

PRAYER

Its Nature and Scope

BY

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Preface

These thoughts about prayer are not mainly devotional, nor are they designed chiefly for the encouragement of those who already have rest in their enjoyment of prayer. They were written primarily for the meeting of difficulties which trouble many minds with reference to the true basis of prayer, its scope, and its limitations.

They are to point out to doubters the reasons for and the reasonableness of fitting prayer, and to suggest caution and warning as to the mode and matter of prayer, rather than to urge to a continuance of a practice already appreciated by spiritually minded believers. Many of these thoughts have been brought out in hours of earnest discussion with inquiring or anxious minds, at various places and at widely different times.

Preface

Because they were first expressed to those who were in trouble of mind, and proved serviceable in making clear the principles involved, it is hoped that they may be helpful to many others whom the writer has never met.

H. C. T.

PHILADELPHIA,
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I

What is Prayer?

Many who are in the habit of praying have but vague notions of the meaning of the term "prayer;" and many more of those who sneer at or undervalue prayer do not know what it is that they are making light of. Whether prayer be indulged in or ignored, it were well to be able at least to answer the question, What is prayer?

A common thought of prayer connects it with direct petition, with a call for relief or help of some kind. It is used in this sense in legal phrase. A petitioner to a court of justice, to a legislative body, or to a ruler, usually closes his formal request with the words, "And your petitioner as in duty bound will ever pray." The same idea has prominence in the minds of most of those who pray morning and evening to God, as the giver of all good. They

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ask of God those things which they want, or which they think they need.

Prayer, in even this limited sense, may be for others as well as for one's self. A legal petition to those in authority, or a call for relief or help from God, may include the friends of the petitioner or others in whom he has an interest. But the idea of supplication and of intercession generally limits the thought of prayer. Yet prayer means a great deal more than this, all the world over.

In the Hebrew of the Old Testament, and in the Greek of the New, there are quite a number of different words translated, in our English Bible, by the one term "prayer." The meanings of these words severally are, therefore, all included in the Bible idea of prayer. These meanings are: confession, supplication, entreaty, desire, intercession, thanksgiving, adoration, praise, worship, meditation, outpouring of self, communion; and unless prayer is recognized as covering all these signifi-

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cations, it falls short of what is fairly within the limits of its fullest sense.

Prayer to God presupposes the fact of God as a hearer and answerer of prayer, in such relations with or in such attitude toward the one who prays, as to justify the privilege of prayer. One would have little encouragement to make a personal request of God, unless he felt that God would be entreated by him as a petitioner. Hence prayer, as mere supplication or intercession, involves an understood relation between him who prays and Him who is prayed to, that carries with it well-known privileges and duties. A man cannot even ask help of God unless he has hope that God will hear and heed him because God is God, and because the petitioner stands as he stands before God ; for a cry of despair is not in the spirit of prayer.

Prayer as prayer carries with it the duty of praise as praise. He who comes to God with requests that he expects to have answered, ought to be grateful that he can

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come thus hopefully; and he will naturally give expression to his thankfulness in hearty ascriptions of praise. Asking a favor of one who can give, includes an obligation, and so a virtual promise, to return thanks if the favor be granted. "Think" and "thank" are radically the same word, and he who fails to thank God for his good gifts fails to think duly of God as their giver. So again "praising" is but another word for "appraising," and he who does not come to God in prayer, with praise for the privilege of praying, fails of showing a right estimate and appreciation of prayer.

When ten lepers came to Jesus with a common petition for their healing, Jesus healed them all; but he was grieved, for their sakes, that only one of them showed his right appraisal of his cure, by returning to give praise for its granting. And the one whose prayer was thus accompanied with praise had a blessing that was not secured to the other nine. Do one in ten of those who now make requests for

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the day, in their morning prayer, preface those requests with praise that they can thus come to God, or do they return to give thanks in the evening for every specific answer to the petitions of the morning? There can be no spirit of true prayer without the spirit of praise accompanying it.

All of the many phases of true prayer are included in the one idea of communing with God. There can be no proper prayer without such communing, or a desire for it. Where such communing exists, or is longed for, confession, supplication, intercession, adoration, meditation, outpouring of self, thanksgiving, and praise, commingle unconsciously. Thus it is that men can "pray without ceasing" and "pray everywhere." And thus it is that God can hear prayer, when no one on earth can hear it.

