his crimes, professes to forgive his enemies, and to die in peace with all the world. But the difference is great between the unmeaning cant of virtue and the real practice of it. It is no vulgar attainment to love the man who hates us; to divest ourselves of a wish to retaliate upon him, who has poured bitterness into our cup; sincerely to desire the salvation of those who, if their power were equal to their malice, would consign us to the flames of hell. Such benevolence never lodged in a soul, whose ideas and affections the Spirit of love had not first purified and elevated.

“‘Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.’ Stephen was fully apprised of the atrocious nature of the conduct of his persecutors, which implied the complicated guilt of murder and impiety; and of the dreadful punishment which was prepared for them by the justice of an insulted Savior. Yet to that Savior he made intercession in their behalf. The words must be understood as a prayer that they might receive repentance unto life, and be pardoned through that blood which they now despised as a common thing.

“The melting charity of this prayer was sufficient to have softened the hearts of savages. Yet it did not suspend the rage of the murderers of this holy man; but as he closed it, the mortal blow was inflicted, which filled up the measure of their guilt, and dismissed the saint to everlasting rest. ‘And when he had said this, he fell asleep.’ Nature had suffered violence; but the struggle was over, and its convulsive agitation was succeeded by a calm. He fell asleep. The word is happily chosen to

express the peaceful nature of the death of the righteous, who, worn out with labor, and exhausted with sorrow, sink down upon the bed of death to enjoy sweet repose. There let the blessed martyr rest, till the dawn of the last morning, when, awaked by the voice of his Savior, he shall rise to receive an unfading crown, and to participate in the triumph of truth, which, by patience and meekness and blood, shall have overcome the rage of the world and the malice of hell." (Dick's Lectures).

093. Prayer of Cornelius.

Prayer of Cornelius.

Acts 10:1-2, etc.

We come now to another important era in the history of the Christian Church, where her covenant privileges are to be extended to a people hitherto “without God and without hope in the world,”—the Gentiles.

Up to this time, the Gospel had been preached only to Jews. It was the express direction of Jesus Christ, that the proffers of salvation should be first made to them—“beginning at Jerusalem.” But it was not the design of Infinite Benevolence to confine the blessings and privileges of the Gospel exclusively to them, although the Jews so thought. Christ suffered for all, whether Jews or Gentiles; and his commission to his apostles was, “Go, disciple all nations;” as if he had said:

“Behold the way!” ye heralds cry;

Spare not, but lift your voices high;

Convey the sound from pole to pole, “Glad tidings!” to the captive soul.

Eight years had elapsed, during which no Gentile had been openly called into the kingdom, nor had it been announced that any might enter. The middle wall was still standing. The barriers of exclusion were still strong; nor had it been revealed, even to the apostles, that that wall was to be demolished, or those barriers to be removed. But the day for the breaking down of this middle wall of partition had now arrived. The waters of life could no longer be restrained. They had been accumulating, in reference to a blessing upon the Gentile world, and, now, we are about to see them gush forth on every side—to spread broader and deeper—and to continue flowing until the end of time.

There was living, at this time, at Caesarea, a man by the name of Cornelius. By birth he was probably a Roman; by profession, a soldier. It is evident that he was not a Jew; nor is there reason to believe that he was in any sense a proselyte to the Jewish religion. It seems probable that he was a Gentile, known and acknowledged as such; otherwise, Peter would have felt less reluctance to extend to him the right hand of fellowship; and it was because he was a Gentile, (and that by means of his conversion the barrier between Jew and Gentile was to be broken down,) that such preliminaries were necessary to remove the prejudices and enlighten the minds of the apostles in regard to the introduction of the Gentiles to Gospel privileges. But though Cornelius was a Gentile, “he was a devout man, and one that feared God.” He was a pious man, and the pious sentiments which he entertained towards Jehovah, he was successful in inculcating upon his family. He was, moreover, a man of prayer. “He prayed to God always:” i.e. frequently, perhaps at stated seasons. That he maintained private, or closet prayer, is evident. It is also to be inferred, that he maintained family devotion. And such was his sincerity, and such his faith, that we are informed that with his prayers and alms God was well pleased. “Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial

before God.”

It is not to our purpose to pursue this narrative further; nor shall we attempt to conjecture what were the tenor and burden of his prayers. It is quite evident that he did not pray in the name of Jesus Christ, nor could he plead the promises of a child of Abraham. He had no other light that we know of to direct him, than that which is shed upon all from the works of nature. He might have enjoyed means of knowledge with which we are unacquainted. Possibly some portion of the word of God might have fallen into his hands. Possibly some Jew might have instructed him. Possibly some convert to the religion of Jesus might have given him some outline of the Gospel. But this is only conjecture, and, we must confess, improbable. It seems, rather, from the manner in which the Gospel was made known to him, that he was entirely ignorant of it, and ignorant that the blessings, either of the Abrahamic covenant or of the Christian dispensation, were ever designed to be extended to him or his countrymen. The revelation was a new one—surprising to him, and still more surprising to the Jews, who thought to have monopolized every spiritual blessing, whether proceeding from the old or the new covenant.

And, now, what are we to gather in respect to prayer from the case of Cornelius? May we not hope that there are thousands in heathen lands, who do pray with the faith and sincerity of Cornelius: and, like him, are accepted of God? In lands where the Gospel shines, prayer, in order to be acceptable, must be offered in the name, and in the faith of Jesus Christ. To this, there is no exception, unless it be in those cases where the mind is darkened through unintentional ignorance or prejudice. But, in heathen countries, where the name of Jesus is unknown, prayer, in his name or in reliance upon him, is not to be expected. And yet, the “spirit of faith” may exist, we hope—those dispositions of the heart which would embrace a Redeemer, were a Redeemer revealed. Cornelius embraced the Savior when he was offered to him: and prayer, ascending from any soul, and every soul which would embrace him, wherever it exists, in the heathen world, must be acceptable to God.

Let this thought comfort us in those dark and gloomy hours, which every Christian experiences, when pondering upon the state of the heathen world. There are there, indeed, thousands and tens of thousands of altars erected to Moloch and to the host of heaven. Yet, may we not hope that there are other altars here and there—not a few in the aggregate— where prayer, according to the dim light of nature, is offered, and is acceptable to God?

But, were there a thousand more such altars than we have reason to believe there are, our efforts to extend the full blessings of the gospel to them should not be lessened. Rather should Christians, who appreciate the blessings of a throne of grace, increase their exertions in behalf of those who dwell in pagan lands.

O'er the realms of pagan darkness Let the eye of pity gaze;

See the kindreds of the people Lost in sin's bewild'ring maze.

Darkness brooding On the face of all the earth.

Light of them that sit in darkness!

Rise and shine—thy blessings bring:

Light to lighten all the Gentiles!

Rise with healing in thy wing; To thy brightness Let all kings and nations come.

094. Prayer In Behalf Of Peter.

Prayer In Behalf Of Peter.

Acts 12:5. In this chapter we have an account of a second persecution, to which the infant church was exposed. In the first persecution Stephen was involved, and attained to the honor of martyrdom. In this, Peter is seized, imprisoned, and condemned to death. The author of this latter persecution was Herod, grandson of Herod the Great, who attempted the life of our Savior in his infancy, and nephew of Herod, by whose command the Baptist was beheaded. Prompted, either by his own bigotry—for he was educated in the religion of Moses—or, to gratify the resentment of others, “he stretched forth his hand to vex certain of the church. James, the brother of John, he killed with the sword; and, because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also.”

Upon his apprehension, Peter was imprisoned; and, that there might be no chance of escape, sixteen soldiers were appointed to guard his person. At length, the day of his execution was fixed.

There was, apparently, now, no prospect of Peter’s release. The apostles had no civil power; the church had none; and an appeal to Herod would be in vain. There was, however, one alternative; and to that, the church, in her extremity, resorts. The disciples assemble at the house of Mary—herself a devoted Christian—and there, during the night, they offer long and importunate supplications for the deliverance of Peter.

There are many instances of successful prayer recorded in the Scriptures; but few, if any, more joyful and surprising than that before us. Surely, the Church need never despair. Upon the estimate of human probabilities, there was no hope in respect to the escape of Peter. For, how could that prison be reached?—How that door be unlocked?—How those keepers silenced?—How those fetters loosened? But let us not anticipate. Peter is sleeping—at peace with God—at peace with himself. It was his last night. But there is within his bosom a good conscience, and the hope of immortality. Why not sleep calmly and secure? But his Divine Master is awake; the church itself is awake, and is at prayer: and, in answer to prayer, an angel of the Living God is dispatched to the prison, to release the apostle. We must, however, pass over the circumstances of his release. Suffice it to say, that under the guidance of the angel, he departs from the prison walls, and repairs to the house of Mary.

