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THE SECRET PLACE

R. AMES MONTGOMERY



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The Secret Place

Studies of Prayer

BY

R. AMES MONTGOMERY, B.A.



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FOREWORD.

These chapters were delivered in substance as sermons to my people on the general subject—Prayer. The messages proved to be all that had been hoped for them, and the desire has been expressed that they be put in such form as to reach those who were beyond the narrow circle of the first audience.

In his correspondence to the British Weekly of January 10th, 1901, on "Mark Rutherford's Journal," Claudius Clear says:

"The great test of a book is whether it helps us to live. Poetry, if it be worth anything, must help us to live. It is to this we come at last in our criticism, and if it does not help us to live it may well disappear, no matter what its fine qualities may be."

The author having received grateful acknowledgment from many that the thoughts herein contained were helpful to them, "In The Secret Place" is given to the larger public with the singleness of desire that others may be helped "to live."

THE MANSE, GLEN AVON, DULUTH, MINN.

28th Feb. 1901.

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UNDERLYING BELIEF IN PRAYER.

Judge me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation. O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man. For Thou art the God of my strength. Why hast Thou cast me off? Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? O send out Thy light and Thy truth; let them lead me; let them bring me unto Thy holy hill, and to Thy tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: And upon the harp will I praise Thee, O God, my God. Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him, *who is* the health of my countenance and my God.—*Psalm 43.*

CHAPTER I.

UNDERLYING BELIEF IN PRAYER.

One of the rich words of the English language is the simple word prayer. It serves to translate no less than thirteen Hebrew words in the Old Testament and five Greek words in the New Testament. The root meanings of some of these words are—whisper, intercede, search, complain, confer, plead, entreat, mediate, demand, placate, desire and request. No other word portrays such varied experience of life. This may suggest to us an explanation of the unsatisfactoriness of all attempts at a definition of prayer. The word is too big with meaning—with the mystery of human life.

Let us not attempt a definition. One is not needed. There are multiplied numbers of them at hand, if one should be insisted on as indispensable to an entrance upon such a study as this,—anyone of which may serve the reader equally well in the perusal of these pages. If you have had any personal experience in The Secret Place your preparation will be better than any definition can provide for understanding what is to follow. If you



are without this experience, it is hoped these pages may lead you into it.

Have you the memory of a Secret Place that belonged to a father, a mother, or some other loved one? Have you happened upon them, or heard them as they held communion with that other Presence? If you have, you will not easily forget the awe of such moments. When you came within the precinct of that place you heard a voice of deep earnestness, filled with emotion, reverence and godly fear. You were halted by it on the very threshold. The atmosphere about you seemed redolent with a sacred solemnity. You breathed heavily in it. A conviction that you ought not to stay seized upon you. Turning about you left on tiptoe, and as you went a strong feeling of embarrassment took possession of you.

A dear friend has told of her experience when as a child she happened upon her mother in the Secret Place. It was in her mother's bedchamber, at the corner opposite to the door. Two or three times each day would her mother be known to resort thither. The children were always expected to knock and wait her bidding before entering mother's room, but childish eagerness and haste would often anticipate the welcome, and open the

door. "Many times it was to find her in that sacred corner upon her knees. And when we found her there," said she, "we quickly and quietly closed the door and stole away, always feeling that she was there for us." Such has been the experience of many of us on the threshold of The Secret Place as we saw the bowed head or bended knee, or heard the subdued voice of the unseen worshiper.

With all of us, the conviction was carried deep into our heart and mind of the worshiper's *belief in the reality, the personality and the accessibility of God.*

Without this belief, The Secret Place will not be kept. In so far as men lose faith in any one of these three—the reality, the personality, or the accessibility of God, by so much do they cease to pray at all. Men who deny the existence of God never pray; neither do those who believe it impossible for the human to commune with the Divine. I say "never," yet, they do sometimes. When the extremity of human strength is reached, or the crash of some awful calamity comes, then such persons have been known to cry out, "Oh my God! Oh my God!" But these were times when the innate conviction of the soul that God is, that He is able, that He is acces-

sible, asserted itself. At such times they were the nearest approach to those whose simple natures exhibit this worthy credulity in less attractive forms. The heathen bowing down to his idols believes thus in his gods. Creatures of horrible imaginings, many of them, which the boasting atheist or deist condemn. But withal, the heathen is often in advance of them, for these idols which he has set up and before which he bows, are oftentimes the outcome of an earnest effort to solve the solemn mystery of the human and Divine relationship, and afford an objective reality to a subjective conviction deep seated in human life, that God is, and that He is accessible.

“He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that seek after Him” (Heb. 11:6) is not only a condition pleasing to God but is an underlying truth in all prayer. Prayer is dependent upon the force of belief in Him. In every instance of prayer that meant anything to the petitioner, there was the consciousness of communion, of affinity with a personality. In proportion as this consciousness of contact with personality was possessed, by so much, did the meaning of prayer become intensified. For such there was secured, what a plain man

expressed as lacking in his praying, "the sense of getting hold of God."

In all efforts of appeal to power controlled by intelligence, before the initiative will be taken, there must be the conviction of the embodiment of that power in a personality accessible to human speech and human need. When men make appeals to the state they are convinced that living personalities exercise those powers which they wish to engage in their behalf. When their faith in the personality of the judiciary is lost, they cease to appeal to it, and "take the law in their own hands," for the dispensing of justice. Men who watch great industrial movements, and study the problems which they present, realize that the effacement of personality, as an object of appeal, which has taken place in the organization of Trusts is often one of the most lamentable conditions with which they have to reckon. The oppressed feel there is no one to whom they can appeal, no ear into which they can pour their cry of distress. And as this conviction increases, listlessness and hopelessness takes possession of their life, and they sink into degradation and despair. But let the consciousness of a court of appeal that is embodied in a living Personality, sensible of their need, in sym-

pathy with their frame, susceptible to their cry and able for their relief, take possession of them, and they will be aroused to a new life. Personality—this is the mightiest power in the uplift of a soul.

Mr. Gladstone was once asked the question, "What do you regard as the greatest hope for the future?" and his answer exhibits his estimate of the significance of this truth in the lives of men. "I should say they must look for that to the maintenance of faith in the Invisible. That is the great hope of the future; it is the mainstay of civilization. And by that I mean a living faith in a personal God. I do not hold with 'streams of tendency.' After sixty years of public life I hold more strongly than ever this conviction deepened and strengthened by long experience of the reality, and the nearness and the personality of God." This is the belief that has made prayer in the language of the Christian the loftiest and noblest exercise in which men ever engage.

EFFECTUAL FERVENT PRAYER.

PRAYER.

Prayer, the Church's banquet, angel's age,
God's breath in man returning to his birth,
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
The Christian plummet sounding heaven and earth;

Engine against the Almighty, sinner's tower,
Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,
The six-days'-world transposing in an hour,
A kind of time, which all things hear and fear;

Softness and peace, and joy, and love, and bliss,
Exalted manna, gladness of the best,
Heaven in ordinary, man well drest,
The milky-way, the bird of paradise,

Church-bells beyond the stars heard, the soul's blood,
The land of spices, something understood.

—*George Herbert.*

CHAPTER II.

EFFECTUAL, FERVENT PRAYER.

Many persons believe prayer to have its efficiency measured in the subjective effects wrought in those engaged in it. They enjoy peace of mind and calmness of breast in such exercises. Prayer becomes a refuge to them when they are tossed about by the storms of life. The troubled are soothed by it. It affords an opportunity for introspection, it is a place of vantage for reviewing the past, and also a height that gives an outlook on the future. To those who have this subjective standard, there is experienced what is experienced by every one able to control his own thoughts and fix his attention upon a given subject for a given time—the consciousness of intellectual and moral virtue, which, upon its recognition, sends a fine glow over the whole frame. They pray, because, in this habit of mind, they get the best views of matters which they have made the subject of their devotions; in this activity they discover paths, before unseen, out of difficulties that encompassed them; they come to understand themselves better in prayer. There is, in their Secret

Place, an atmosphere congenial to contemplation. From this place the perspective is of a wider sweep over the dangers to which they are subjected during the day, over the business which the to-morrow must dispose of; from here they may anticipate the coming events which have cast some shadows before; from here they may gird up their minds for all that life may bring. This is their retreat from the trials and sorrows of life, for the literature of this place is restful to the weary, and consoling to the bereaved. Prayer enables a man to see what he needs to see, which can be properly seen only when alone—the wealth of solitude, the sublimity of life, the majesty of eternity, the shortness of time, and where alone, one can feel the awe of those great thoughts of God and The Unseen.

But there is another view, much larger than this, which many persons have and which is exhibited in those lines of Tennyson—

“ Pray for my soul ! More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.”

This is the conception in which there is such inspiration for its engagement as makes prayer the habit of a life, that breathes the breath of life into each engagement, that cherishes The Secret Place, and out of which springs the effectual fervent prayer.