"I need not leave the jostling world,
Or wait till daily tasks are o'er,
To fold my palms in secret prayer
Within the close-shut closet door.

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"There is a viewless, cloistered room,
As high as heaven, as fair as day,
Where, though my feet may join the throng,
My soul can enter in and pray.

"And never through those crystal walls
The clash of life can pierce its way,
Nor ever can a human ear
Drink in the spirit-words I say.

"One hearkening, even, cannot know
When I have crossed the threshold o'er;
For He alone, who hears my prayer,
Has heard the shutting of the door."

II

Universality of the Prayer-Cry

“O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.” This is the declaration of the inspired Psalmist, and the widest acquaintance with human nature and with human experiences confirms the truth of the declaration. Man prays because man is man, and needs help from One who is above man and outside of man. The universality of the human prayer-cry is a result and a proof of the need and the fitness of prayer by man to God.

Those who profess to be able to show, by a study of the form and the powers of living organisms, the process by which man has arrived at his present state, tell us that an existing need tends to produce a corresponding effort and an ultimate capacity to meet that need. Light calls for sight. If there were no light, there would be no

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eye to perceive the light. But wherever there is light, life seeks and secures the power to perceive and utilize light. It is in accordance with the principle here suggested that the existence of a Hearer of prayer is in itself an invitation and an incitement to the universal prayer-cry of humanity.

Prayer is not a consequence of any specific command to pray. The duty of prayer is not even included in the scope of the Ten Commandments—or the Ten Words of God's loving covenant with his people. There is no primitive injunction to prayer in the earlier pages of the Bible history of the race. The fact, like the fitness and the necessity, of prayer, seems to be taken for granted in Bible teachings, as truly as the existence of God and the dependence of man on God. A cry to God for help in some crisis hour of need or sorrow is instinctive in the human heart, and must be so while man is man and God is God.

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Men may repress their impulse to pray in ordinary times, or may neglect and ignore the duty and privilege of prayer, while they are free from any sense of peril, or are thoughtless as to their utter dependence on supernatural aid and guidance; but the time will come when they realize that they are not sufficient unto themselves, and then, in spite of themselves, the prayer-cry is forced out of their heart of hearts. "He that will learn to pray, let him go to sea," says George Herbert pithily, out of the wisdom of the ages; and many a man has uttered his first conscious prayer-cry in some hour of extremity in an ocean storm, or as he faced death on a battle-field.

"Do you ever pray, my friend?" asked an army chaplain of a wounded soldier in the prison hospital in Charleston, in our Civil War, just after the fierce and fruitless assault on Fort Wagner. "Sometimes, chaplain," was the answer; "I prayed last Saturday night, when we were in that fight

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at Wagner. I guess everybody prayed *then.*" Yes, everybody prays at one time or another, in faith or in fear, in hope or in despair.

"'There is no God,' the foolish saith;—

But none, 'There is no sorrow!'

And nature oft the cry of faith

In bitter need will borrow.

Eyes which the preacher could not school

By wayside graves are raised,

And lips say, 'God be pitiful!'

Who ne'er said, 'God be praised!'

Be pitiful, O God!"

In the presence of the dread realities of the unknown future, the soul's cry for spiritual help is instinctive and universal. At its least, it is like the unconscious cry of the new-born babe for the food of nature provided of God in the mother-life; or like the unspoken cry of the parched lips, in the delirium of fever, for the cool water which the wandering intellect cannot give words to ask for. Because their human needs require superhuman help, and superhuman help is divinely provided for them, there-

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fore their souls cry for such assistance. The God-given supply prompts the man-felt longing.

Those who are outside of the influence of Bible teachings or of Christian associations give utterance to cries for super-human aid in their hour of need. They call on the gods to help them, or they cry to the demons to spare them from harm. The prayer-cry of the human heart is universal. He who refuses to pray, sins against the light of revelation and of nature. He wrongs his own soul as surely as if he were to refuse to smile in the hour of joy, or to shed a tear when he is in sorrow.

“He who goes to bed and doth not pray,
Maketh two nights of ev'ry day.”