Peter knocks at the gate, and is heard by a damsel by the name of Rhoda. In a suppressed voice, Peter asks admittance; but, in the tumult of her thoughts, and in the excess of her joy, instead of unbarring the gate, she hastens to the disciples, and, to the surprise of all, announces that Peter himself is standing at the gate. This was deemed impossible—and the damsel is pronounced “mad.” But wherefore this unbelief? For hours, they had been praying, with all possible earnestness and importunity, for this very result; and, now, when told that Peter is safe, they cannot credit it, and prefer to think that the damsel is insane, than that their prayers are answered. And still more, upon her affirming that she is neither mad nor mistaken, they resort to another

explanation, not less indicative of unbelief, that, probably, it is Peter's ghost!

We do not say that there was any thing uncommon in the conduct of these disciples; but, there was a great want of faith. Christians often pray earnestly, but they are slow to believe that their prayers will be answered, and express great surprise when they are answered. How often is it that a revival is sought—ardently and importunately—and should, therefore, be expected: but when God pours out his Spirit, and sinners begin to be humbled and convicted, Christians are astonished that their prayers are thus answered. This narrative suggests several important truths in regard to prayer.

1. Prayer is a direct means of obtaining blessings from God. That Peter was delivered from the hands of Herod, in answer to the prayers of the Church, is evident from two facts. 1. That prayer was made for his release. And, 2. That God sent his angel for the special purpose of effecting his deliverance. The inspired penman has so connected these facts, that any other inference is impossible. They are stated as cause and effect. Had the Church not assembled, or had they not thus prayed, who will affirm that the apostle would have been delivered. But it is incredible, say some, that the high and mighty God should listen to the supplications of worms on his footstool. It is, doubtless, great condescension; but, why incredible? May not a child ask a favor of his parent? And may not the parent respond? God is infinite; but he hears when the young ravens cry—he notices the falling sparrow—why not listen to the cries of an immortal being? Why not rescue one at the instance of others, when that one is to be made an instrument of good to a world?

It is further objected, that God is immutable; and, therefore, cannot alter his purposes consistently. God is, indeed, immutable. He has decided never to alter his purposes; but it is his purpose, has been, and ever will be—an unchangeable law of his moral administration—to answer sincere and importunate prayer. Should he not answer such prayer, when such are his purposes, he might, indeed, be charged with mutability, inconsistency, and unfaithfulness. He has provided for a response to every faithful prayer, from the beginning to the end of time.

2. Prayer should be earnest.

Steady, ardent, intense. Mr. Barnes observes that the word rendered “without ceasing,” is found but in one other place in the New Testament. 1 Peter 4:8. “Have fervent charity among yourselves.” The word conveys the idea that their prayers were earnest and fervent, rather than constant. They corresponded, in these respects, to the importance of the blessing sought. This was the life of a fellow disciple—of an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. The death of Peter at this juncture—of this ardent, bold, single-hearted champion of the Cross—would, seemingly, have been a severe blow to the rising Church of Christ. The disciples were quite right, then, in throwing into their prayers, that night, all the ardor of which they were capable; and, to that ardor, the spirit of God, we may believe, imparted his own divine energy in “groanings which could not be uttered.”

3. Prayer should be persevering.

If the object sought, be important, why should it be relinquished? Why not pray on till the blessing is bestowed? This the child does. He gives not over seeking, till the parent grants his request, or decides that it cannot be consistently granted. Abraham pleads for Sodom until he is ashamed, it would seem, to plead longer. But, who can say, that, had he plead her cause still longer, he would not have prevailed? Our Lord has said, that men should always pray, and never faint; and, if

always, there is no limitation to persevering prayer. The rule is, to pray till God bids you “cease;” till God grants the boon, or says, “No.”

4. Prayer, on suitable occasions, should be offered by Christians uniting for that purpose.

Such an occasion was the deliverance of Peter. His imprisonment was a public calamity. The whole Church was suffering, and was likely to suffer still more, should the plans and purposes of Herod be accomplished. With great propriety, therefore, did the Church, as a body, come together and plead, in their collective capacity, for the deliverance of one, of so much importance to the infant cause. In like manner, should the Church at the present day act; if, from any cause, her interests are suffering. Are the influences of the Spirit suspended?—Are false doctrines being spread abroad?—Are ministers swerving from the truth?—Is the Church, in respect to her light, life, zeal, losing her proper influence over the world?—Are sinners waxing bold, and crowding the broad way in an unusual manner?—If all these, or any of these, discouraging and palsying influences are at work, let the Church assemble; let her plead and importune the aid of her Divine Head.

5. Prayer is sometimes answered, while it is yet being offered up. This was true in respect to the deliverance of Peter. He was released while the disciples were praying at the house of Mary. This accords with one of the promises of the prophetic Scriptures. “It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and, while they are yet speaking, I will hear.” Daniel received an immediate response to his supplication: “While I was speaking in prayer, and confessing my sin, and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God, for the holy mountain of my God: yea, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me, about the time of the evening oblation, and he informed me, and talked with me, and said: O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding. At the beginning of thy supplications, the commandment came forth, and I am come to show thee, for thou art greatly beloved.” In like manner, were the disciples answered on the day of the Pentecost. They were engaged in prayer at the very time of the descent of the Spirit, and were supplicating that most important blessing. And, since that auspicious morning of the Christian Church, how many have received similar blessings, while they were in the very attitude of supplicating them! To Him, their prayers and cries, Each contrite soul presents;

And, while he hears their humble sighs, He grants them all their wants.

6. God has every possible facility for answering prayer.

He is Lord of the universe. Not an angel exists, that is not ready to fly at his command; nor are bars, and bolts, and keepers in the way, when he decides to act in behalf of an individual, or in behalf of his Church. Grant that to us every thing seems forbidding; may be the powers of earth, and the powers of darkness are against us.—What then? By a single turn of his providence, God can, with infinite ease, put those out of the way who would intercept and prevent the blessings sought.

We do not say that, at the present day, we are to expect miraculous interference on the part of God. The age of miracles may be past; but God is infinitely well able to touch some spring, far above our sight and comprehension, by which storms are hushed—billows are put to repose—human prejudices are removed, and human passions are allayed.

Let us not be discouraged. No, however dark and gloomy our affairs may be; whatever difficulties seem to exist, and render it, so to speak, impossible that we should be blessed in a given way—if that blessing be needed, and God so decide—and we pray humbly and in faith for it—it must come. And it will come: whether it be bread we need, or deliverance from the power of a cruel tyrant, or the converting influences of the divine Spirit. God reigns! let the earth rejoice!

095. Paul And Silas.

Paul And Silas.

Acts 16:25.

Paul and Silas are in an inner prison at Philippi, and are praying and singing praises at midnight. What is the explanation of their strange adventure?

These servants of Jesus were now on a missionary tour; in the progress of which, they came to Troas. Here, a vision appeared to Paul in the night—a man of Macedonia, apparently praying, and saying: “Come over into Macedonia, and help us.” The request was concise, but pressing. Inferring, from the vision, that he was called to preach the Gospel in Macedonia, Paul, accompanied by Silas, sets out without delay; and, after a prosperous voyage, arrives at Philippi.

Philippi, at this time, was the chief city of that part of Macedonia. It was under Roman law, but was principally inhabited by Jews. Not long after their arrival, accompanied by several Jews, they went out of the city, by a river side, on the Sabbath-day, to an Oratorio, or place where prayer was wont to be made. Here Paul preached; and Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, became his convert. Not long after, as Paul was again proceeding to the above place, for prayer, a certain damsel, possessed with the spirit of divination, met him, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying. In the name of Jesus, Paul ejected the demon which possessed her; in consequence of which, she abandoned her soothsaying, and, of course, her masters failed of their usual gains, by reason of her practices.

Greatly incensed at the loss of such an income, the masters of the young woman accused Paul and Silas of “troubling the city.” They succeeded in raising a popular outcry against the missionaries. The magistrates, also, became enlisted; and, in their zeal and indignation, rose upon them; and, having severely beaten them, cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely. The jailer— himself an unfeeling monster—quite willing to carry out the mandate of the magistrates, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.

Paul and Silas might, probably, have saved themselves from punishment, had they, at the moment of their seizure, as they did the next morning, declared themselves to be Roman citizens. But, willing to suffer for the Gospel, they waived this privilege; and, as true disciples of the Redeemer, submitted to stripes and imprisonment imposed upon them. The Lord Jesus was, however, with his faithful servants, and overruled their trials, for promoting the object of their mission to Philippi. Their prison became a place of prayer and of praise; and there was enacted a scene of grace, which will for ever prove a source of admiration and joy, wherever the story shall be told. At midnight, Paul and Silas lift up their voices in prayer. They doubtless prayed for themselves—for deliverance, if such were the will of God—but more, that the name of Jesus might be honored; and that souls then, and in that populous city, might be converted. What a rich source of consolation to these imprisoned missionaries was access to a throne of grace! What holy confidence do they exercise in God! What reliance do they feel upon Him, who had said to his first apostles: “Lo, I am

with you unto the end of the world!" Paul was strong in prayer.