A fundamental prerequisite of an effectual fervent prayer is a belief in its practical efficiency beyond our subjective conditions; that it can affect an Agency beyond our realm; that it can induce Divine interest in our concerns; a conception that holds prayer to be an opportunity to command resources otherwise beyond our reach. No one in our day has better understood the significance and power of prayer than did Moody. The papers reported him to have said during a campaign in Boston,—“there seems to be an idea around Boston that God’s plans are fixed, and that although prayer may be healthy as an exercise you won’t get anything. That’s wrong. The night before the accident to the Spree occurred I had been talking with one of those men who called himself a philosopher, and said prayer was of value only as an exercise. The next morning when it looked as if we were going to the bottom he didn’t stop to discuss prayer. He went at it, and not for exercise either.”

The bluntness of his speech does not obscure but rather intensifies the light of this practical illustration.

What did the Master mean when He said, "ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you?" Did He mean that those asking and receiving, seeking and finding, knocking and having the door opened were simply enjoying the felicity and stimulus of a reflective influence? But hold, read farther, "Or what man is there of you, who, if his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone; or if he shall ask for a fish, will give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father, which is in heaven, give good things to them that ask Him?" (Matt. 7:7-19.) Christ has by this analogy of the Heavenly Father's willingness with the earthly parent's action reduced to absurdity such theorizing about prayer as would make it a matter of moral and mental gymnastics. In splendid antiphony to these words of Christ, are those incidents in scriptural and sacred history that are given as specific answers to prayer. "I cry unto the Lord with my voice, and He answereth me out of His holy hill." (Ps. 3:4.) "Our fathers trusted in Thee; they trusted

and Thou didst deliver them.” (Ps. 22:3.) “Elijah was a man of like passions with us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth brought forth her fruit.” (James 5:7-18.) But we need not multiply these citations. In the history of the Church many testimonies are recorded of like value of those which the scripture affords. Peter’s deliverance from the hands of Herod, and the release of Paul and Silas from the Jews at Philippi are repeated time and again when God has delivered His saints out of the hands of all of their enemies. It only needs for a Paton to write his biography for the world to know that even yet, from perils by sea and by land, from perils of robbers, from perils of his countrymen, from perils in the city, from perils in the wilderness, God is able to deliver. And if this does not satisfy the mind and heart, learn the story of Geo. Müellar who knew how God, in answer to prayer, can and will supply our every want. Oh! the storehouses, the abundant resources, the inexhaustible supplies, the irresistible power, that we can lay hold of by prayer. And those who know this are not without the inspiration, the joy, and satisfac-

tion about which the man who prates of prayer as a reflective exercise speaks, but which, alas, he enjoys so little. Archbishop Trench knew what uplifting and strengthening power there is in prayer and its efficiency beyond our realm, and he expressed his wisdom in these beautiful lines:

“ Lord what change within us one short hour
Spent in Thy presence will avail to make!
What burdens from our bosoms take!
What parched grounds refresh as with a shower!
We kneel; and all around us seems to lower.
We rise, and all the distant and the near
Stands forth in sunny outline brave and clear.
We kneel—how weak: we rise—how full of power!
Why should we do ourselves this wrong,
Or others, that we are not always strong,
That we are ever overbourned with care,
That we should weak and heartless be,
Anxious and troubled, when with us is prayer,
And joy and strength and courage are with Thee?

FOR WHOM IS PRAYER GIVEN.

"The prayers I make will then be sweet indeed,
If Thou the Spirit give by which I pray :
My unassisted heart is barren clay,
Which of its native self can nothing feel :
Of good and pious works Thou art the seed,
Which quickens only when Thou say'st it may
Unless Thou show to us Thine own true way.
No man can find it : Father ! Thou must lead.
Do Thou, then, breathe those thoughts into my mind
By which such virtue may in me be bred
That in Thy holy footsteps I may tread ;
The fetters of my tongue do Thou unbind,
That I may have the power to sing of Thee
And sound Thy praises everlastingly. "
—*Wordsworth.*

CHAPTER III.

FOR WHOM IS PRAYER GIVEN?

You often hear men speak of prayer as familiarly as if it were an invention of their own for their convenience in circumstances of emergency and need. When all other avenues of escape from pending calamities are closed to them then they may resort to prayer. Christians holding this conception of the nature and purpose of prayer are easily susceptible to the grave reflections cast against it. We well remember hearing a conversation between two men in which one of them, a Christian, listened to the other who was not a Christian, inveigh against prayer—marshaling incidents from his own experience in proof of its impotency. With bitterness he recounted times when he had earnestly desired deliverance from certain afflictions and had prayed time and again, as earnestly as anybody ever prayed, but without results. “Now, if there is anything in prayer, tell me,” said he, “why I was not answered.” The Christian to whom he spoke having but little spiritual knowledge, and deeply conscious of many failures in his own experience, was

overcome by the arguments to which he had listened. And many persons who might have easily dealt with these self-same arguments have been mastered by experiences identical with his.

Men take it that prayer is for every one, and if God is a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God, He is obliged to hearken unto every man's cry of whatsoever character it may be. We have not read His word so. *Prayer is a privilege, given to those who are, or who want to be, right with God.* As with that man railing at prayer, so with many others, they make the effort to *command* the Divine Ear. These are they who lay Heaven under obligation to this world. When they fall into difficulties out of which they cannot extricate themselves they cry unto the Lord, expecting Him to answer. When pain and suffering, or sickness and death come, then, they argue, that he ought to raise them up, or reveal all His ways to them. They sometimes go so far as to claim it to be their privilege to follow the world until its misery has supplanted its pleasure, then to claim of God immediate deliverance from the law of sin and death. They would live after the flesh until its fires have burned out their lives and then expect of God that He would give them Life Eternal. They would dare to

waste their days in the follies of sin, to cast the dregs of their wasted life in the face of the Infinite, then ask for a place in Paradise and expect to get it. Be thou not deceived. God will not be sneered* at in prayer. We cannot ask anything nor can we expect anything beyond the measure of our desire to be right with God. The Pharisee who regularly gave alms, who was proud of his righteousness, and who had a better standing in society was less worthy of God's favor than the poor Publican, who above everything else, realized his need of God and desired His mercy. That railer who overcame the Christian, like many whose prayers are unanswered, had no concern about his relations to God beyond deliverance from the pain which sin worked in his members, the bondage into which disease had brought him, from the suffering which loss entailed. As to God and righteousness there was no conscious need of these. God's message to Paul—"My grace is sufficient—" would have been no comfort; for what he wanted was not grace, but ease and health, and his self-sufficiency, to be restored.

The teaching which promulgates this thought of the liberty of all men to claim

μυκτηρίζεται—Gal. 6: 7.

Divine favor in prayer is, that God is the Father of all and must, therefore, be moved with fatherly concern for His children. Without entering into the discussion of this subject we can say that fatherhood carries with it rights as well as obligations. The child who leaves the parental house, spurns the parent's love, despises the filial relation—yea, sets himself in open defiant rebellion to him—has no claim upon the parent. He may plead for mercy. But men's failure in this relation to the Heavenly Father is—they do not want mercy; they want money, or, that which will make them independent again. God is concerned and touched by the soul's anxiety for the forgiveness of sins, and the conscious recognition of dependence upon Him, and the desire for holiness in heart and life. When the publican prayed—"God be merciful to me a sinner," he secured the ear of God, into which he could pour all other longings of his heart and the needs of his life.

Prayer is given to us as an opportunity for approach to God to express our deepest conscious need. On the other hand, it is an opportunity for God to express the Divine Nature in a direction in which the Divine Passion runs—toward those who feel their need of him. Observe this: "Our Father

which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name"—the child honoring God and recognizing the filial relation. "Thy Kingdom come:"—a desire which is beyond self. "Thy will be done:"—submission, self-surrender, passion for God. "Give us this day our daily bread:"—dependence upon Him for sustenance. "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors:"—concern for right relationships—human and divine. "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:"—the anxiety to be kept right. "For Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever and ever. Amen:"—a holy adoration of Him and loyalty to Him. And when men thus pray, there is opened for God an opportunity to do for them what He yearned to do:—to Father them, to rule them, to bless them with His smile of forgiveness, to endow them with the riches of His favor, to uphold them and succor them in the hour of trial,—to receive from them the best which finite man can give, worship, obedience and love.

God is gracious. He seeks us. He longs for us to come to Him. His love has been manifest at the "highest point a moral nature can touch." And prayer has been given to men, not as an instrument which any man can wield to wheedle God with, but as an avenue

of approach for man, and an opportunity for God to receive every one who is, or who wants to be, right with God.

“In the heart contrite and lowly, in the heart upright and holy.

God reveals Himself, the secret of the World.”

FOR WHAT IS PRAYER GIVEN.

**Say, what is prayer, when it is prayer indeed?
The mighty utterance of a mighty need;
The man is praying who doth press with might
Out of his darkness into God's own light.**

—*French.*

CHAPTER IV.

FOR WHAT IS PRAYER GIVEN?

Prayer is given to us not only as an avenue for requests but also as an opportunity for communion.