Whatever one may think of the reasons for prayer, or of the reasonableness of the universal heart-cry for supernatural help, he must admit that this cry is natural to man, and that therefore there is some good reason for it. If he represses his impulse at times to share in it, he bears himself

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unnaturally, and he is less than a man if he lives a prayerless life. It is a shame to man to lead a prayerless life.

“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 world is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.”

III

Prayer a Providential Force in God's Plan

It is according to the promise of God, and therefore it is in accordance with the "laws of nature," that great wonders can be wrought through prayer. God has so planned his work of creation that right prayer is as potent a force in the universe as the mightiest of mere natural forces.

There can be no conflict where God has ordained harmony. All agencies which God has put in operation work together for good to them that love him. His kingdoms of nature and of grace are not at variance. The progress of the one kingdom is no hindrance to the progress of the other; on the contrary, each is by God set to help forward the other to its best and completest work. Unless the prayer of faith comes in for its provided mission, all

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the forces of nature fail of their most beneficent accomplishment, just as surely as the electric current waits aimlessly for the magnetic battery and the telegraphic wire to enable it to bear a message of affection or warning from one Christian believer's home to another.

The confusion in many a man's mind over this matter of prayer arises from ignoring the fact that God so arranged all the workings of nature, so planned and fixed its "laws," that the needs and the longings of all his children in all the ages should be met by the influence of prayer in nature's operations. Concerning the miracle of the overthrow of Pharaoh's host, the speculative rabbis concluded that when the Lord originally formed the Red Sea he so contrived it that its waters should separate when the rod of his servant Moses was first stretched above them, and that they should fall back again when that rod was over them a second time. Theirs certainly was a great deal better

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logic, and theirs a more sensible conclusion, than is the notion of some modern theorists, that the "laws of nature" are so constraining and inexorable that they bind Omnipotence; that they render God unable to do as he would like to, and unwilling to do as he has promised.

Electricity and gravitation are recognized as forces controlled by the "laws of nature." Yet man has unmistakable power to will and plan and execute a change in the operation and application of these forces by means of simple mechanical agencies, so that gravitation is practically overcome and suspended, or resumed and intensified, for a special purpose within given limits of time and space; and electricity is drawn out of its normal course in the heavens and made to travel a wire stretched from one point to another to enable two persons at a distance from each other to converse on matters of merely personal interest. This is admitted by those who deem it unreasonable to suppose

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that a loving personal God can and does change and direct the application of the forces of nature at the need and call of those whom God loves. They seem, indeed, unwilling to concede to God the power over the forces of nature that is exercised in a thousand cases by the humblest tender of a pile-driver or the poorest trained telephone girl.

God's promise is explicit and often repeated that the faith-filled prayer of the disciples of Jesus shall be answered. If that promise is not to be depended on, God cannot be trusted. If God can be believed, that promise is sure. To the child of God, his Father and his Father's promises are inseparable. They must be accepted or rejected together. When God says that we may have a thing *if* we pray for it in faith, God's promise of giving that thing is conditioned on our faith-filled prayers for it. We know, therefore, just how that thing is to be obtained. If we fail to meet the conditions of its bestowal,

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we must make up our minds to do without its benefits.

When there is no asking for that which is to come by the asking, there is no receiving of that thing. The "laws of nature" are no hindrance to God's giving of whatever his children need and in faith pray for. But his children's failure to pray for a blessing which he has conditioned on their prayer, does hinder his giving to them. God *can* be depended on,—depended on to keep his promise of an answer to the faith-filled prayer of his children, even though ten thousand miracles were needed to that answer,—depended on, also, to withhold those good gifts which he has promised to bestow on his children only in answer to their prayer of faith.

There are rich gifts awaiting the rightful prayers of the disciples of Jesus,—gifts that are to be had for the asking, and not to be had unless they are asked for. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and

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find grace to help in time of need"—mercy and grace for ourselves and for others. God stands waiting to answer such prayers on our part. Let us fail of no blessing at his hands that is conditioned on our request for it. As sure as is our confidence in his existence may be our confidence in his fidelity to his promises. "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us. And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him."