"Prayer is a creature's strength—his very breath and being; Or was, perhaps, the "breath and being" of Paul, more than most other men. That night, probably, no fears assaulted his heart; no apprehension of approaching evil altered him from his purpose.

Paul and Silas prayed. They did more—they sang praises to God. Many a modern Christian might pray under such circumstances—but how few would sing praises to God! "Little do songs accord with the gloom of a prison." But Paul and Silas were animated by the consideration that they were suffering for the name of Jesus. Of that name, they were not, and never could be ashamed. Had some one, that night, looked in, through those prison doors, upon the apostle—had he inquired of Paul whether he were not "ashamed of Jesus" of Nazareth, he may have broke out in those strong and admiring lines of the poet:

Jesus, and shall it ever be— A mortal man ashamed of thee!

Ashamed of thee, whom angels praise! Whose glories shine through endless days!

"Never! No—never!" I think I hear the apostle say. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

I can do all things, or can bear All suffering, if my Lord be there.

Paul had no reason to doubt the support and approbation of his divine Master. His Lord was there. The displays of his power and grace were there. While their songs were still rising, and were borne up by strong faith and holy zeal— the other prisoners meanwhile wondering at the unwonted scene—God bore his divine attestation in favor of his suffering servants, by a miraculous earthquake, by which the foundations of the prison were shaken—the doors were opened— the bands of the prisoners were loosed.

Let us hasten to the sequel. That was as happy and as glorious, as the prospects of Paul and Silas, the evening before, were gloomy and depressing. The jailer is converted, and salvation comes to his house. What a change! What a sudden, surprising change! What an answer to prayer! What a result of honoring and praising God!

"How happy, henceforth, was that family! The new convert rejoiced, and so did all his house. 'The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous.' There is no joy like that which flows from the belief of the Gospel. It purifies, while it refreshes the soul; it gives a more elevated tone to the feelings than worldly pleasures can give; it contains no poisonous mixture, which afterwards corrodes the heart; it sheds a lustre upon every object, and cheers even the dark hours of adversity; and, in a word, it is permanent—going with us wherever we go—accompanying us to death, and springing up within us, as a well of living water, in the world to come."

If such be the Gospel, let us embrace it. If God thus honors those who praise him in adversity, let us never shrink from trial, however great it may be. If such answers are given to prayer, let us be willing to offer it from the dungeon, and at the midnight hour, if such, by the will of God, be, at any time, our abode.

096. Romans.

Romans.

097. Aids Of The Spirit.

Aids Of The Spirit.

Romans 8:26.

Wherever there exists a soul which has been released from the terrors of the law, and been baptized with the peace of the Gospel, let that soul never cease to praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. It is a mighty deliverance; to effect which, the wisdom, energy, and love of the sacred Three have all been engaged. The law, under which the Father has placed the sinner, and which law the latter has violated, is, and must be, for ever incapable of restoring him to peace and holiness. The law knows nothing of mercy. In its demands, it is peremptory and unmitigated; or is sweeping and irreversible in its condemnations. Applied to the conscience of the sinner—that conscience being carnal, and sold under sin—it only excites, irritates, and distresses; so that an unsanctified man, in every step of his progress to eternity, has only to exclaim: “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” But here, the Gospel by Jesus Christ comes in for his relief. It discloses a way, and a marvelous way, by which the sinner can be restored to holiness, and once more to joy. These are the subjects which occupy the seventh and eighth chapters of the Epistle to the Romans. The law, is the minister of condemnation: the Gospel, is the minister of justification. The law never restores the soul to holiness, nor to filial confidence in God: the Gospel does both. It tells of a Spirit, whose agency has been purchased by the Son of God; and through whose influences, the soul may be sanctified, and a spirit of adoption engendered in the heart. It discloses, also, to the distressed and troubled heart, sources of the richest consolation, through the ministrations of that Spirit. This last, is the idea presented to us in the words which we have recited. The Spirit helpeth our infirmities: or those weaknesses to which we are subject in the present life. He helps us, by giving us strength to bear them, and by exciting us to make efforts ourselves to sustain them. “For we know not,” says the apostle, “what we should pray for as we ought,” etc. This is a specification of the aid which the holy Spirit renders us.

Let us, in the first place, look at the reasons why Christians do not know for what to pray:

1. They do not know, often times, what would be really best for them.
2. They do not know what God might be willing to grant them.
3. They are, to a great extent, ignorant of the character of God—the reason of his dealings—the principles of his government—their own real wants.
4. When they seem to realize what their true wants are, and they are about to present them at a throne of grace, their minds become strangely clouded, and their hearts cold and insensible; so that they are unable to take hold upon the promises of God, or to press their suit with success. But here, the Gospel discloses to them a means of success, which, before the death of Jesus Christ, never entered into the heart of man to conceive. We do not mean to say, that the Spirit did not animate the devotions, and inspire the prayers of the saints of the olden time. He did. But it is not

probable that Moses, or. Samuel, or David, or Isaiah had any clear conceptions of this great doctrine of the Gospel. It was left to our Lord Jesus Christ to make the blessed annunciation of the descent, and of the divine operations and aids of the holy Spirit. It was left to the great apostle of the

Gentiles to record, in two sentences, truths of inestimable importance to the believer, touching the aid vouchsafed him in his approaches to the throne of grace.

Most true is it, that we do not know how to pray, nor for what to pray. But the Spirit does. And he makes intercession for the saints: that is, he greatly assists or aids them. The meaning is not that the Spirit prays for us; not that he intercedes for us, as does our great Advocate, the Lord Jesus Christ; not that he gives birth to those groanings—those deep-felt emotions, with which the soul is sometimes oppressed and overwhelmed before the footstool. But he sustains us under them; he gives impulse and energy to them. He gives them a depth and an intensity, which the unaided soul could never impart to them; so deep, so intense, that no language is able to express them.

How often is it that the parent, when praying for a beloved child—a wife for a beloved husband—or a husband for a wife—a friend for a friend—has feelings which no language can describe, and which no language can begin to express; feelings, which absorb the soul; which drink up the Spirit; which the child of God knows that he of himself could not engender; and which he knows, too, full well, that no sighs and no groans of the heart, unless aided by the Spirit of God, could, for one moment, express!

Such a divine helper, then, we have. One, which the Father himself is more ready to give, than earthly parents are to give good gifts to their children; and who himself is always ready to come to our assistance in the time of need.

And, as the apostle adds: “He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit,” etc. The Spirit excites desires, and aids us in sighs and groans which cannot be uttered; but God knows what these desires are, and what are the import and bearing of these sighs and groans. No matter if they are not expressed; no matter if no language can give utterance to them. God comprehends them.

God sees the inward workings and intense emotions of the heart; and can answer according to his own infinite wisdom, and according to those desires which are prompted by the Spirit, according to his divine will.

Prayer, thus prompted by the Spirit of God, or prayer which is offered under the superintendence of that Spirit, may be expected to be acceptable to God, and a favorable answer looked for.

This, child of God, is a subject of the deepest importance to thy soul! You are here proffered assistance which I beg you ever to appreciate, and of which ever to avail yourself. Blessed is the man who seeks the aid of the divine Spirit, and who yields himself entirely to His holy influence. Need we call ourselves any longer poor? Need we think ourselves blind? Need we feel ourselves feeble? Put in possession of such spiritual wealth—with so much light thrown around us, and the strength of Omnipotence imparted to us, ought we ever to faint?—ought we ever to be sad? Taking advantage of the aid which is here offered us, I see not but that the strongholds of sin and Satan may fall before us. I see not that there is any limit set to our own spiritual attainments. I see

not why we may not call down blessings, which, in their influence, shall reach every son and daughter of Adam.

098. 2 Corinthians.

2 Corinthians.

099. The Thorn In The Flesh.

The Thorn In The Flesh.

2 Corinthians 12:7-9. The Apostle Paul was a man liable to encounter opposition from various quarters and on various accounts. Such opposition he did encounter in many of the places which he visited: at Philippi, at Athens, and at Corinth. But no opposition seems to have been more keenly felt than that which brought his apostolic authority into distrust. Such an attack, however, we find made upon him, during his residence at Corinth; or, after he had left that field of action, by certain Judaizing teachers, and which required a full and satisfactory vindication. This vindication he enters upon, in the tenth chapter of this epistle, and continues it through the eleventh and a part of the twelfth chapters. After stating the remarkable manner in which he had been called to the apostolic office by Jesus Christ, he proceeds to an account in the eleventh chapter of his labors and trials, for the sake of that Savior whose cause he had once so powerfully opposed, and whose disciples he had once so cruelly persecuted. It is a brief account which we have; but it may well be asked, who ever endured more for the cause of Jesus Christ than this same apostle? Had we a detailed recital of his labors—of his stripes—of his imprisonments—of his shipwrecks—of his perils by water and perils by robbers—perils in the city and perils in the wilderness—of his watchings and hungerings and thirstings—what history could be more interesting? what adventures more thrilling? And yet some Alpine adventure of some modern traveler—the falling of some distant avalanche, or the stranding of some misguided ship—has occupied more space, and been magnified into more importance, than the sufferings and deprivations of the apostle, which occupied years. But it was not permitted this missionary of the Cross to boast of his toils and hardships; he might only briefly allude to them, although he was put upon the proof that he was a true apostle of Jesus Christ.