Not in the least do we belittle the thought or the privilege that prayer is an opportunity for us to express our deepest conscious need. But when Christians dwell on conscious need, they do not leave first principles. We want to transcend these in the way of life. To be harping on your impotencies is not the way to get out soul-inspiring music. The armies that conquer cannot carry the vision of their hospitals and depleted ranks. They must behold the man of victory. We must lay aside our infirmities, and our strong crying and tears for the joy of our salvation and that our mouths may be filled with laughter. There is something more than duty in the Christian life; there is privilege. And that not only for obtaining, but for bestowing. Infinite is the condescension of God that He comes to us in the person of His Son! But grace becomes luminous with humility when He consents to receive from us that which we can bestow.

And there is something which we can bestow on God. It is the praise and adoration of our hearts. Not alone for what He has given us, but for what HE IS. Not only for the gift, but for the Giver.

In the history of men their choicest relation have been as they understood and set their affections one upon another for intrinsic excellence of character. Then friendship and love were at their best, not dependent upon the abundance, or affected by the scantiness of bestowments. They communed at every opportune hour, with a freedom and joy that otherwise could never have been felt. They rejoiced in their friend and love. And as we know God more, prayer becomes to us the avenue of the soul for communion with One for whom love burns in the breast. That is the only condition in which such an utterance as Job's could have found expression. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." Job was beyond the point of regard for God that was measured by that which he could get from Him. Other men and women have paralleled his love for God. And in proportion in which they have done so, their prayers have been concerned with worship and not with requests. Their appearance before God has been for communion and not for pleading.

Where two persons have to do with each other, if their relations are confined to those occasions when one seeks the bounty of the other, the interchange of life is at the minimum. Not until they come to meet together for a certain feasting and flow of soul do they discover themselves at their best. After an hour's communion with Emerson, Longfellow, it is said, literally emitted poems. Had they sought each other for what bounty they could draw out their communion would not have been so sweet nor their satisfaction so complete. Longfellow would never have known the character of his friend. So does it continue to be when one of these two personalities is Divine. Men never know Him, never experience the joy of His presence, till they seek Him unmindful of the loaves and fishes, desiring only to commune with Him.

We lay a disproportioned emphasis upon the joy it is for God to give as compared to the joy it is for Him to receive. We emphasize the privilege of asking, forgetting the joy there may be to us in giving. The heart is so constituted it must have an opportunity to pour out. The best happiness is secured by it, not in receiving, but in giving. The felicity which the saints have enjoyed in The Secret Place could never have come to them if they

had been there for the sole purpose of drawing upon God. They were here for worship and praise. Such lines as those of Charlotte Elliot "My God is any hour so sweet," could not have been written when the whole frame of mind was bent toward getting but never giving back to God. The experience of God's presence, so vivid and near, and joy inspiring which Cowper is said to have had in prayer, in one of the lucid hours of his religious life, when he thought he should have died with joy if special strength had not been given him, could not have been when upon his knees for self alone. Worship must have been uppermost. In the biography of Toplady it is recorded that when near the end, to a friend making inquiry as to his state, he replied, "Oh my dear sir, I cannot tell the comforts I feel in my soul—they are past expression. The consolations of God are so abundant that He leaves me nothing to pray for. *My prayers are all converted into praise.* I enjoy a heaven already in my soul." Heaven is the place in which there is an absence of requests in the breasts of its inhabitants; and if we can so overleap the cries of self for things desired and give ourselves to praising and glorifying Him, we shall find the way of most frequently approximating heaven in our prayers. Convert your petitions into praise.

WORLDLINESS OPPOSED TO PRAYER.

“Ever thus the Spirit must,
Guilty in the sight of heaven,
With a keener woe be riven,
For its weak and sinful trust

In the strength of human dust;
And its anguish thrill afresh
For each vain reliance given
To the failing arm of flesh.”

—*Longfellow.*

CHAPTER V.

WORLDLINESS OPPOSED TO PRAYER.

“Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss that ye may consume it upon your own lusts.” That is a clear statement of the reason for our failure to receive the answer we so often desire when we pray. But what is the explanation of the failure of the prayer? What makes our prayer so worthless? What destroys the reality, the vitality, the dynamic of prayer? What hinders its upward flight? Some of these questions have been answered in part in the preceding pages, *i. e.*, unbelief, and meager, if not wholly wrong conceptions of prayer. Other causes abound which render prayer useless to those who believe in it, who understand its large significance and who prize the privilege. Looking into our Christian consciousness we may readily discover some of these causes, which, if we have the courage for the undertaking, may easily be removed. We do not need to go to God’s Word to find out our difficulties at this point. He has spoken to us by His Word and Spirit, and it only remains for us to remove the hindrances.

One of these hindrances is *worldliness*. I do not know of a better definition of this word than Robertson's "the attractive power of the present in opposition to something to come." Prayer is not congenial to the spirit absorbed in the present. Prayers that have had power with God and men, that bore the stamp of genuineness, found utterance in those persons to whom the present was transient and the future, the beyond, abiding. There is the perfume of other-worldness in true prayer. The worth and beauty and attractiveness of this world is eclipsed in such an engagement, and the soul transcends the present to enter into regions where the glory and permanent reality of the unseen stands out before it. And herein is a secret of the Master's admonition for us to seek The Secret Place. We need to get away from the busy place, from the publicity of this world's intrusions, in order that we may hear the still small voice that sounds down into the deepest depths of our human needs. We need to come apart that the inner self may be exposed to the lime-light of Divine Truth. We need to secure private audience with the Great Teacher, the Great Helper, the Great Comforter. We need to find the place where our spirits may commune with our Father.

Now, I do not mean to say,—communion with Him is impossible, except in solitude, in seclusion from the activities of human life and human interests. Men and women have enjoyed moments of such communion in the busiest places and hours of life. It is reported of a great merchant, who, when asked at what times he had the sweetest communion with the Father, replied, “as I walked down Wall street to my place of business.” But those who enjoyed His presence and companionship in such environments were not worldly men and women. The present had not absorbed them nor its prospects clouded their vision of the future. Their minds had their secret place into which they withdrew and God met them apart. And that cannot be said of worldly people, worldly Christians. They do not go apart. To them reality can be asserted of only such things as they can see with their eyes, hear with their ears and handle with their hands. Time alone, the present, is worth gaining. The satisfaction of the physical, the accumulation of riches, the enjoyment of society, these are the concerns that absorb the worldling. Everything is reduced to money values, to society’s opinions, to the world’s markets and estimates. These persons sacrifice their individuality,

their conscience, and their Christ to what other men and women think. And that is the controlling concern when they pray:—absorbed in what men and women about them think. Pharisees are they, on the street corners and in synagogues, praying to be seen of men.

Yet, how often have we had this Phariseeism get the better of us! How often this worldliness has hindered us in our private devotion! We have lived so much amid these realities of time, our estimates have been based so often on the utilities of the present, our minds have been so occupied with its wealth, our eyes so charmed with the glitter of this world's attractions, and our tastes so corrupted with its vanities, we have no desire to feast on the beauties and glories of the Unseen. Indeed, we have come to believe there is nothing so real as this world, and that God, if there be a God, is too far away, Eternity too uncertain, as compared with the Present, for us to give up what we have for what is yet to be. And when you and I come to this, we have no vision—we never go apart to get one of the Unseen.

Sometimes God has shown us how little there is to this world, *how little there is to us* when we have been living on it; and then we

prayed as we had never prayed. Oh, how the soul was poured out! Had not prayer been left to us then, we would have been without strength to recover; without a prospect, without a hope. Since that day time, and sense, and the world are not nearly so absorbing. There are times, even now, when these get the better of us; but such times are not the best moments of our lives. The best moments are those when we have been apart with Him and risen above the present, above its attractions and beyond its power.

“My God, is any hour so sweet,
From blush of morn to evening star,
As that which calls me to Thy feet—
The hour of prayer?
Blest is that tranquil hour of morn
And blest that solemn hour of eve
When, on the wings of prayer upborne,
The world I leave.”

—*Charlotte Elliott.*

**THE WEAKNESS OF
SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN PRAYER.**

“Will not God impart His light
To them that ask it? Freely—’tis His joy,
His glory, and His nature to impart;
But to the proud, uncandid, insincere,
Or negligent inquirer, not a spark.”
—*Cowper.*

CHAPTER VI.

WEAKNESS OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN PRAYER.