IV

What to Pray for, and Why

God has disclosed himself in the Bible as the Father of the children of men, and men are invited to love him, to trust him, and to call upon him, as true children would love and trust and call upon an earthly father. This relation of father and child, therefore, suggests and defines the relation of God and men; and the scope and the nature of prayer are indicated in their reach and in their limitations by this simple and intelligible figure.

Whatever an earthly child might ask of an earthly father, a spiritual child of God may ask of his heavenly Father; and in the spirit that is proper in an earthly child approaching his earthly father, a spiritual child of God may properly approach his heavenly Father. It is right for a child to be reverent, to be trustful, to be loving,

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as he comes to his father. It is right for a child to tell his father freely of his needs, of his wants, and of his wishes. It is right for a child to feel that his father knows better than he does whether his requests should be granted or denied; and he should accept cheerfully and with gratitude his father's decision in every case. This is as true in the case of a child of God coming to his heavenly Father, as of a child of man coming to his earthly father.

But it is said that God is omniscient as well as loving, and that because he knows every want of every child of his, as a human father cannot know every want of his child, it were needless, or presumptuous, for a child of God to make specific request of God for a personal gift to himself as though it would not be given except for that request. How can we feel justified in coming with a special request to God for personal ministry to us, individually, as though we were forgotten or overlooked of God; or as though he could be expected

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to change his plans, or modify his laws, in our behalf? It is sufficient for us on this point to know that God asks us, as his children, to make known our personal wants to him, and to ask of him those things which, as his loving children, we desire from him; and that he distinctly assures us that he will be influenced and affected in his ministry to us by our calls upon him.

“Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee,” is the invitation and the promise of the Old Testament, many times repeated. In the New Testament the Son of God and the Son of man, while explicitly saying to his disciples, “Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him,” at the same time gives to them a pattern of prayer, including special petitions for both spiritual and material gifts which God knows they require, yet which he seems to condition on their request for them. Again and again Jesus Christ says, in substance, to his disciples, “All things

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whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive;" or, "All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye have received them, and ye shall have them." These promises, with all their wide scope, are limited by their very phrasing to God's children as God's children, and to those things which a child of God can ask of God in faith; but within those limitations they are explicit and positive.

There are Christians whose philosophy of prayer would limit its advantages to its subjective influence on, or in, the one who prays, and who think that it cannot result in any change of God's action toward the petitioner, although it does result in an improved state of thought and feeling on the part of one thus seeking communion with God. But this view is at variance with the plain teachings of the Bible, and with the explicit declarations of God himself. God says he will be influenced by prayer. He says that the prayer of faith shall result in special objective advantages

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to the one who prays, and to those who are prayed for in faith. A child of God ought to expect answers to prayer, and he fails in his plain duty if he does not rest on God's promise to this extent.

When the Syrophenician woman prayed to Jesus for the recovery of her demon-possessed daughter, and he seemed not ready to grant her request, she continued persistently in prayer, not in order to bring her mind into mere submission to his will, but in order to bring him to grant recovery to her tormented child. It was an objective, not a subjective, result that she was after; and Jesus commended her spirit in this, and granted her request. This is also the way of God with reference to prayer, as taught us in the Old Testament and in the New.

Other Christians would make a distinction between spiritual gifts and material gifts which is not made in the Bible, and which is not in accordance with God's fatherly dealings with his children. It is

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said, by some, that it is right to pray for spiritual gifts and graces, but that it is not right to pray for food, or for clothing, or for health, or for personal safety in time of danger. But all these things are important in their way to a child of God; and a child of God has a right to make known his wants in any and every sphere, in loving trust and in submissiveness to his heavenly Father's will.

Jesus Christ rebuked this distinction between things spiritual and things material, when he asked the Jewish scribes, who stood watching him as the man sick of the palsy was brought into his presence for his healing: "Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins are forgiven; or to say, Arise, and walk?" and then he both forgave the sins of the palsied one, and restored him to physical health. In those days, men were readier to believe that bodily strength could be given by Jesus Christ, than that he had power to bestow spiritual wholeness. Nowadays, Christians seem readier

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to believe that prayers in the name of Christ for spiritual gifts will be answered, than that prayers in behalf of the body and its necessities will meet with an answer from God. Both errors are alike displeasing to God.