Let this, however, suffice, -in reference to this part of his argument. In the following chapter, we have an argument drawn from a different source—from the favors which God had bestowed upon him, especially in that remarkable vision, which he had enjoyed when he was caught up to heaven, and permitted to behold the glories of that exalted and blissful world.

It does not comport with our plan to enter into the details of this extraordinary transaction. It may, however, be briefly observed, that it is the only instance in the Scriptures of any one who was taken to heaven, either in reality or in vision, and who returned again to earth, and was then qualified to communicate important truths from personal observation. Enoch and Elijah were translated; but they returned not to communicate intelligence to men. On the mount of Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared; but they talked only with Jesus about his decease, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem. Lazarus comes forth from the grave; but he has nothing to say of the invisible world. Many of the saints arose at the resurrection of Jesus; but we have no knowledge of their bringing back any intelligence from the world of spirits. The prophet of Mecca claimed to have made the sublime ascent to the third heaven; but his revelations were as puerile and incredible, as his journey was obviously visionary and absurd. But the apostle Paul was

there—so there, either in vision or in reality, that he might have communicated what was communicable of the glories of that pure and exalted abode. Paul, however, is silent. He is not permitted to reveal what he saw—what he heard— what he felt; nor might he even boast of the honor and of the blessedness to which he thus attained. He might state the fact—which after all he had concealed in his own bosom for fourteen years—he might state the fact, for the important object of proving to his enemies that he had been eminently favored of God (Barnes's Notes in loco). And yet what must accompany such a privilege as was accorded to the apostle? Naturally proud and self-confident—ambitious, doubtless, in his unsanctified state, of the honor which cometh from men—it is necessary that a check should be given to his pride and self-confidence, resulting from favors thus conferred upon him. He must have “a thorn in the flesh—a messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure.”

What that thorn was, we shall not attempt to decide. In no other place, in the New Testament, does the word translated thorn occur. In heathen writers, the word is used to denote that which is pointed or sharp, as a stake or a palisade. By the Septuagint translators, it is employed to denote a thorn or prickle. Whether the apostle refers to some infirmity or pain in the flesh—some deformity of body, which was like a thorn to him—cannot now perhaps be determined. The pious Baxter supposes that it was the stone or the gravel; Doddridge, a paralytic disorder, by which his countenance was distorted, and his speech became stammering. Chrysostom and Jerome supposed it the headache; Tertullian, the ear-ache; and Rosenmuller, the gout in the head. But all such fancies are obviously vain; and the numerous strange and ridiculous opinions of commentators are proof sufficient that it is impossible in the nature of the case to ascertain the truth; nor is it important. It is plain, however, that it was an evil, which had the effect to keep Paul humble, notwithstanding the exalted honors and privileges to which he attained.

It was an evil which Paul grievously felt, and the removal of which he ardently desired. For a time he knew not what was the will of God respecting it. Under the desire and hope of relief, he informs us that he made application to the Lord Jesus—and this was his right, and this his privilege— that it might depart from him. It were idle to suppose that the apostle did not pray with a sincerity and ardency becoming the exigencies of the case. This he would naturally do, for he grievously felt the calamity which pressed upon him.

He prayed once—twice—thrice. He urged his suit; he cried importunately. Paul we find limiting himself to the same number of petitions offered by the Son of God in the garden of Gethsemane. That illustrious personage urged that the cup might pass from him; but he bowed in submission to the will of God. In like manner, Paul urges the removal of this thorn in the flesh; but bows in submission to the divine will. Its removal was incompatible with the personal interests of Paul; with the higher interests of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. If removed, Paul might become boastful and vain-glorious. He must therefore carry that burden, and his Master would help him. “My grace,” said the Lord Jesus, responding to the supplications of his disciple, “shall be sufficient for thee.” “Lord!” replied his submissive and acquiescing servant, “it is enough. Hence forth I will glory in my infirmity, that thy power may rest on me.”

100. 1 Timothy.

1 Timothy.

101. Grace At Meals.

Grace At Meals.

1 Timothy 4:4-5.

“Grace,” or, as it is otherwise called, “Blessing at Meals,” is a short prayer, either before or after partaking of food, in which the Divine blessing is sought and gratitude expressed for the supply of our bodily wants. In New England, and perhaps elsewhere, it was long the custom to invoke a blessing prior to partaking of food, and to return thanks immediately after; and this practice continues in many families to the present time; although, within a few years, it has been the practice of some to combine the two in one service. And while no valid objection exists to two services in families which prefer this mode, no evidence exists that such was the practice either of Christ or of the primitive church. The old Hebrews, however, according to Lewis (*Antiquities of the Hebrew Republic*, vol. ii: p. 451), began their meals with the benediction at the cup: “Blessed be the Lord our God, King of the world, who has created the fruit of the vine;” and then the cup was passed to the several guests. Next followed the blessing of the bread, which the master held in his hand, saying: “Blessed be the Lord our God, King of the world, who has produced bread out of the earth.” It was an established rule, that none of the company should touch any thing till he, who broke the bread, had first tasted it. The distribution of the bread appears to have been practiced in the time of Christ and his apostles. On the occasion of feeding the five thousand, Christ having sought the divine blessing, or, as the original signifies, (Matthew 14:19,) having given thanks, and so Mark expresses it, (Mark 8:6,) he brake, and gave to his disciples, and they to the multitude. This was the more easily done, as, according to Kuinoel, the Jewish loaves, like all the Oriental ones, were thin and brittle. In like manner, Paul, during his eventful voyage into Italy, insisting upon the sailors and soldiers, after a long season of fasting, taking meat, which term was indiscriminately used, as was also bread, for all kinds of food: “Took bread, and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all,” most of whom were heathen; and yet, before whom, the apostle would honor God; “and when he had broken it, he began to eat,” etc. Even as early as the prophet Samuel, (1 Samuel 9:23,) it appears that the master of the feast distributed to every one their portion, or ordered what should be set before them. From Deuteronomy 8:10 :—“When thou hast eaten, and art full, then shalt thou bless the Lord thy God for the good land which he hath given thee”—Oriental writers have contended that to give thanks after a meal was a Levitical injunction and positive command. But nothing more, perhaps, was intended than to inculcate a grateful spirit on the part of the Hebrews when they should come into actual possession of the land whither they were bound—a land in which they were to “eat bread without scantiness”—“a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and pomegranates.” The posture of the body during grace cannot be considered material, if it be but respectful. It has varied in different periods of the world, and among different nations. The original posture of the Hebrews in eating and drinking was sitting; but the Bible seems not to determine their posture in those cases where grace was offered. They either spread something on the ground, and sat upon it, or they sat at table. “And Jacob said unto his father, I am Esau thy first born; I have done according to thy word: arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my

venison. Genesis 27:19. In the time of Moses this posture prevailed. On the occasion of Aaron's making a molten calf, it is recorded, (Exodus 32:6,) "And they rose up early," etc.; "and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." In the time of Saul, the same practice existed. "And David said unto Jonathan, Behold, tomorrow is the new-moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king at meat. 1. Sam. 20: 5. Artaxerxes Longimanus and his queen also took their meals sitting, as we learn from Nehemiah, Nehemiah 2:6. But no intimation is given in the above instances, that the blessing of God was invoked. In those elder times, as now, persons were seated according to rank or equality. Thus, Abner sat by Saul's side; and David had his peculiar situation allotted him, which is styled his seat or his place. The posture at meals was afterward changed; for, as men became effeminate, they consulted their ease, and lay or reclined at their meals. This custom prevailed in the time of Christ. In the case of his feeding the five thousand, he seems to have stood while he blessed the loaves; the people were sitting. In the celebration of the supper, as was common with the Jews at other meals, Jesus and his disciples reclined; the upper part of the body leaning on the left elbow, the lower part stretched at length, and so lying that the head of one naturally reclined on the bosom of another. This explains John 13:23. "Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples whom Jesus loved." With us, standing was formerly the common posture during grace; and, in many families, it is so still. The guests surround the table, while the father or master of the family invokes the blessing of God: and when the repast is finished, the company rise, and thanks are returned in a similar manner. The more modern practice is for the guests to seat themselves at the table, when a blessing is invoked and thanks expressed during one and the same service. In some families, after the guests are seated, silence is observed for a brief space, while the guests say grace, each one for himself. One service seems to be the scriptural mode. And this, it must be conceded, is the more commendable practice in those families, where the guests are necessarily irregular. As to the manner in which grace should be performed, Dr. Watts observes: "We ought to have a due regard to the occasion and the persons present; the neglect of which has been attended with indecencies and indiscretions. Some have used themselves to mutter a few words with so low a voice, as though by some secret charm they were to consecrate the food alone, and there was no need of the rest to join with them in the petition. Some perform the service with so slight and familiar an air, as though they had no sense of the great God to whom they speak. Others affect a most unnatural solemnity, and change their natural voice for a tone awkward and disgusting."