Another hindrance to prayer is *self-sufficiency*. When men come to believe more in human effort and material agencies than in the practical relations of God to themselves and that world of theirs in which they move, they do not set much store by prayer. If men pray then, they do it as a reflective exercise. They pray with themselves. They save themselves from such Phariseism as was exhibited in the Temple, in hesitating to enumerate their excellencies, or compare themselves with other men. But it must not be taken that they have improved upon the righteousness exhibited there, for that is not always the case. They hesitated to make the comparison because they thought so little of their fellows. It would not have redounded to their credit to say they were better than the Publican. They believe more in themselves than in anybody else. Moreover, as to prayer, the place and power of human energy which they have seen so efficient in the movements of men for securing

the desire of human hearts, is of more value than prayer has ever been; and the regulation beliefs in them are toward money, in "push" and "pulls," in the daily practices of men; and, in Nature, toward law. There comes to be little place for prayer in such men's lives, since the place which God occupied in them is circumscribed to those deistic conceptions, in which it is conceived, that, having formulated law, and created the world, He then turned the whole creation over to the manipulation of human wisdom and might. "It is my wisdom and might which hath gotten me this wealth," they say, "why should I thank God for it, or ask Him to help me administer it?"

"God helps those who help themselves" has been a favorite maxim of yours. Down deep in your heart is a satisfaction that *your* help has been very efficient. God may have had some part in your achievement, but you are confident you have had a large part. All these years you have been cultivating an increasing confidence in yourself. Your environment is one in which inventive genius has reached its greatest attainments, in which wealth is of the greatest moment in the estimate of society, in which what a man *has* is of greater moment than what he *is*. Oh,

how far God is pushed from such environments!

“Prayer is a good thing, faith in God is a beautiful idea,—but after all,” you have been saying to yourself, “but after all there is nothing like push and pluck in active business life.” And, after awhile, you forgot to pray, or were so rushed to get down to business you did not have time; later you found it a less spontaneous exercise; then you wondered if it really made much difference; finally you concluded, “God helps those who help themselves,” and went in for self-help altogether. If you still pray, it is not because you believe in its practicalness or feel the need of help. Why should a man pray when he feels his self-sufficiency?

Moreover, The Secret Place is uncongenial to self-sufficient people. It is upon our knees, in The Secret Place, that we are made to face our delinquencies. When we come apart with the Master we are made to see our imperfections, our weaknesses, our sins. Not by any harsh reproof spoken there, but in the light of His presence, these things appear. And this reduces us. This humbles us. We cannot be alone with Him and act as though we were all we ought to be, or all we could be for righteousness. Men fall upon their faces

before that Presence and cry "not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name." When we begin to be proud, to think well of ourselves, we cease to be frequent in prayer. And when we do pray, we do not get on well, for we have not faced this great hindrance of self-sufficiency and got it out of the way.

And this is quite likely to be a hindrance to you and me. We live in an age when men have many reasons for thinking well of themselves, and when they are living up to their reasons. Men never got on so well, never achieved so wondrously, never wrought so gloriously, never lived so nobly, as now. And if we were ever so humble ourselves, it is a noxious atmosphere we breathe. There is much of truth in Faber's words to his confraternity,—“self-love has infected the world as if it had drunk poison.” It is hard to escape the poison in the cups with which we are refreshed. So it is hard to contemplate, appreciate and glory in our own strength, and yet, get on well in prayer. When we lack for no good thing we are satisfied. And this is why our spirit of prayer has atrophied—we felt so little need.

Because God loves us as His own dear children, He exercises His love in reducing us, that He may, on the wings of prayer, lift us up

again. That, says Phelps, is the mission of sorrow. "The truth is we never feel Christ to be a reality until we feel Him to be a *necessity*. Therefore, God makes us feel that necessity. He tries us here and He tries us there. He chastises on this side and He chastises on that side. He probes by the disclosure of one sin, and another, and a third, which have lain rankling in our diseased hearts. He removes, one after another, the objects in which we have been seeking the repose of idolatrous affection. He afflicts us in ways which we have not anticipated. He sends upon us the chastisements which he knows we shall feel most sensitively. He pursues us when we would fain flee from His hand; and, if need be, He shakes to pieces the whole framework of our plans of life, by which we have been struggling to build together the service of God and the service of self; till, at last, He makes us feel that Christ is all that is left to us. * * * On the basis of that single experience of Christ as a reality, because a necessity, there rises an experience of blessedness in communion with God, which prayer expresses like a revelation. Such devotion is a jubilant Psalm."

MECHANICALIZED PRAYER.

Poor heart, lament;
For since thee God refuseth still,
There is some rub, some discontent,
Which cools His will.

Thy Father could
Quickly effect what thou dost move;
For He is power; and sure He would
For He is love.

Go search this thing,
Tumble thy breast and turn thy book:
If thou hadst lost a glove or ring,
Wouldst thou not look?

What do I see
Written above there? Yesterday,
I did behave me carelessly,
When I did pray.

And should God's ear
To such indifference chained be,
Who do not their own motions hear?
Is God less free?

But stay! What's there?
Late when I would have something done,
I had a motion to forbear,
Yet I went on.

And should God's ear,
Which needs not man, be tied to these
Who hear not Him, but quickly hear
His utter foes?

Then once more pray;
Down with thy knees, up with thy voice,
Seek pardon first, and God will say,
Glad heart, rejoice.

—*Geo. Herbert.*

CHAPTER VII.

MECHANICALIZED PRAYER.

The Christian ought to have his set time in each day for communion and worship. Then, leaving the interests which engage his thought and activities for the greater part of that day, he may draw aside to meet with Him who heareth and seeth in secret.

However, for him whose life is hid with Christ in God, these stated hours are only incidents in each day's history. The pity is that for most of us, they too often are mere formalites and instead of being incidents in a life, they become the sum total of our daily experience with Christ. We commune with Him only at these set times.

And then there is little communion. Our engagements are items of routine and habit when they might be opportunities for the joyous improvement of a privilege. These hours in The Secret Place lack the freshness of other daily experiences and the liveliness of hours of business. Perhaps our stated hour has been put off to just before we retire for the night. It has been relegated to the close of the day that time may not be taken from any-

thing else, and "wearily we drag this great earthen world behind us into the presence of God." For some of us it is a memory of those blessed days of infancy and childhood, when, as we knelt at her knee mother taught us

"Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray Thee, Lord, my soul to keep."—

A memory of the time when this prayer was a solemn and sweetly simple reality. But now it is a mere formality. There is no conscious commitment of ourselves to God for keeping. If the possibility of danger should intrude itself upon our minds we should be greatly upset and fearful of our trust. Prayer means little more to us than it meant to the heathen who strung his prayer on a wheel driven by the wind. With us as with him it is purely mechanical. And it may be truly said of such mechanical habits as we have thus dropped into, the hour of prayer does not mean half so much to us as the hour for lunch.

Our thralldom is not always apparent. The forms and language of prayer are not the first to be affected. We may be completely fettered by the thongs of habit and formality, and yet proceed with an easy confidence in the exercise. But while we mouthed our words, plans for the coming day were being perfected, opportunities of business were in con-

templation, while our thoughts meandered upon and down the highways of the world. Indeed, this mechanicalizing of prayer oftentimes secures great fluency of speech. Men become skilled in the utterance of lively sentences, and can continue in the exercise of prayer for a great season. Once having become expert and having learned to make use of all the trimmings of rhetoric and elocution, in figures of speech and modulations of voice they may make what esthetic people call "a beautiful prayer." In truth, they are doing what Ruskin called, "praying against time." And those of us who have heard such prayers, whether made by ourselves or by another, were convinced when we heard them that there was no contact with God; there was no communion. There was only the sounding brass and the tinkling cymbal.

Many a prayer meeting has been killed by such exercises. The knell of some sermons has been rung in the "long prayers" of this character that went before. And I fear there are lives that have been spoiled by the manifest cant of these prayers in the church and in the home.

Now, over against those who pray thus, are men and women of halting speech, stammering tongue, few and poor words and trembling

voice. But when they pray they seem to see heaven opened and Jesus sitting and judging and the angels hovering near. While we could almost hear the rustle of the angel's wings as they led us up to God. All the force of their living personality was in their words. They talked with Him face to face. And we knew by the ring of it, that that prayer was having power with God, as well as with man.

Prayer is the expression of the soul's best music. Now, there is a vast difference in the performers of music. Most people can learn the technique of music. But all are not musicians. And you do not need a peculiarly delicate ear, or a keen musical sense to distinguish the musician from the mechanic. Music belongs to the soul and not to the copy selected, or to the instrument upon which it is played. It is the expression of inherent qualities that come out in the touch, in the measurement of the time, in the discriminations of tone, in the interpretation of the performer. When a musician plays she puts her soul into the performance; and unless you be fit for treason, you know there is the expression of soul life. Now, the same may be said of prayer that is not mechanical—it is the expression of soul life. In prayer at its best there is an engagement of the intellect,

the powers of reason; the enlistment of the heart,—the seat of our affections and emotions; and the employment of the will,—the source of our energy and action. When these are thus employed, the hours of worship become worth their while, for the joy of the soul's outgoings and refreshings. Prayer becomes not a mere perfunctory exercise, cold and meaningless, but a living, vital reality. There is not only the stimulation of a reflective influence in such engagements, but there is, also, the "thrill of conscious happiness in the sense of direct relation with heaven."