Many of the miracles of our Saviour were wrought in behalf of the bodily needs of those who prayed to him. In his pattern prayer, he frames a petition for a daily supply of things needful to the body of the one who prays. In foretelling the dark days which should come to his disciples in the destruction of Jerusalem, he enjoined them to include time and weather in their prayers with reference to it. "Pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on a sabbath," he said; and who supposes that Jesus meant in this that such prayer could make no difference in the result?

As to God's way with his children in this matter, Jesus said: "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

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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?"

We have reason to infer that the thrice-repeated prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane was for special physical strength, lest his worn body should fail him in the struggle that was yet before him, and he should die of exhaustion before coming to the cross; for we are told in the letter to the Hebrews that his prayer was heard in that thing which was a cause of fear to him. And the record is, that an angel was sent to minister to him; and he had new strength from that hour to the end. Physical strength was a necessity to Jesus while here in the flesh, as it is also a necessity to every child of God who still has a work to do in the flesh; and prayer for physical strength for the doing of one's appointed work is right and fitting, on the part of each and every child of God.

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Of course a child of God is to consider his body only in its proper place, in and for the service of God. He is to ask only for that supply to his body which shall enable him to serve God more efficiently, and where and as God pleases; and he is to ask in submissiveness to God's will, assured that God's answer will be according to God's wisdom and love, whether it be in compliance with the petition, or in denial of it.

When Paul prayed three times over for the removal of the stake in his flesh, he was assured that God would do better by him than to grant that request; he would give him added strength to bear up under it; and thenceforward Paul was ready to rejoice in his physical infirmity as a means of spiritual power. This should be the way of every child of God in his praying for blessings from God in the physical realm.

All prayer should be without anxiety or fearfulness. Jesus cautioned his disciples

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not to be worried over their material wants ; but he did not tell them to refrain from asking for a daily supply according to their daily needs, in this realm. When his disciples cried out to him for help in their hour of danger on the sea, Jesus rebuked them for their lack of faith, not as shown in their call upon him for protection, but as indicated in their expressed doubt of his readiness to give them rescue and safety.

Jesus, while here in the flesh, showed by his works that he had power over material things, over disease, over death, over the forces of nature, and over spiritual forces. He fed the hungry, he healed the sick, he prolonged life, he raised the dead, he calmed the winds and waves, he cast out demons, he forgave sins. Before he went away he said to his disciples : "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also ; and greater works than these shall he do ; because I go unto the Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in

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my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask me anything in my name, that will I do." Is it not strange that, in the face of the example and the declaration of our Lord at this point, any one of his disciples should venture to say that a follower of his is not authorized to ask in Christ's name for food, or health, or safety to the body, or for the calming of a storm, as well as for spiritual blessings?

A prayer of a true child of God, offered in faith, will be for such things only as the child supposes he needs and has a right to ask for, in order to his filling his place and doing his work in life to better advantage. And every such prayer will of necessity be conditioned on God's knowledge that the thing asked for is best for the petitioner. Thus offered, every such prayer, whether it be for things in the realm of matter or of spirit, will be approved of God, and will be answered accordingly. God's word is pledged to this.

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Whatever a child of God needs—not merely wants, but needs—a child of God is authorized to ask for. Whatever a child of God asks for in faith, within the limits of his needs, God stands ready to supply. The responsibility of asking is laid on the child of God. The responsibility of deciding whether the thing asked for is really needed rests with God.

V

Limitations of the Right of Prayer

One of the puzzling questions in the minds of many Bible-believers grows out of the apparent positiveness of the Bible in promises of answer to prayer, and of the seeming uncertainty of answers to prayer in the experiences of those who pray.

On the one hand, the invitations and the promises seem to them explicit and unqualified: "Call unto me, and I will answer thee;" "Ask, and it shall be given you;" "All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive;" "If ye shall ask anything of the Father, he will give it you in my name;" "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." On the other hand, they know of many calls on God which have not been an-

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swered, and of prayers innumerable which have received no response. And because of this lack of fulfilment of Bible promises, they stand bewildered.

It does not meet the case to say that God often answers prayer by giving something that is as good as that which was asked for, but which is very different from the thing requested. The promise appears to leave the choice to the petitioner; therefore, to deny him his choice does not seem consistent with either the letter or the spirit of the promise.