"It is the custom of some," he adds—and the remark will apply to not a few at the present day—"to hurry over a sentence or two, and they have done, before the company are half prepared to lift a thought to heaven. Others, again, make a long prayer; and, among a multitude of other petitions, do not utter one that relates to the table before them. The general rules of prudence, together with the due observations of the customs of the place where we live, would correct all these disorders, and teach us that a few sentences, suited to the occasion, spoken in an audible and proper voice, are sufficient for this purpose, especially if any strangers are present."

There are probably few professors of religion, at the head of families, who neglect grace at meals. Among non-professors the practice is confined to a few; while a multitude never seem to think of Him who spreads their table and fills their cup. For the benefit of such—if such should read these pages—a brief view of their obligations, in this respect, are subjoined:

1. The practice is scriptural.

There does not appear to be exactly positive precept for grace at meals in the Scriptures; yet, they abound with examples, of the pious in all ages, and such suggestions and exhortations, as clearly to indicate the will of God in reference to it. The practice of Samuel—of Christ—of Saul, have already been noticed. Jewish writers agree that the custom among the Jews was universal; and Wetstein affirms that it was not neglected by the heathen themselves. They often made, as every scholar knows, libations to their gods before their meals, as an acknowledgment of their indebtedness to them for their daily food. “He, therefore,” says President Dwight, who, in a Christian country, neglects to praise God for his food, cannot, with propriety, be called a heathen. He may, with more propriety, be styled an animal. Nay, in some respects, he degrades himself below the brutes; for the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib; but he doth not know nor even consider.” The New Testament abounds in facts and in exhortations in relation to this practice. Say the historians of the proceedings of the day of Pentecost, Acts 2:42 :—“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” Some writers apply this to the celebration of the Eucharist. But, as they had all things common, “breaking of bread,” says Mr. Barnes, “would rather seem to refer to their participation of their ordinary meals.” The practice is referred to by Paul (Romans 14:6) as though it were common, and had his approbation. To the Corinthian church the apostle writes, (1 Corinthians 10:31): “Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, do all to the glory of God.” But when we receive our food, how can we glorify God before men, unless by asking his blessing upon it, and rendering to him our praise for the liberal provision which he daily makes for our support. Again, to the Colossians, (Colossians 3:17,) he writes: “Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father by him;” and to Timothy he says, in his strong, characteristic language, that every thing designed by God for food is to be received, when eaten, with thanksgiving: “for,” says the apostle, “it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.” Such, in the absence of positive injunction, are the ample proofs of this important duty, and such are the exhortations which Scripture gives us for our seeking for the divine blessing upon our daily food.

2. The practice is most reasonable.

God works by second causes; and complicated is the machinery by which he loads our tables with his providential bounties. Nevertheless, these bounties are as truly of his providing as was the bread which was rained from heaven for the children of Israel. Men may forget this truth, or they may disregard it, and affect, as some infidel philosophers have done, to believe that God takes little interest in this world, or in the race that inhabit it. But, under the light of divine revelation, men know better; and were they honest and willing to “render unto God the things which are God’s,” they would feel it to be both a duty and a privilege to acknowledge the hand that feeds them. Who imparts to his needy neighbor, or to the wandering mendicant, and does not expect some expression of gratitude in return? What would they think, who never pause themselves to express thanks to God, and perhaps deny his just claims to their gratitude for the food that sustains them—should the beggar, whom they have fed, on rising from his repast, say: “Sir, I have eaten bountifully at your table, but I feel under no obligations to you, and, therefore, will riot even take the trouble to thank you?” Who ever knew a beggar guilty of such incivility and ingratitude? But who, on the other hand, has not known hundreds of partakers of God’s bounties for months and years, who, apparently, never thought it their duty to express their gratitude to Him? They eat—drink—enjoy—but as to any recognition of their dependence upon a higher power, they are,

seemingly, as stupid as the stalled ox. But why this marked indifference?—this positive ingratitude? Is the Infinite God, then, under obligation to load your table with his bounties? Is it for you to revel in his providential mercies—to enjoy, with keen relish, provisions gathered from the four quarters of the globe—and you manifest no gratitude? Must his winds waft ships freighted with the delicacies of other climes? Must he, at your bidding, send down the rains of heaven to germinate your wheat and your corn, and to ripen your harvests?

Ah, dependent child of the dust! you may not thus hope to direct your Maker; nor may you be dumb while your rational appetite is gratified by food of God's providing. Should he cease to care for you for one short month, what would become of that body which you cherish with so great care? One hail storm could prostrate your finest wheat harvest. One night of frost cut off and destroy your luxuriant fields of corn. Look at Ireland and her famished thousands, and tell me, is man not dependent upon God? In that ill-fated country, the cry of starvation is heard on every side, and the loud wail of thousands of haggard, emaciated forms—still breathing, and yet dying—is borne upon every breeze to this land of plenty. Spread such a table in some Irish cabin as you eat at, and would the delighted throng gathering round be dumb in the praises of God for such relief? And, yet, you are as truly in the hands of God as they are—as dependent, and under as solemn obligations to be grateful to your Divine Benefactor. In short, there is not a service on earth more reasonable than Grace at meals. Nor do we see how the father of a rising family can discharge his conscience while neglecting it, and while setting an example of such utter ingratitude as that neglect implies. Let such mark it and remember it: if God will not hold him guiltless who taketh his name in vain, surely, he will not hold him guiltless that is for ever dumb in his praises.

3. The practice conduces to order, morality, and religion. The children of that family in which devotional exercises are daily observed, and we include grace at meals, are more likely to put their dependence upon God, and to be grateful to Him, than are the children of that family in which no such services are observed. The former have before them the example of a father, which they are likely to follow. As he feels, so will they be likely to feel; and, as he expresses himself, so they will express themselves. They will not forget, when they shall have left the parental board, the thanks poured out there. At least, such services strongly tend to render children decent, respectful, and courteous. The family are assembled at the same time; they take their seats at the table in order; they are quiet. The conversation which follows the blessing, is apt to be more rational, and more instructive.

Some object to leading in family prayer, that they have no time; but grace at meals will occupy but a few seconds. Others object to prayer on the ground of inability. But what parent is so deficient in courage as to be unable, in a sentence or two, to implore the blessing of God?

Such services sometimes exercise an influence of a most salutary and lasting kind. Irenaeus somewhere relates the effect of "asking a blessing," which deserves a place in this connection, and which may serve as a hint to Christians that their example is seldom without observation.

He, with a party of friends, was on a visit to Niagara Falls. As they arrived late in the evening, they had a private supper; and, being by themselves, a blessing was asked before they partook of it. There were two or three servants in waiting, among whom was one by the name of Morrison. "During our stay of three days," says Irenaeus, "we were struck with the unusual attention which Morrison manifested to our wants; not only doing his duty, but, apparently, taking extra pains to

please us, whenever it was in his power. Just before we left, Morrison stepped up to me, as I was walking alone, and, making an apology for his boldness, expressed his desire to have some conversation on the subject of religion. Upon being assured that I was glad to speak with him, he told me that the Savior was dear to him, and that he was always glad to see gentlemen in the house who loved religion. He then said somewhat as follows: 'I don't know what it is exactly, but it's love, I know it is; for ever since you asked a blessing at the table the other night, I have felt my heart kind a going out to you and your friends, and I couldn't bear to have you go away without telling you how I felt.'

"In answer to my inquiries, he gave an account of his conversion, and I gave him words of encouragement, which he received with apparent joy; and at parting. I shook hands with him as with a new-found friend.

"Here was man, of a darker skin than mine, surrounded by a score of thoughtless, perhaps profane, companions, deprived, by his constant duties in the house, of the enjoyment of religious privileges; and, yet, with a soul washed in the blood of Jesus, and longing for sympathy with some other soul that had been cleansed in the same fountain. He observes a stranger, at the table which he serves, acknowledging with gratitude the Giver of the bounties before him, and he marks the stranger at once as a Christian, a friend, a brother; and he goes to him with confidence to lay open his heart."

Let the Christian learn from this incident that he is often watched when he little suspects it; and may accomplish much good by a faithful and punctilious attention to the duties of his profession.

102. James.

James.

103. The Efficacy Of Earnest, Energetic Prayer.

The Efficacy Of Earnest, Energetic Prayer.

James 5:16.