**PRAYER ATROPHIED BY UNCERTAIN-
TIES OF LIFE.**

**"No action, whether foul or fair,
Is ever done, but it leaves somewhere
A record written by fingers ghostly,
As a blessing or a curse, and mostly
In the greater weakness or greater strength
Of the acts which follow it."**

—*Longfellow.*

CHAPTER VIII.

PRAYER ATROPHIED BY UNCERTAINTIES OF LIFE.

It is made clear to us in God's word that one holding malice toward a brother or treasuring mean and wicked thoughts of his fellows in his breast cannot hope to have success in prayer. There is but little need for us to dwell upon the truth—"if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" to those readers for whom these chapters are intended. Consciousness of guilt is an insurmountable barrier to every petition save one,—the plea for forgiveness. If positive sin can be charged against the life, praying men and women know that, unless repentance is made, oftentimes with strong crying and tears, all claims to reach the Throne of Grace are hollow pretences. Such a one is a sinner. There is but one prayer for him to make—"God be merciful to me a sinner." But the hindrance that stands most frequently in the way, common to the experience of sincere and faithful followers of Christ, is *uncertainty of life*. There is not the consciousness of guilt experienced in positive wrong-doing. There is a lack of

decisiveness in our judgments. We find it difficult to fix upon the point of weakness in conduct. Just what is wrong we are unable to say. But we feel that the act is not quite without question. The consciousness is emotional rather than intellectual. When asked "what is wrong about that," we cannot tell. Yet, every true Christian knows that this conviction, for him, at least, is not to be despised. It is what he may call an intuition, an instinct, of the new man in Christ. The occasions upon which this consciousness is stirred are related to questions of propriety in affiliation with worldly people, in the associations of business, in the observance of social customs, in matters that involve the bonds of friendship, and that pertain to hospitality and good will. Most sensible people wish to avoid the appearance of being peculiar, while of prudishness in matters of faith and practice Christians seem unduly afraid. And when there is a lack of definite reasons against particular conduct, having this fear of being accounted over-nice, Christians often do things which their reason cannot defend, and which their heart, also, because of this instinctive Christian averseness, refuses to support. When we have acted thus, unable to perceive the wrong involved, but feeling uncertain as to the

course pursued, we find our ardor in the hour of worship cooled. We enter the Secret Place bereft of the spiritual calm we have previously enjoyed. There is the remembrance of uncertainty of life and this spoils our frame of mind.

When we go on in this uncertain way the wings of prayer are clipped. Paul understood its dangers and wrote to the Thessalonians, "Abstain from all appearance of evil." The relation which we sustain to God is a delicate one. And there is no act of our religious life so dependent upon the rightness and sanctity of this relation, as is prayer. There is some secret, some mystery in the exercise of true prayer that is enshrined in the reciprocal relation of the soul with Christ. "If ye shall abide in me and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you." (John 15: 7.) "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you? * * * the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." (1 Cor. 3: 16, 17.) "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit Himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." (Rom. 8:26.) In some broad and

profound sense, we know not how broad or how profound, true prayer is an expression of the Divine Presence in the soul. And where He stays and abides there must be no uncertainty of life.

We often forget how dependent the act of prayer is upon rightness of life. We have conceived prayer to be simply an incident of the public worship, an item in the order of service, or an event in the routine of life. But *prayer is a communion*. And a communion is possible only to those standing on common ground and between whom there is an agreement of life. All those elements to be found in one life's appreciation and understanding of another life are to be found in this reciprocal relation of the soul with Christ in the presentation of genuine prayer. Prayer becomes the expression of man's confidence in God. The flower and fruitage of a life, in, and with Christ. It is no mere pretence, no meaningless exercise, or worthless exhibition; it is the expression of the life as Christ has begotten it within the soul. Prayer will be what it ought to be, what we want it to be, a joy and privilege as we nourish that life within. Whatever else may be said, this much is true, this nourishment comes only in faithfulness to what is without the appearance

of evil without question, without uncertainty. When we are in doubt and uncertainty like this, if we hold ourselves in abeyance, until our heart can support our mind and will, prayer will find an unhindered flight to the Throne on high. And there will come back to us an answer in this assurance—"We know that He heareth us."

**THE GAIN OF CONSTANCY OF LIFE
IN PRAYER.**

"It is characteristic of minds which are aspiring in their piety, and which have begun to reap the rewards of arduous devotional culture, to be habitually conversant with God. Such minds are constantly *looking up*. In the very midst of earthly toils they seize moments of relief to spring up to the eminence of meditation where they love to dwell. In the discharge of duties most unfriendly to Holy joy, they are apt to experience a buoyancy of impulse toward a heavenly plane of thought which it may even require a power of self-denial to keep down."

—*Phelps' "Still Hour."*

"Who is the honest (constant) man?

He that doth still and strongly good pursue
To God, his neighbor, and himself most true:
Whom neither force nor fawning can
Unpin or wrench from giving all their due."

—*Geo. Herbert's "Constancy."*

Oh, thou who movest onward with a mind
Intent upon thy way, pause, though in haste!
T'will be no fruitless moment.—*Wordsworth.*

CHAPTER IX.

THE GAIN OF CONSTANCY OF LIFE IN PRAYER.

That "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much in its working" (James 5: 16) has been for great encouragement to many hearts. When all other resources have failed they have gone to The Secret Place feeling that until this proved of no avail they were not without hope.

The teaching of this passage is, that prayer is an efficient instrument in the hands of one right with God. We wish to learn the secret of making the most of such an instrument. According to James, success in prayer depends largely upon conditions that are subjective. If you and I look back to the isolated events in our lives when we felt the greatest joy in prayer, the greatest assurance in our efforts, the most freedom in the presentation of our petition, we, too, shall discover frequently that subjective conditions were at bottom the occasion of our success. And other lives are much alike our own in the history of their devotions. In the study of human experience, then, we may discover

some of these secrets of successful prayer and thereby be enabled to attain to greater success in our efforts.

If uncertainty of life has been a hindrance to our devotions in the past, it is no less true that *constancy of life* has been the secret of frequent success. Now, constancy "respects the affections," and, we are told, "prevents from changing and furnishes the mind with resources against weariness or disgust of the same object; it preserves and supports an attachment under every change of circumstances." The word has been used to describe the best devotion of the husband to the wife, and of the wife to the husband; who in joy and in sorrow, in health and in sickness, in prosperity and in adversity are faithful. Constancy allows no breach in the connubial relation. It describes regularity of life. There is no yielding to temptations, no dallying with the entrusted affections. When seeming occasions for doubt arise, or when slander is hurled, constancy does not falter. It is the element for joy in those two hearts that in the years gone by plighted faith to be each the other's very own, "until death us do part;" and, now, when the frost of years has whitened her tresses and the summer's heat and the winter's cold have furrowed his brow,

constancy makes their latter days of sweet repose. And constancy is the word that is descriptive of an essential quality in every life that is continually successful in prayer. It describes the spirit of their relation to God. It characterizes their frame of mind.

This is the kind of spirit to which the apostle made an appeal when writing to the Thessalonians. "Rejoice alway; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus toward you" (I Thess. 5: 16-18.) In lives that are constant, there are the elements of joy as over against weariness and disgust—the elements of steadfastness in contrast to fits and starts, the elements of gratitude as opposed to ungratefulness. These three co-exist in every one who knows the secrets of prayer. They have a joy in him. Their life finds in Him a completeness that is something like that which is experienced when one true heart finds its love reciprocated by another. The moments which are reserved for communion are filled with an inspiration that lifts us out of weariness. An inspiration something akin to the joy that comes in beholding the object of our affection and in knowing that there is a response with a like emotion of the heart. Prayer becomes for such the opportunity of

love to sing His praise, to protest their joy in Him, and to declare a warm affection.

I cannot imagine any bitterer sorrow than comes to a life in the knowledge of inconstancy in one to whom the heart has been given only to be neglected, trifled with, and betrayed. Again, I cannot conceive of anything that would effect so complete a separation between two lives pledged to constancy as would the guilt of its violation. When a husband has been inconstant to a wife, or a wife inconstant to a husband, they have raised up one of the most difficult barriers affection could be made to meet. We may begin, therefore, to understand how important constancy of life is in every act of prayer. Prayer is essentially an act of love. Love is not satisfied with an occasional meeting or a fleeting thought, but longs for the season of communion, and counts each moment as it flies. But prayer with us has been a duty, an obligation, that we must meet. And we have regarded a few isolated weekly expressions of it sufficient to discharge our obligation, and then have run off to make love to the world and dally with the sacred ties of affection that bind us to Christ our Lord. When we have done this we have erected barriers over which no prayer can leap.

At such times we had no effluence of emotion when we prayed. Weariness, if not disgust, seized upon us in the exercise. There was no joy. Why? We have been inconstant in our life. Constancy would have enabled us to rejoice in the object of our affection, and in the opportunity for communion which the moments in the Secret Place furnished.