As the promises are made to plain people, it is fair to suppose that the meaning of those promises is on the face of them'; and since their form is apparently an unqualified one, the expectation of an explicit and specific answer to them would seem to be fully justified. In view, therefore, of the apparent irreconcilableness of the specific promises of answer to prayer, and the obvious facts concerning prayer and its answers, many a child of God is

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wondering how this state of things is to be accounted for. "I can give no light on the subject," said a distinguished theologian, who was asked his opinion on this vexed subject. "The unanswered prayers of Christians are a mystery to me." And he spoke for many Christians, so far.

Yet there is no sound reason for perplexity on this point. There is, in fact, no such discrepancy between the answers to prayer promised and the answers to prayer received, in the experiences of Christians, as there might seem to be by the ordinary mode of stating the case. Both the invitations and the promises to prayer which seem so unqualified have in their very nature important qualifications which a plain man can recognize and appreciate; and within the limits of these qualifications the answers to prayer are assured to all who pray accordingly. The trouble with those who are bewildered on this point is, that they fail to bear in mind the essential limitations of the right of

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prayer, which they will have to admit are to be found in it. And so far the trouble is of their own making.

Does any one believe that the promises of an answer to prayer are to the open enemies of God, assuring to those enemies the power to overthrow God's rule, or to thwart his purposes of love to his creatures? If not, then here is an essential limitation to the right of prayer, to begin with,—a limitation which a plain man can perceive and comprehend. The promises which in the Bible are made to "you" are clearly made to God's children as his children, or to the disciples of Jesus as his disciples. They are not to everybody, regardless of the attitude of the petitioner toward God.

Even to a disciple of Jesus, can it be supposed that the promise is an unqualified one of harm to any one against whom he may pray, or of help to him in carrying out his intentions of evil? If not, then here is another limitation to the right of

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prayer, even though the invitation to pray should seem an unqualified one as it stands in the Bible text. The right of prayer is obviously limited to those who turn toward God as his creatures, and to the asking of such gifts as God is understood to be willing to bestow. No one has a right, under any Bible invitation, to pray for that which is contrary to the loving nature and to the known will of God. A plain man can perceive this as clearly as a theologian.

Any promise from one person to another, or any compact between two persons, is to be interpreted in the light of the well-understood relations of those persons to one another. Take an illustration, for example, from army service in time of active warfare. A corps commander directs a colonel to take his regiment to a critical position and perform a specified duty. As he sends him out, he says, "Call on me for whatever you want, and you shall have it promptly." Hardly is the colonel at his post before he sends back a request to

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the commander for the suspension of all hostilities along the entire line—even, if necessary, at the cost of surrender—so that the new movement can be made without any danger to the life and limb of those engaged in it. The request is refused.

“But didn’t you promise to give me whatever I wanted, if I would ask for it?” says the colonel. “Certainly I did,” replies the commander; “but that promise had reference to you as a soldier, under authority, in time of warfare. You knew that you were liable to death on the battle-line. You knew that I must keep up active movements elsewhere along the front.” “Well, then,” says the colonel, “I don’t see that your promise amounts to anything, if you are to grant only such requests as you think it wise to grant. I thought the promise was unqualified; but it seems now to be so limited that all there is to it is a privilege of asking without knowing whether an answer will be given or not.”

“The promise *was* unqualified within

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its well-understood limits, as between a commander and his subordinate," is the commander's answer. "If you had asked for forty rounds of ammunition per man, or for three days' rations, or for a supply of shovels and picks, or for a covering party on either flank, or for an explanation of your orders on a doubtful point, you might have been as sure of an answer as of the sun in the heavens. The promise was unqualified just so far as you had any real needs; just so far as you might properly want because of your need; just so far as you had a right to make a requisition in the line of your designated service. So far the answer was assured you.

"And even beyond all that, you might have *asked* for a cessation of hostilities, in order that you might work to better advantage; but as you could not know if *that* were practicable and wise from the commander's standpoint of knowledge, you would have to leave it to him to say whether or not he would accede to that

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request. Within your own sphere of need and knowledge the promise of help had no limits. Outside of that it must, in the very nature of things, be conditioned on the commander's judgment."