There is, in this passage and the context, apparently much to encourage our belief in the efficacy of fervent and sincere prayer. But it is apprehended that a degree of doubt is often experienced in contemplating it, as encouraging such a conviction, from the fact that it seems to express only a self-evident proposition, namely: the effectual prayer of a righteous man is effectual. The propriety of such an interpretation of a passage, in an inspired volume, may well be questioned: hence, on referring to the original, we find the word rendered effectual, to be a derivative from a verb, signifying to labor hard, or energize; and the idea is, “that the earnest, energetic prayer of a righteous man availeth much, or has great efficacy.” This interpretation is sanctioned by Bloomfield and others; and, doubtless, conveys the true import of the passage. And in this view, it has, it must be conceded, great force. The prayer here contemplated, besides being offered—as all prevalent prayer must be—in reliance upon the merits of Jesus Christ, and in submission to the divine will, must, also, be offered by “a righteous man:” not one righteous in the absolute sense—for no one is perfectly holy—but by one who is truly pious—a sincere lover of God. And, moreover, it must be earnest, energetic prayer, or intensely fervent. Such prayer is declared to avail much, or to have great efficacy.

Prayer involves the idea of want on the part of the suppliant, and supposes ability to supply that want on the part of him to whom the prayer is addressed. “It is the preferring of a request upon the one side, and compliance with that request on the other. Man applies: God complies. Man asks a favor: God bestows it.” Here is an antecedent, which is prayer, and a consequent, viz: “The fulfillment of that prayer, in virtue of a mandate from heaven.”

And, moreover, prayer proceeds upon the ground of a real influence, or motive-power, upon the being to whom it is addressed. The child asks a favor of a parent; and, by so doing, aims and expects to move the parent to grant it. And he does move him. Without that prayer, he would not, in a supposable case, receive the favor desired. And, moreover, the very importunity of the child, or his earnest, energetic manner, may be the influential cause wherefore the parent bestows it. Man asks a blessing of God; and the object of his asking is to move or influence God to bestow it. And he does move him. “We hold,” says Dr. Chalmers, “that there is, in prayer, a real interchange between earth and heaven; and that, for the requests of faith and piety, which ascend from the habitations of men below, there do come down actual returns from the upper sanctuary. The asking, upon the one side, is met by a consent, and so a giving, or performance, upon the other.”

It has been said, indeed, that the only object of prayer is “to discipline the affections and so to prepare the mind to receive and appreciate the blessing sought. But this is not true. For, if prayer be designed only to influence the heart of him who prays, why did Christ spend whole nights in prayer? “Being perfect, he required no discipline of the heart. He had no dross to consume, by

holding converse with the divine mind." But, for the full and perfect discharge of the solemn and responsible duties assigned him, he needed the aid of the Father; and, by prayer, he sought to influence the Father to bestow that aid. And he did so influence him. Nor is there any reason to suppose that, without such prayer on the part of Christ, the requisite aid would have been bestowed by the Father. "If there be not a suasion, or actual influence, exerted by prayer, then, indeed," as Dr. Chalmers remarks, "does there lie a hopeless and impassable barrier between us and Him who is called the Father of our spirits." On an appeal to the Scriptures, are not these views sustained? Abraham intercedes for Lot; and we read: "And God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities of the plain." God remembered Abraham's prayer, or intercession for Lot; and, by that prayer, was moved, or influenced, to send Lot out. God said to Moses, in reference to the children of Israel, who had murmured and rebelled: "Let me alone, that I may destroy this people." "If you pray for them, my hands are tied," as an old divine says: "I shall not be able to destroy them." And again, in reference to the same people, God says: "Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet could not my mind be towards this people:" i.e. they could not influence me to bless them. What is the import of these passages, if prayer has no power over God to influence him? Moreover, what doctrine did our Savior design to inculcate on this point, when he uttered the parable of the unjust judge? The judge, a wicked and unjust man, was moved by importunity; he was influenced to avenge the cause of the widow, because she continued to pray. The friend applied to for bread, (Luke 11,) rose, and gave to his friend, because the latter continued to plead. And this is the true import, or designed inculcation, of the passage: "The earnest, energetic prayer of a righteous man has great efficacy it has strong influence; it is a cause, operating upon and powerfully inclining the divine mind to grant the request. To the efficacy of specific prayer, an objection has been made, on the ground of the "unalterable constancy of nature." To this, it may be replied, that, granting the truth of the Scripture history, the laws of nature have, in past ages, been suspended, or reversed, in numerous instances, in answer to prayer. The apostle James cites an instance—that of Elijah—in connection with the passage we are contemplating, in proof that the earnest, energetic prayer of a righteous man has great efficacy. In answer to the prayer of that distinguished prophet, it rained not on a portion of the earth for the space of several years. But the inquiry is both natural and proper.—Is miraculous interposition to be expected, in answer to prayer, at the present day? We cannot say, with positive assurance, that such interposition never occurs. But the presumption is, that nature proceeds in one invariable order; insomuch that the same antecedents are followed by the same consequents. And this has probably been true since the beginning of the creation, saving the well-accredited miracles of the Jewish and Christian dispensations. "We admit," says Dr. Chalmers, "that never, in our whole lives, have we witnessed, as the effect of man's prayer, any infringement made on the known laws of the universe; or that nature, by receding from her constancy, to the extent that we have discovered it, has ever, in one instance, yielded to his supplicating cry. We admit, that, by no importunity from the voice of faith, or from any number or combination of voices, have we seen an arrest, or a shift, laid on the ascertained courses, whether of the material or the mental economy; or a single fulfillment, of any sort, brought about in contravention either to the known properties of any known substances, or to the known principles of any established succession in the history of nature. These are our experiences."

But, if so, what encouragement have we to pray for blessings which involve, or seem to involve, a supernatural interposition? For instance, suppose a valued friend is sick, and apparently sinking to

the grave: May I pray for the special interposition of God? May I pray that skill may be imparted to the physician? May I ask God to direct to such remedies as he will bless?—that he will give efficacy to the means of cure employed? Such prayers are offered. But, if the laws of nature are unchangeable—if God never specially interposes—of what avail is such prayer?

Take another case: A widow, standing on the shore, sees a vessel—on board of which is her only son, and her chief earthly dependence—on the point of foundering. Without the special interposition of God, there is no prospect that she can long survive. Now, has that widow—whom we suppose to be a true child of God—any good reason to believe that her Heavenly Father will answer her cry, made in this day of her trouble? He has said: “Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will answer thee, and thou shalt glorify me.” But, if the laws of nature hold on with a uniform and undeviating constancy, that vessel cannot survive. Suppose the lone widow, in the midst of her agony is told, by some cold, philosophic objector, that the laws of nature never change. Would this satisfy her? Would this prevent her cries to the Lord of winds and waves? Cry she must, and cry she would.

Now, how shall we meet this difficulty? We may not deny her right to call; nor may we deny the efficacy of prayer. The objection is a formidable one. But, formidable as it is, and inexplicable as it may be, no good man, probably, was ever prevented, in a single instance, from praying, on account of it. God has authorized and encouraged his children to pray; he has promised to hear and answer; and these promises and assurances should dispel all gloomy doubts and fears. God has, in some way, provided for every supplication which shall be offered, from the beginning to the end of time; and with more confidence may the child of God look for a favorable answer to his humble and fervent prayer, than the husbandman may expect a crop of wheat or corn, after all proper preparation therefore. With a view, however, to meet the philosophical objection drawn from the constancy of nature, an hypothesis has been framed by Dr. Chalmers, which is both ingenious and plausible. In substance, it is this:

Every event, in nature or history, has a cause in some prior event which went before it, and that again in another; and we might climb our ascending way from cause to cause, till the investigation has been carried as far as our finite powers permit. But the progression, or causation, stops not here. An angel could carry it further: Gabriel, perhaps, higher still. But of these remote causes, and their modes of succession, we can positively say nothing. For aught we know, they may be under the immediate control of higher beings in the universe; or, like the upper part of a chain, a few of whose closing links are all that are visible to us, they may be directly appended to the throne, and at all times subject to the instant pleasure of a prayer-hearing God. And it may be, by a responsive touch at the higher, and not at the lower part of the progression, that he answers our prayers. It may be not by an act of intervention among those near and visible causes, where intervention would be a miracle; it may be by an unseen, but not less effectual act of intervention, among the remote, and, therefore, the occult causes, that he adapts himself to the various wants, and meets the various petitions of his children. Let us illustrate this principle, by reference to the case of the widow, whose son is in peril. She prays for the rescue of her child. God decides that her prayer shall be answered; but he works no miracle. How, then, shall it be done? Now, it is obvious that “the heat, and the vapor, and the atmospherical precipitates, and the consequent moving forces,” are all subject to Him; and a slight change of temperature, far out of our sight, would produce a change of wind, so as to take the vessel—on board of which is the widow’s son—off from the