One secret in prayer, then, is in a state of life. Prayer is dependent upon the condition of heart and mind toward Him to whom we pray. Men's conceptions have been inadequate. Looking upon prayer as an act, unrelated to their antecedent history, they have been careless in their conduct and life in the intervals between these lone moments of the week, until loss of property, bankruptcy, sickness, death, or some dire calamity has driven them to their knees. Then when they prayed it availed them nothing in its working. They enjoy no conscious experience of success. They have no experience of contact with God. These are for a life that keeps in touch with him. Yes, more than that, which lives in the sunshine of His presence. And such lives are alarmed for any act of unfaithfulness and mourn for any lapse in love. Prayer is for them an exercise of

delight. The hours they give to it are hours of happiness, peace and effulgent joy.

“The Lord is ever close and near
To those who keep His word.
Whene’er they cry to Him in fear,
Their prayer is surely heard.
He knoweth well who love Him well
His love shall yet their clouds dispel
And grant their hopes deferred.”

**THE SUCCESS OF IMPORTUNITY
IN PRAYER.**

**"Jesus, who knows full well
The heart of every saint,
Invites us all our grief to tell,
To pray and never faint.**

**He bows His gracious ear—
We never plead in vain;
Then let us wait till He appear,
And pray and pray again.**

**Jesus, the Lord, will hear
His chosen when they cry;
Yes, though He may awhile forbear,
He'll help them from on high.**

**Then let us earnest cry
And never faint in prayer;
He sees, He hears, and, from on high,
Will make our cause His care."**

—John Newton.

CHAPTER X.

THE SUCCESS OF IMPORTUNITY IN PRAYER.

There are many secrets in prayer. But they are all open ones, easy of our acquirement, and within reach of those who desire to possess and be advantaged by them. One of these is *importunity*. The word is almost hackneyed it has been so bandied by those who talk about prayer, but it is the best one yet discovered. It expresses a scriptural teaching. There is this association that we need to guard against. Importunate people are those who continuously solicit favors, which the one solicited does not feel disposed to give, and who is extremely annoyed by the persistence of the importuner. In the parables in Luke (11:5-8 18:1-6) which so aptly illustrate this word this annoyance is conspicuously in the foreground. The man seeking a favor of his neighbor at the midnight hour wearied him into granting the request, while the widow worried the unjust judge into granting what he was in no disposition to give. But let us not forget that God does not

hold toward us the attitude of either the unjust judge or the slothful neighbor, as shown in the immediate context, and which we often forget, "Shall not God avenge His elect who cry to Him day and night, and He is long-suffering over them?" "Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Importunity, to which we are instructed, is a test of you and me, and not of God. The urgency and importance of our request is proven in the unsatisfied state of our minds when we have not received an answer to the petitions we have presented. The importunate soul is like a vessel not yet in port, wrecked and tossed at sea. Or like one, who, in dire distress, feels the urgency of needed help, or, as another in sore straits, seeks assistance, his good name, yea, life itself, being dependent upon securing it. That is the importunity to which we are encouraged and which should give color to our prayers.

There are many who will say this is an overwrought emphasis of the idea contained in this word, and in practice would require a tension of feeling that is not felt in matters that are evidently proper subjects for our prayers. "There is not the conscious necessity of which you have just spoken," say some, "of

many things for which we pray; neither is there such overmastering sense of our need. Human strength cannot escape the consciousness of its self-sufficiency to secure many objects, which we make the subject of our petitions." My answer is that our prayers have often been meaningless because we really were indifferently concerned about the issue. Again, one of the best evidences of a deepening spiritual life is an enlarging consciousness of dependence upon God in every moment of life—in every comfort, in every task, in every joy. Out of such consciousness prayer arises that bears its unmistakable imprint. And finally, importunity is not the multiplication of requests, neither enlarging vocabularies nor the continuance of speaking, but the uneasiness and unsettledness of mind that knows its dependence upon the will of Him of whom request is made. There are few words in the mouth of that wrestler on the banks of the Jabbok, but the spirit of importunity inspires every word. "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." (Genesis 32:26.) It gave desperate earnestness to Moses' speech,—“If Thy presence go not with me carry us not up hence.”—(Exodus 33:15.) And oh how earnestly it is expressed by that sufferer in the garden.—“O!

my Father, if it be possible!"—(Matt. 26:39.) "Earnestness," you may have called it. Very well. But whatever it may be there is no trifling in these instances; there is no flippancy, there is no weariness that will overcome the consciousness of calamity in the event of His failure to hear.

You, my reader, doubtless have been through experiences that called forth an importunate prayer. It was at the time when you were thrown back upon God and made to feel that unless He heard you all was in vain. In the silent watches of the night you sat by the little bed that held your precious child. You feared it could not live in spite of all you could do. Then,—Oh, how you importuned for its life! If not for a loved one,—it may have been when you, yourself, were ill. Ruskin tells of such an experience,—the single one, he calls it, in his life, when, having been taken ill in Europe, the thought of his possible failure to reach home, and the sore grief into which his parents would be plunged if he should die, drove him, for two days, to continuous prayer; until there came to him, in the midst of an increasing illness the consciousness that God had answered him and that he should get well. That which makes prayer so full of meaning in such ex-

periences as these is the longing, the need, the urgency that would not let you rest.

The beautiful hymn of Henry Francis Lyte gives expression to this quality of successful prayer in the tenderest lines. They are familiar to you, but it may be their history is not. Broken in health and spirit, he had pulled himself up for a communion service before leaving his English parish, to regain, if possible, his coveted health in the softer climes of Southern Europe. At the close of this service he retired to his chamber, from which he came forth bearing this beautiful hymn:

“ Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide!
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, Oh abide with me!

“ I need Thy presence every passing hour,
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who like Thyself my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, Oh abide with me!’’!

That is importunity at its best. When prayer is inspired by such a spirit, it receives access up yonder. And there is for him who makes it the consciousness of audience and satisfaction.

**STRAIGHTFORWARDNESS ADVAN-
TAGEOUS IN PRAYER.**

“Prayer is the breath of God in man,
Returning whence it came;
Love is the sacred fire within,
And prayer the rising flame.

It gives the burdened spirit ease,
And soothes the troubled breast;
Yields comfort to the mourning soul,
And to the weary rest.

When God inclines the heart to pray,
He hath an ear to hear;
To Him there's music in a sigh,
And beauty in a tear.

The humble suppliant cannot fail
To have his wants supplied,
Since He for sinners intercedes
Who once for sinners died.”

—*Rev. Benjamin Beldome*

CHAPTER XI.

STRAIGHTFORWARDNESS ADVANTAGEOUS IN PRAYER.

Read again that passage from the Sermon on the Mount according to Matthew as recorded in the sixth chapter of his gospel and observe in particular the instruction of the seventh verse: "But when ye pray use not vain repetitions as the heathen do; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking." It takes some Christians a long time to escape this heathen conception,—if we may judge from the prayers we often hear,—that it is much speaking that wins the favor of heaven. Omniscience alone, that is able to read the thoughts and intents of the heart, could tell what was wanted or intended in many of the prayers we have heard offered—in some we have made. Such prayers cannot reach the ear of God as can a *straightforward* asking for what we want. Straightforwardness is a secret in prayer that is worth our knowing. This is one of the most engaging qualities that character can possess. It is no less true when descriptive of prayer. There is nothing concealed in prayers of this kind.

They bear the impress of truthfulness. There is no pretence. Simplicity is the element of their power. There is no covering up of the motives or veiling of the desires. They ask for the things they want.

The prayers given us in the scriptures, in its history, or as examples for guidance, are definite, particular, simple and straightforward. Some of these happily illustrating this quality have already been cited. But observe others: The prayer of Abraham for a son (Genesis 15:2); or in behalf of Sodom (Genesis 18:23-33); the lamentation of Joshua preceding the discovery of Achan with the accursed stuff, (Joshua 7:7-9;) hear the confession and pleading of Israel as exemplified in Judges 10:15, and that of Ezra in his humiliation and distress for their abominations (Ezra 9:6-15); and the confessions of David in such a psalm as the fifty-first; and the pleading of Hannah for the favor of the Lord (Samuel 1:11); all these are models of straightforwardness. In the New Testament the Master's utterances are remarkable for their brevity and conciseness. True, indeed, he spent hours apart in some Secret Place, but we may be sure with definiteness of purpose and simplicity of communion. These examples recorded for us were a constant

exemplification of this truth,—“ye are not heard for your much speaking.” Those recorded from the apostle’s lips bear this mark of going straight to the point. From that day to this, straightforwardness has been the quality of devotions of saintly men and women who have prevailed with God. When Knox’s heart yearned for Scotland, he said, “Give me Scotland or I die”—the kind of praying which Queen Mary feared more than she did all the armies of Europe. This was said to be characteristic of Doddredge’s prayers, “they had an intensely business-like spirit.” This was the beauty of the prayers of the great evangelists. When asked concerning the time spent in the Secret Place during the great evangelistic campaign in England, when thousands were brought to Christ, Moody confessed to spending little time in prayer, as the Spirit of God upon him seemed urging him to action. Those who have heard him were always struck by the directness and simplicity of his approach in prayer. This was likewise true of Drummond; and of Müller, the man who established what has been called the “prayer telephone,” over which he told God his wants and found the answer in every day’s abundance for the needs of his great institutions.