In such a case as this, would the difficulty be in the wording of the commander's promise, or in the unreasonableness of the subordinate's rendering of it? The promise was all that it ought to have been, and no more. Its scope and its limitations were plain enough to any fair-minded hearer. As in soldier life, so in the life of the disciple of Jesus.

The scope and the limitations of one's personal responsibility in God's service, define the extent to which one can confidently claim an answer to prayers for help in that sphere. Where God has given one of his children a specific mission and duty, God is pledged to impart power for the performance of that duty and mission. As children of God and as members of Christ we are workers together with God

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for the establishing of Christ's kingdom on earth, and we should pray and strive to that end, believing that our efforts and prayers are a force in God's plan for bringing it to pass.

Yet we cannot claim an answer to our specific request for the evangelization of a dark continent, or for the turning to Christ of a soul for which we have no direct personal responsibility, as we can in a case where God has committed a soul to our personal care. When God has given to us a child, a pupil, a servant, or any other needy soul, that rests on our heart as a burden that we cannot upbear alone, we can bring that burden to him in undoubting faith, saying, "Here am I, Lord, and the one whom thou hast given me; if thou canst do anything, have compassion on us and help us." The answer to such a prayer will surely be, "If thou canst believe [for this child as for thyself]; all things are possible to him that believeth."

God has already disclosed to us his will

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on many a point where we have the duty and the privilege of special prayer. God has made it clear that he does not want us to yield to temptation; hence, when we are tempted, we can ask, nothing doubting, for strength of resistance. God has promised wisdom in any emergency to those who need and seek it, if they will come to him with unwavering faith. In every such case we can ask accordingly, without limitation or reservation.

So, again, in all our requests for help in doing any duty to which God has assigned us, or for the power to be faithful to any trust committed to our charge, or for the ability to represent God aright in any sphere where we stand as his representatives. To the extent of our knowledge of God's will for us, or for those over whom he sets us, or to whom he sends us, we have a right to pray without qualification, and to expect in all confidence a specific answer to our prayers.

On the other hand, God has not made

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it clear to us that it is best for us or for our dear ones to retain unimpaired health, or to be spared from death, or to have success in business, or to win honors, or to retain a friendship, or to be shielded from disgrace, or to labor on in our present field of endeavor, or to receive any one of a hundred longings of our heart in the direction of things that are not explicitly forbidden of God, yet that are not made known to us by him as sure to be for the welfare of all who desire them. For no one of these things have we a right to pray without qualification. Not knowing whether their bestowal would be a benefit or an injury, it is our duty to leave it to God to give or to withhold as he sees to be best.

In the very nature of things, it is clear that no child of God has a right to pray for that which he has no right to desire; and that he has no right to desire that which is not for his good, or for the good of those for whom he prays. Hence it is clear that a child of God has a right

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to pray unqualifiedly only for those things which he knows to be for good; while for those things which he thinks may be for good, but about which he cannot be sure, he is privileged to pray with the qualification in his prayer that God will grant them if they are for good, and withhold them if they are not so.

Prayer is a privilege, and prayer is a power. But the right of prayer has its essential limitations; and he who asks for that which he has no right to ask, or who asks unqualifiedly for that which he ought to leave it with God to bestow or to withhold, fails to bring his prayer within the scope of these essential limitations; and there is no promise of an answer to his prayer. God's promises of answer to prayer never fail of their fulfilling; but man's hope of answers to his prayer beyond the promises of God are always liable to disappointment.

VI

Praying in the Name of Jesus

Jesus says over and over again to his disciples, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do;" "If ye shall ask me anything in my name, that will I do;" "If ye shall ask anything of the Father, he will give it you in my name;" "In that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you; for the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came forth from the Father." "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: [now] ask, and ye shall receive."

What does all this mean? What is it to ask in the name of Jesus? Is it, as many Christians seem to believe, to conclude a prayer with the set formula, "All which we ask in the name of Jesus"? Or is it something more than this?

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The "name" in primitive thought stands for the person bearing that name; it is, in a sense, the person himself; while in our modern and Western thought a "name" is often little more than a label attached to a person, in order to distinguish him from other persons. To know another's name, to have a right to bear that name, to speak and act in that name, is, in primitive thought, to be a sharer of that person's life,—by birth, by marriage, or by covenant adoption,—and so to be, in a peculiar sense, a representative of that person.