shore; or would lull the tempest, and smooth the waters, by which the peril would, in a single hour, be removed. These are changes which come to us, so far as we can see, through the natural operations of the laws of nature; and they are changes effected in answer to that woman's prayer. God may have been influenced by her cries, in this way, to overrule the "elemental war, and hush into silence this wild frenzy of the winds and waves." "And so," says Dr. Chalmers, "of other prayers. It is not without instrumentality, but by means of it, that they are answered. The fulfillment is preceded by the accustomed series of cause and effects, and proceeded as far upward as the eye of man can trace the pedigree of sensible causation. Were it by a break any where in the traceable part of this series, that the prayer was answered, then its fulfillment would be miraculous. But, without a miracle, the prayer is answered as effectually. Thus, for example, is met the cry of a people under famine for a speedy and plenteous harvest. Not by the instant appearance of the ripened grain, at the bidding of a voice from heaven; not preternaturally cherished into maturity, in the midst of storms, but ushered onwards by a grateful succession of showers and sunshine." "The intermediate machinery of nature is not cast aside, but pressed into the service; and the prayer is answered by a secret touch from the finger of the Almighty, which sets all its parts, and all its processes a going." In like manner, God can give efficacy to medicines—in answer to prayer—which shall appear to us to fall in, and do fall in, with the established courses of nature. "We ask the guardians of our health," inquires the writer whom we have so often quoted, "how far, upon the pathway of causation, the discoveries of medical science have carried them; and whether, above and beyond their farthest look into the mysteries of our framework, there are not higher mysteries, where a God may work in secret, and the hand of the Omnipotent be stretched forth to heal or destroy? It is thence he may answer prayer. It is from this summit of ascendancy, he may direct all the processes of the human constitution, yet without violating, in any instance, the uniformity of the few last and visible footsteps." (Chalmers' Works, vol. 2: p. 314. Also, Sermons, vol. i. p. 352.) The author of the "Natural History of Enthusiasm," advances a still different hypothesis. His conception is, "that the history of nature, and of society, is made up of innumerable progressions, in lines which perpetually cross each other; and which, at their point of intersection, receive a new direction, in virtue of the lateral impulse that has come upon them. When an individual receives an answer to his prayer, the interposition may be made, not in the line which he himself is describing, but in one of those which are to meet him on his path; and at a point, therefore, where even, though the visible constancy of nature should be violated, yet, as being, at the time, beyond the sphere of his observation, it is a violation not visible to him." He says: "If the special intentions of Providence towards individuals were effected by the aid of supernatural interpositions, the power and presence of the Supreme Disposer might, indeed, be more strikingly displayed, but his skill much less. And herein, especially, is manifested the perfection of the Divine wisdom, that the most surprising conjunctions of events are brought about by the simplest means, and in a manner that is perfectly in harmony with the ordinary course of human affairs. This is, in fact, the great miracle of Providence—that no miracles are needed to accomplish its purposes. Countless series of events are traveling on, from remote quarters, towards the same point; and each series moves in the beaten track of ordinary occurrences; but their intersection, at the very moment in which they meet, shall serve, perhaps, to give a new direction to the affairs of an empire." (Natural History of Enthusiasm, p. 128.) This hypothesis has one advantage, Dr. Chalmers admits, over the one which he has advanced. In the latter, the interposition, in answer to prayer, must, in some instances, be made in the way of causation, in

anticipation of that prayer. But, in the former, it might be, in all instances, “both after the prayer, and beyond the direct cognizance of the suppliant.” This tallies better with our actual expression of those fulfillments, by which relief is often made to come to us from an unexpected quarter; and also with such declarations of Holy Writ as, ‘God being a very present help in the time of trouble.’” To the believer in the truth of God’s word, however, none of these hypotheses, nor any others, are necessary, either for his comfort or his confidence. As to the mode in which his Heavenly Father can answer his prayers, he has little difficulty. That, he leaves to Him who cannot be at a loss how to fulfill his promises. And yet, there are possibly occasions when he may find these suggestions of practical importance. There are minds which affect to see an utter incompatibility between the constancy of nature’s successions and the efficacy of prayer. Now, to nullify such an objection, it is sufficient, on the part of the believer, to be able to show one possible method, whereby a reconciliation may be made between this doctrine of faith, and the phenomena of experience. It is not necessary, in order to meet the cavils of the captious, or the unbelief of the skeptic, that he proves that this or that hypothesis is true. It is sufficient that he points out a way in which it is possible for God to answer prayer, consistently with the uniformity or unalterable constancy of nature.

Such armor, the believer should hold in readiness to put on, if occasion requires. But, thanks be to God, while there are thousands who do not, in fact, pray, there are few, it is believed—and the number is, we trust, diminishing—who neglect the duty from unbelief in its efficacy. But, whatever may be true of the multitude, the children of God have no excuse—and can they wish one?—for not frequenting a throne of grace. Are you, child of God, at any time, pressed with doubts, fears, difficulties? Yield not to them! pray on!—pray more! You may not comprehend how God can answer your supplications; leave that to him. You may marvel how a feeble worm of the dust should think to influence the mighty Ruler of the universe. Well may you marvel! But it is true—quite true—that prayer has all the purchase upon the throne which is ascribed to it in the Word of Inspiration. It has accomplished wonders in every period of the world, and is still, as it always has been, marvelous, most marvelous, as we concede it to be—

“The slender nerve that moveth the muscles of Omnipotence.”

104. Conclusion.

Conclusion. And now, readers, the Bible History of Prayer is before you. And I ask, is there one example noticed in these pages, or to be found in the Bible itself, of sincere, humble, importunate prayer, which was not answered? Or which was not answered favorably? Is there, among the thousand pages of that Book, which speaks of God's condescending mercy to man, one intimation that praying breath ever was, or ever will be, spent in vain? Our History begins with the race, and stretches through a period of more than four thousand years; and, while the examples are numerous, and the exhortations and encouragements to this duty are quite as numerous, there is not one solitary intimation that the prayer of a righteous man was ever rejected. Good men, in a few instances, have been forbidden to pray; but it was in reference to such as had filled up the measure of their iniquities, and for whose recovery to obedience and holiness no further means could consistently be used.

But, to you, a throne of grace presents itself; and, before it, you are invited to prostrate yourselves, and to seek pardon, mercy, eternal life, at the hands of a gracious God. More than this: you may ask not only for the life to come, but for the life that now is—every blessing which will be of true and permanent value to you.

Before concluding, the author wishes the privilege of briefly addressing a few classes more specifically, and of impressing upon them the importance of an exercise, which may result in blessings of eternal and incomprehensible value.

There is the young man, whom he would attract, if possible, to intercourse and communion with God. And yet, he is aware, that, of all persons, young men are probably most averse to prayer. In the flush of health—amid the buoyancy of youthful hopes—on the stream of earthly pleasure, gliding smoothly and joyfully, they, least of all, feel the necessity of such a resort. Yet, for the reason that this necessity is so little felt, the influences and blessings which result from prayer are the more important. Would that young man, who, in a moment of temptation, put his hand into the money-drawer of his employer, have done so unworthy a deed, had he, that morning, prayed? Would he have gone forth to the duelling-ground, intent on taking the life of a fellow-mortal, and running the hazard of pouring anguish into the bosom of a fond mother and beloved sisters, besides rushing unbidden into the presence of a holy God, had he first bowed, in humility, at the footstool of sovereign mercy? Would he have entered the "house" which "inclineth unto death," or communed with the "stranger," whose "paths incline unto the dead," had he listened to the monitory voice of wisdom, given in answer to prayer? "None that go in to her, return again; neither take they hold of the paths of life!" In short, what youth would venture to the theatre—to the gambling retreat—or to the house of madness and inebriation—there laying, perhaps, in a single night, the foundation of ruined health and blasted reputation, had he sought the paternal care, and restraining influence, of a Heavenly Father? Ah me, these are questions which are too often put by young men only when the die is cast!—when the work of ruin is accomplished! But why may not the voice of wisdom be heard in season? Why not, my young friends, pursue a course which will

effectually secure you against such temptations?—against the wish to frequent such haunts as have led thousands—as firm and cautious as you are—to all the wretchedness of blighted prospects here, and sealed their doom for a long eternity hereafter? The writer is acquainted with one who commenced a life of prayer at an early age. Has he lived to regret it? So far from this, that now, when the shades of autumn begin to thicken around him, if on one habit he looks with approbation, it is this. If, from one duty of life performed—though with many imperfections—he anticipates peace and joy, in declining years, it is that of prayer. One purpose of his life, the Christian poet has beautifully expressed: In every joy that crowns my days— In every pain I bear My heart shall find delight in praise, Or seek relief in prayer.