That straightforwardness is a secret in prayer is easily evident. When deep concern for the needs of life and a sensible appreciation of the Hearer of prayer is found there is no conviction of the need of multiplying words; but rather, a consciousness is possessed that there is no room for them. Prayer is an exercise of the emotions. The more complete their enlistment, the more fervent and intense the prayer. Then, its expression must be with dispatch.

We are forced to this secret in sorrow, in crises of life when crushed by calamities or overwhelmed with sore distress. Then the heart wells up and breaks out in bursts of grief, in petitions for help, in prayers for deliverance. These prayers have the right quality. And if we could only bring that habit of straightforwardness down to the morning and evening exercise, it would vitalize these petitions and make them fresh as each morning's breath, and as sweet as the evening's rest.

James Montgomery understood the elements of true prayer, as is evident in these familiar lines:

"Prayer is the burden of a sigh,
The falling of a tear,
The upward glancing of an eye
When none but God is near."

There is no difficulty to a heart of self-sacrificing love to understand the sigh, the tear, the glance of an eye when they make an appeal. These speak a simple and genuine message to God and men. A message easily understood, and efficient in its pleading; a message that goes straight to the heart, and that wins the service of the will.

FULL PERSUASION IN PRAYER:

“ But that Thou art my wisdom, Lord,
And both mine eyes are Thine
My mind would be extremely stirred
For missing my design.

Were it not better to bestow
Some place and power on me?
Then would Thy praises with me grow,
And share in my degree

But when I thus dispute and grieve
I do resume my sight,
And pilfering what I once did give,
Disseize Thee of Thy right.

How know I, if Thou shouldst me raise,
That I should then raise Thee?
Perhaps great places and Thy praise
Do not so well agree.

Wherefore, unto my gift I stand,
I will no more advise;
Only do Thou lend me Thine hand,
Since Thou hast both mine eyes.”

—*George Herbert*.—“Submission.”

CHAPTER XII.

FULL PERSUASION IN PRAYER.

The beautiful poem "Submission," by George Herbert, quoted by Ruskin in the second volume of *Prætorita*, and said by him to have been one of the poems most useful in the formation of what was wisest in his thoughts, or happiest in the course of his subsequent life, suggests another secret, which, when learned, gives efficiency to our prayers.

Let us have a full persuasion in our minds of the rightness of our request. If this is lacking then we must have entire commitment of the case to God. When we have gone to God desiring things we could not bring to the altar, it has stopped up the outpourings of our heart for every other thing as well. To know not what we should pray for as we ought is a practical experience of the Christian life. Many, many times have we been perplexed with the questions of propriety according to the standard of our faith and trust, in making particular requests, but we have learned in regard to our desires that to try them thoroughly there is no place like that which examines them as to their effect

upon the spirit of devotions. Many engagements of society and business have found their condemnation here. For some professing Christians this has been a sufficient reason for refraining from certain practices, amusements and pursuits which many other professing Christians indulge in. But such persons have passed beyond the stage of development that is concerned with the first principles and are going on unto perfection.

We have said at the beginning that an underlying postulate of prayer, of whatever quality, is a belief in *God*. That He *is*, and that He is a *Rewarder* of them who diligently seek Him. And, further. One of the first principles for our guidance is a belief in the practical efficiency of prayer. That was written of prayer generally. Now, it is with other and finer lessons that we are having to do, as we are speaking of convictions that respect particular objects for which we pray, and of particular efforts in prayer. We are endeavoring to learn the secret of constant success in prayer, and of the continuous enjoyment of His favor. Men never pray without a belief in God; they can never seek His blessing on that about which they are uncertain themselves or which they are unwilling to commit to Him.

A man once very much desired a certain attainment. It promised honor, income, comfort, and from the distance, larger spheres of usefulness for God and his fellow-men, which, deep in his heart, this man desired more than all else. These would seem to be objects which God might be readily asked to give. But to bring these into The Secret Place and make them the subject of prayer he could not freely do. There had been a lack of conviction of his desire for them being a proper one to entertain, and even a certain feeling that this was an improper request to make. He decided his duty was to fall back on his faith in God, and to trust that in God's own good time, all these, honor, riches, comfort and a larger sphere of usefulness, would find their place in the purpose of God for his life. Now, many of us have been in such perplexity. But we set about to find out a way for ourselves; set about to find solutions for such problems which God alone can solve; and which He alone has any right to solve. And this setting about led us into paths of life where human skill, human wisdom and—human weakness, found greater opportunity for display than God found for companionship with us or we found for communion with Him. While upon this lonely and uncertain way our secret of prayer was lost.

On the other hand, the entire commitment of life to Him, in the uncertain and clouded moments, has given the richest quality to the spirit of devotion and prayer. There is no hymn in the English tongue more filled with such a spirit than that of Newman's which we frequently sing. But little do we think of the heart experience for him expressed in it. And when we do think we are not able to fathom it. We only know that there was such experience, for this hymn deeply stirs our own hearts, and finds echoes, some faint, some loud, in other hearts. It will ever continue to do so with those who have seen the darkness, and felt the struggle of spiritual conflict and mental strife. He had passed through some of his sorest trials, and had taken some of his greatest departures in the expression of his faith at Rome. Sailing for home from Sicily, they met with a calm sea, when the sails would not stir. So they waited for the breeze. And while they waited he wrote:

Lead, kindly light! amid the encircling gloom,

Lead Thou me on;

The night is dark, and I am far from home,

Lead Thou me on;

Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see

The distant scene; one step enough for me.

I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou
Shouldst lead me on;
I loved to choose and see my path; but now
Lead Thou me on;
I loved the garish day, and spite of fears,
Pride ruled my will. Remember not past years.

So long Thy power has blessed me, sure it still
Will lead me on
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone;
And with the morn those angel faces smile
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.

Is there not a sweet calm confidence in this
which tells of a perfect commitment of self for
guidance in the walk of life? Out of such
persuasion of one in whom they have believed
that He is able to keep every trust, to keep
any trust committed unto Him, the prayers
that availeth much ascend.

DESIRING GOD IN PRAYER.

"So far from getting used to it, the more the beauty and tenderness of God's majesty grow into us, the more will the hatefulness of sin come upon us with all the startling force of novelty. The sort of common consent by which men ignore God, His rights, His claims and His interests, will seem to us almost more hideous than overt acts of sin. Life will become a burden, the world feel as a strange and unhomelike place, and a blessed weariness will come over us, which will find no repose but upon the sweet and satisfying thought of God."—*Frederick William Faber, D. D., in "All for Jesus, or The Easy Ways of Divine Love."*

"Earth gets its price for what earth gives us;
The beggar is taxed for a corner to die in,
The priest hath his fee who comes and shrives us,
We bargain for the graves we lie in;
At the devil's booth are all things sold,
Each ounce of dross costs its ounce of gold;
For a cap and bells our lives we pay.
Bubbles we buy with a whole soul's tasking;
'Tis heaven alone that is given away,
'Tis only God may be had for the asking."
—Lowell.

CHAPTER XIII.

DESIRING GOD IN PRAYER.

In the fourth chapter we said that prayer is not simply an avenue for the presentation of requests, but is also an opportunity for communion, for worship. Keep this in mind as you begin this chapter. There are three words in the New Testament translated by our word prayer, each of which has its own own peculiar significance. The first (*δέησις*) gives prominence to the expression of personal need; the second (*προσευχή*) to the element of devotion; the third (*ἐντεύξις*) to child-like confidence, by representing prayer as the heart's converse with God. These three ideas find expression in our one word prayer. Hence it is a word rich in quantity and quality. An expression of life at its best. Every effort made to analyze it results as the work of dissection always does, in the destruction of that subtle thing called life, leaving us with the bare forms and mechanical constructions. You learn most about prayer, see it at its best and feel its force, by allowing it to flourish, by engaging in it.

In the gospel according to Matthew, the

word chosen by the Master to set true worship in contrast with heathen customs, is the one which gives the largest expression to the idea of devotion, of worship. And not without reason. There is this to be observed in the study of God's word, that there is a happy selection of the best word to express the thought intended to be given. The first and important element of every prayer is its aspiration toward God. And the loftiest subject for prayer is *God, our Heavenly Father*.

Have you observed the place which he occupies in the prayers of Old Testament characters? Behold as an example, that one of Solomon's at the dedication of the temple. He begins thus: "Lord God of Israel, there is no God like Thee, in heaven above or in earth beneath." And in this lofty strain he continues his exultation of the God of Israel, Who is faithful, Who is merciful. The verity of His word, the loftiness of His character, the indispensableness of His presence, are the great concerns with which Solomon is engaged. Examine the Psalms. What a large place God occupies in them! His glory, His wisdom, His power, His righteousness, His long-suffering, His pity, His condescension and His skill are the subjects not only of song,

but also of prayer. Look again, at that prayer of Asa's (II Chronicles 14:11): "Lord, it is nothing with Thee to help with many or with them that have no power; help us, O Lord, our God; for we rest on Thee and in Thy name we go against this multitude. O, Lord God, Thou art our God; let not man prevail against Thee." Asa's cause and desires were as nothing compared with the character and interests of God. In the New Testament there is but one example to which we need refer,—it is that one which the Master gave us and in which emphasis is laid upon the great subject for prayer by virtue of the position and pre-eminence assigned to it in the order of petitions. "After this manner, therefore, pray ye: Our Father which art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name." Sacred is Thy name! Worthy of our deepest reverence and devotion! Noblest object of our contemplation! To Thee our thoughts should turn! Before Thee our wills should bow! To Thee our heart-deep love should be given!

Unless we are stirred with thoughts of God our prayer never rises above our heads. There is no such thing as prayer with God left out. There is no such thing as Godless praying. That would be simply hollow-sounding harangue. There is no engagement so heavy

as prayers without the realizing sense of His reality; no hours so burdensome to human hearts as those we call worship hours, when there is no sense of the Divine presence. On the other hand, there are no moments so refreshing, none so filled with inspiration, so glad for the heart, so sweetly solemn, as those we spend in The Secret Place feeling that He is near.

In that passage in Matthew (Matthew 6:8) we read, "for your Heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have *need* of, even before ye ask Him." It is of the deepest significance that Jesus followed this word "need," with instruction to make God the first subject of prayer. Because of the emergency of the moment, or because of our physical environment, or because of the attachment of our hearts to the things of this world, we have made other things the subject of our petitions, any one of which might be dropped out of our lives without greatly affecting us.

We would not be worsted much if we never received those things which we have many times made the subject of our petitions. But a man without God is without hope. And to be without hope is to be without a future, to have no vision, to have no light. You might be without food for days, or unable to make

but little use of it for months and yet live; but if you were without God for one moment, you would be plunged into the darkest abyss. You may secure the choicest treasures for which the men of this world live, you might be ensconced in all the comforts and with all the luxuries which princes and princesses enjoy, and yet be conscious of vacuums in your life which had not yet been relieved of their awful emptiness. There are needs of the human life which earth cannot fill, depths of the human soul which only the Eternal Love can fathom. And the whole history of God's manifestation through Jesus Christ is intended to teach us that the deepest need of the human soul is GOD. Let us then pray with John Newton:

“ More of Thy presence, Lord, impart,
More of Thy image let me bear:
Erect Thy throne within my heart,
And reign without a rival there.”

**INTERESTED IN GOD'S KINGDOM
IN PRAYER.**

“ He shall reign from pole to pole
With illimitable sway;
He shall reign when, like a scroll,
Yonder heavens have passed away.
Then the end; beneath His rod
Man’s last enemy shall fall.
Hallelujah! Christ in God—
God in Christ is all in all.”

—*James Montgomery.*

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT THINGS OTHERS HAVE NEED OF IN PRAYER.

No man liveth or dieth unto himself. We are indissolubly united to each other by the ties of humanity. These ties prevent us escaping the contact of our fellows upon the broad plains of society, or, delicately entwining about our very hearts, bind us together in the family circle at the hearthstone. It is along these ties that our measure of manhood and womanhood is often taken, in receiving as well as in giving conduct toward our fellows. You may quite as accurately measure a man in his reception of the conduct of others toward him as in the way he acts toward others. The man who, when sinned against by his fellows treasures up the offense in his breast, brooding over it, until it brings forth misery in himself and annoyance to others, is quite as well known as he who never interests himself in the good fortune, success, or sorrows of others. For each the circle of friendship is likely to be small and the spirit of their fellowship cold.

The conspicuous characteristic of Jesus was

His sympathy with and interest in the happiness and well-being of others. He taught us, also, the beauty, privilege and duty of making these subjects the burden of our prayer.

Do you not remember the large place intercessory prayer has in the word of God, and especially in the history of the gospels,—recall how God appointed intercessors for the people, and how friends and parents interceded with Christ for loved ones, and how Christ interceded for His disciples and enemies, and how, hardest of all to receive, but nevertheless urgent as our duty, we are to pray for those who spitefully use us and persecute us? Yes, we can remember. The sweetness of the privilege, and the grind of the duty will not let us forget.

There is a beautiful example in the book of Job of the profit that comes to those who intercede for others. The conference is ended. God has expressed His displeasure with Elphaz and his friends, ordering them to seek Job with offering and sacrifice for their sin, and to request that he pray for them. Obeying, the prayers were offered in their behalf; and the record is, “the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends.” (Job 42:10.) This might be your experience and mine more frequently, if we prayed for

our friends. Captives to spoiled tempers and mean thoughts, victims of ugly conduct and harsh words, we might be set free if we were in prayer for others in The Secret Place.

Christ's instruction to Peter was "when thou art converted strengthen thy brethren." And *we* have much to do in this direction. The danger of the temptation to lose faith is a grave one. Coldness and formality in the church has too often chilled us. There are also the times of loss and disaster which come to men, when the bond of sympathy might be strengthened. There is no experience in life that touches us so close as the loss of that which we count dear. How great has been the jeopardy of faith in these times! How dark and difficult to see then that all things work together for good to those that love God! Remember other men and women have had,—are having,—severe trials and temptations. The secret of Peter's salvation was, that another prayed for him; and if we remember our brother and sister in these hours of affliction to intercede with God in their behalf, it will be like fresh fuel on the well-spent fire of trust, flaming up to give light and warmth to the soul; and the chill that has sometimes struck into the very vitals of faith in God and man may be overcome.

Oh, how these social relations, interests and institutions need the sanctifying influence of The Secret Place! The marital relation, the home and the church—God has given these, and their preservation is vital to society. Disrespect, even to contempt, for these sacred institutions and relations seems to be increasing. Men dare enter upon them as “experiments” and to speak of them as “conveniences,” until the disruption and dismemberment of these institutions are the sad spectacles of our national life. They need our prayers. They need to be guarded and cherished at the mercy seat, and in the Secret Place, where men and women come face to face with God.

How many subjects present themselves in our homes and claim our prayers! Here the chords of sympathy are tuned, and the touches of affection bring out the sweetest music of the soul in the Secret Place. It would be as impossible to specify them as to define the infinite multiplicity, variety and depth of human experience, or measure the intensity of the emotions of the heart. The seventeenth chapter of the Gospel according to John should leave us in no uncertainty as to the acceptableness and power of our approach in these events where the emotions of the heart

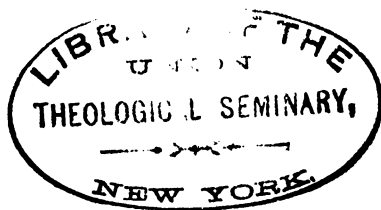
are at play. If such prayers were not acceptable, a great privilege would be destroyed and grievous limitations placed upon the soul. But such prayers are acceptable.

To go back to Peter's case, there is much to learn. Faith would be greatly tested in such an experience as that through which Peter was to pass. The fires would burn so low, the ashes of unseemly conduct would so gather on the coals, as to make them seem dead. He goes so rapidly and so far away, so completely contradicts the hope of the Master's prayers by his conduct as to make that prayer offered in his behalf seem in vain. But it was not in vain. Jesus did not believe it to be in vain. He knew that prayer offered according to the Father's will, from a heart pent up with love, so anxious for the outcome of crises through which the one prayed for was to pass, such prayers He knew would be answered. He knew, notwithstanding Peter's fall in the testing hour, he would turn again. And keep it in memory,—*such prayers are still answered*. Because God chooses the time for giving the answers, do not lose faith in the effectualness of the effort.

"God's plans like lilies pure and white unfold,
We must not tear the close-shut leaves apart—
Time will reveal their calyxes of gold."

The forces that are set in motion by prayer work through un contemplated agencies and conditions; sometimes they travel by long and circuitous routes; at unexpected moments they appear in the secret places of human hearts and lives. They are felt beyond the reach of human strength; beyond the power of human wisdom they extend. No power of earth or hell can resist them. And that one for whom your prayer is made in such Christ-like abandon of devotion and harmony with God's will, will, at some time, it may be at some awful crisis of the soul, on the very edge of an irrevocable loss, like Peter, turn again and weep bitterly for the extremity to which they have gone. Men and women never get so old they forget a loved one's prayer. They can never sink so low these forces, which prayer engages, cannot raise them up. They never wander so far as to lose sight of the family altar at home. They never go into such seclusion the voice of love's prayers for them cannot follow and find them out. They never become so indifferent as to lightly esteem the influences which mother's prayers breathe. And from the "far margins of the world," where men have wandered in their search for the pleasures that shall satisfy, where they have sunk into sin and

degradation, and sometimes, into hopeless bondage, these prayers have searched them out, and brought them back, and restored them to their liberty, to their loves, and to their God. Then cease not to pray for your friends, your enemies and the loved ones God has given you.



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