And, to the young man, he can recommend no safer line of conduct; and from none, he is sure, will flow such pure and perennial joy. “The prayer of faith,” says Bishop Porteus, “moves the hand of Him that moveth all things.” With such a power placed at our disposal, who needs to be miserable here? Who may not be happy hereafter? In urging the habit of prayer upon the youthful female, the writer feels, that, to insure success, there are fewer obstacles to remove, while there are more powerful auxiliaries to aid. Her heart may, indeed, be equally destitute of the love of God; but it is usually less callous, having been less exposed to temptation, and less conversant with the various forms of vice. Her affections are more easily moved; her sensibilities more tender and delicate; her apprehensions of evil more real; and her need of care and protection more urgent. Woman early wishes for a friend—a shield—a protector; and it is truly pleasant to reflect, that so many do early make God their Father and Friend, and grow up in the daily practice of prayer and communion with him. But, on the other hand, it is matter of painful regret, that even a single one should decline the proffered guardianship of a Being who is better able than all others to provide for them in times of misfortune and adversity. Few sights are so painful as an aged female who has never consecrated her heart to God, and who has no hour in which to retire and hold converse with things “unseen and eternal.” On the other hand, what object more lovely than a young female, bending in all the ardor of her affection, and with the purity of a sanctified heart, before the throne of God—first yielding her entire self to Him, and then imploring blessings upon the earthly objects of her love and endearment. One such child in a family is of greater value than scores of graceless sons and daughters; and to the eye which appreciates moral loveliness, is of greater beauty than one who, without her disposition, sparkles with the gems of Golkonda.

Let us take an example: and let those whom the writer is addressing, gather what her habits were who set the example. That example is worthy of imitation, and may well be extended to the more ordinary spheres of action, in which they are called to move. The female in question was that day to become a bride. A party of interested friends had early assembled at the bridal mansion, to prepare the drawing-room with appropriate decorations for the approaching happy hour. The pleasant service done, they retired, happy in contributing to the joy of an occasion which, while it would take from them one whom they loved, would unite that one to the object of her highest earthly regard.

All had retired from the lovely spot. But there was one friend—a cousin—who, a short time after, stole gently back, to look once more at the varied beauty of the room, and to indulge by herself the hopes and anticipations of an affectionate heart, for the future happiness of her friend. She gently opened the door, and was about to enter, when she noticed the sofa was wheeled round to the precise spot where, that evening, the happy pair were to exchange their solemn vows; and there

the lovely bride was kneeling, so absorbed in her own solemn thoughts, that the entrance of her friend was unnoticed. The friend stood, for a moment, gazing in rapt admiration at the scene. She longed gently to approach, and kneel by her side; but the occasion was too sacred to admit of social union, and she retired. And what, so solemn and absorbing, was occupying the thoughts of this happy being? Was it the anticipations of earthly felicity that had brought her there? Nothing of the kind! Delighted she might have been—and justly was. But she had one duty to perform—a high and holy duty— ere she plighted her vows to the object of her earthly affections. There, in that spot, where she would soon stand and surrender her earthly all to her husband, she would, in solemn and devout prayer, first consecrate herself to the Lord. The prior consecration was due to Him.

I know not of an earthly scene more lovely, or of an immortal being, in similar circumstances, in an attitude more becoming. And I am sure, that, if her intended husband had himself the love of God reigning in his heart, and could he have seen her there—whatever he might have thought of her before—his love would have been more pure and intense.

What a beautiful example for the imitation of every youthful female! Not merely when about to be led to the hymnal altar; but at other times, and on occasions, and in circumstances more common. That heart of yours, my young friend, belongs to God; that eye should be directed to His glories, as they shine forth from His word and works; and that tongue should daily be employed in prayer and praise. I know not the subsequent history of that lovely bride—the beautiful incident in whose life I have related—but I am sure she never repented of that prayer—of that dedication of herself to God on the morning of her espousals. I know not that she escaped sorrow—for earthly sorrow is sometimes the lot of the friends of God—but I know he would not forget the kindness of her youth. He would not forsake her. She might bury husband—children—friends; she might suffer from sickness—poverty—persecution; but, in no hour, would her Heavenly Father forsake her; he would guide her by his counsel, and afterwards receive her to glory. Youthful females! would you lay the foundation of future peace—would you provide against the reverses of fortune—would you have a Friend and Protector through this world of vicissitude—would you have consolation in the darkest night of adversity which may set in upon you; and, more than all, would you, at length, be presented faultless before the presence of the Divine Glory, with exceeding joy?—consecrate yourselves to God, and live thereafter a life of prayer.

There is a third class, whose attention to the duty of prayer would seem so natural, as to render any observations, at least by way of urgency, entirely superfluous. We refer to parents.

“The world,” says a writer, “does not furnish a single prospect so beautiful, so lovely, to the eye of virtuous contemplation, as a family assembled in the morning for their affectionate devotions: combining the two most charming among all the exercises of the human heart—piety to God, their common Parent, and tenderness to each other. No priest, no minister, is so venerable as a father. No congregation so dear and tenderly beloved as a wife and children; and no oblations are offered with the same union, interest, and delight, as those of a pious and affectionate household.” Nor can it be without its benign influence upon children who are not pious. They may not, indeed, be sensibly impressed at the time; they may leave the parental roof for other residences and other employments; but they will not be likely to lose the recollection of the altar at home. No! Should they wander to the ends of the earth; should they settle in some wild of the far-distant West, or

bend their course to the furthest East, the image of a father, bowing, bending at the throne of grace, will recur to their thoughts; his tears, his devout aspirations for the welfare of their souls, can scarcely fail to lead them to efforts for their own salvation. The parent, who humbly, daily, and fervently prays in his family, has reason to anticipate the blessing of God upon his children. But he who neglects so obvious a duty, and such a means of salvation, ought not to pretend that he has any real love for them. What reason has he to hope that his offspring will pursue the path of true wisdom when he neglects it?—Or, will they invoke the favor and grace of God upon themselves, when he does not do it for them?

But, family prayer is not the only duty of the parent; to that, he should add, daily, fervent and importunate prayer in the closet. There may be parents who satisfy themselves with the former; but, generally, those who maintain family religion, will, also, it is believed, be true to their secret devotions. For his personal holiness and growth in grace—for his comfort in communion with God—secret prayer is indispensable. Nor will the parent, who thus prizes the privilege for himself, think less of it in reference to his children. In the solitude and secrecy of his chamber, he can pour out his heart with a fullness and fervor which might seem extravagant in the family. Has he anxieties—fears—sorrows?—He can pour them into a bosom which has higher, and more sympathizing parental feelings than his own. There he may wrestle—agonize;—there, with a holy pathos, such as finds birth only in the parental heart, and is uttered only by parental lips, he may cast his children on the Lord, and claim for them the blessings guaranteed in that covenant which can never fail.

Instances are not wanting, in more modern times, of the efficacy of prayer for children by parents. Two are, at this moment, before the writer: The daughter of a pious father and mother, in Philadelphia, in opposition to their wishes, accepted an invitation to attend a ball, some twenty miles in the country. Alive to her danger, thus at a distance from them, and under the influence of ungodly companions, they determined to spend the night in prayer on her behalf. On the termination of the festivities, she returned to her lodgings, and retired to rest. But God met her in the slumbers of the night. From a dream, full of horror, she awoke, agitated and alarmed. The prospect of a miserable eternity was presented to her, and, during her broken slumbers, so pressed upon her, that, at length, her sleep was wholly interrupted. Strong conviction of sin now succeeded thoughtless happiness; and, early in the morning, she took the stage, and returned home. Here she soon experienced a happy change, and united with her parents in praising the Lord for redeeming mercy. The second instance was, perhaps, still more remarkable. A gentleman of Boston, had an impenitent son in Vermont, for whose salvation he felt extremely anxious; and, calling on some brethren of the Church, made known to them his feelings, and requested them to go with him, and pray that his son might be converted to God. Not long after, the son knocked at his father's door. The father opened the door; and the son, on seeing him, exclaimed, weeping, "I have come to see you, that you might rejoice with me for what the Lord hath done for my soul." His father inquired at what time his mind was first arrested. He replied, on such an evening, about eight o'clock. His father remembered that it was the same time at which he and his brethren were engaged in prayer for his son (*Christian Spectator*, vol. iv. p. 273). Are such instances rare? But would they be rare, were parents as faithful and as earnest as the interests of their children demand?—Or, as a kind and covenant-keeping God permits and encourages? Why, if prayer be ever answered, may it not, at least in some instances, be answered immediately?

Need it here be added, that Christians should pray? That question ought not, perhaps, even to be raised. A Christian not pray! He that never prays, is not and cannot be a Christian; nor has he more than a miserable foundation for a hope who does not pray habitually. The grand difference between Christians is, doubtless, to be traced to prayer. I will not say to the amount of time spent in this service; although this is probably true; but to the fidelity with which the duty is performed. The most eminent saints, probably, pray the most; certainly, with the most faith, fervor, and importunity. But these are not all. There is one truth connected with prayer, the importance of which language can scarcely express, and which the author would, if possible, engrave on the tablet of every Christian's heart. That if he would be heard and answered, he must live in consistency with his supplications. This is a fundamental truth, which the word of God and all experience confirm. And this great truth, the author would stereotype on this concluding page, for it is cardinal—it is vital—we must act consistently with our supplications.

Thus living, and thus acting, children of God, and only by so living and so acting, will you find verified, in your own happy and delightful experience, that beautiful declaration of the poet, with a recital of which, the author began these pages, and with a repetition of which, he concludes them:

Prayer, ardent, opens heaven; lets down a stream
Of glory on the consecrated hour
Of man, in audience with the Deity. THE END.

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