A son bearing his father's name stands for that father, and rightly expects to be received with the respect due to his father. A member of a family or of a tribe is recognized as worthy of the position and honor due to that tribe or family. A soldier, or a servant, coming with a message from his master, does not stand merely on his personal worth, but on the worth and power of him whom he represents. Hence to ask, or to come, in the name of another,

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is, as an Oriental would understand it, and as the Bible would state it, to be a representative of the one whose name is thus borne.

When the high-priest of Israel went before the Lord, as the representative of the twelve tribes of Israel, to ask mercy and grace in their behalf, he bore upon his breast, above his heart, a breastplate in which were set four rows of precious stones; "and the stones were according to the names of the children of Israel, twelve, according to their names; like the engravings of a signet, every one according to his name, for the twelve tribes." And the command for Aaron, as the high-priest, was: "Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart, when he goeth in unto the holy place, for a memorial before the Lord continually."

It was not necessary that Aaron should call over, audibly, the names of every one of the twelve tribes, every time he entered.

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the holy place, in order to come into the presence of the Lord as the representative of those tribes each and all. He was their representative. Their names were in his heart, and their symbols or tokens were over his heart, and for their sakes and in their names he came and pleaded, and made offerings, according to their needs.

Similarly, to-day, an officer might come into the presence of an army commander, bearing upon his shoulders the straps of his rank, and upon his breast the insignia of his corps and his division, and ask a favor or an order, in the name of his immediate command, and by his very position be recognized and received as the representative of that command. Or, an American abroad, standing under the folds of the United States flag, might be as truly and as specifically received as an American, and given honor as a representative of that republic, as if he were to call over in their order the forty-five names of the states of the Union as the component divisions of

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the nationality to which he owed allegiance and from which he claimed protection. It is the being a representative of that which a name represents, and not the calling out of the name itself, that constitutes coming and asking, in any name.

The "name," in Oriental thought, is even more than the person bearing it. It, in a sense, covers and encloses the person. It wraps itself about him as a garment or as a flag, and shields and protects his personality. He who gives his name to another, or who authorizes another to be and to go in his name, adds himself as an outer covering to that other's self, and thereby does for that other all that could be done by either personality, or by both. Thus, "the name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe."

When David the stripling shepherd, without any outside armor, stood before the giant Goliath who "had an helmet of brass upon his head," and "was clad with

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a coat of mail," the weight of which "was five thousand shekels of brass," having "greaves of brass upon his legs, and a target of brass between his shoulders," and his weapons were a sword, a spear, and a javelin, David faced him confidently, saying: "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a javelin: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts [enclosed as in a tower in the name of the Lord], the God of the armies of Israel, which thou hast defied." David in that strong tower was safe, as Goliath was not, in his armor.

To "take the name of the Lord" is to assume that name, to claim it as one's own, to bear it as if one had a right to it as his family or personal name. It was the custom of the sovereigns and leaders of primitive peoples to incorporate the names of their gods with their own names, and thus to take or carry those names as their protection and authority wherever they went. Thus Bel, Sin, Nebo, Assur, as Babylo-

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nian and Assyrian gods, were found in Belshazzar, Sennacherib, Nebuchadrezzar, Assurbanapal ; Set and Ra, gods of Egypt, were found in Sety and Rameses. Similarly the name of Jehovah, Jahu, or Jah, was found in Joshua, Jeroboam, and Jeremiah. Bearing these names, such men went in the name of their gods, or of God the Lord.

This was coming in the name of the Lord, in the old dispensation. Similarly, in the new dispensation, coming in the name of Jesus the Christ, and asking in his name, is not saying his name over, but it is being enclosed in his name, and representing that which his name represents ; it is coming as *Christians* in sincerity and truth. There were those in the days of the apostles who thought, as many Christians now seem to think, that having power from God was a result of repeating the name of Jesus, as if it were a magical formula.

Persons of this sort "took upon them

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to name over them which had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth." But being thus adjured, in one instance, "the evil spirit answered and said unto them, Jesus I know, and Paul I know ; but who are ye ? " and harm came not to the evil spirit, but to those who fraudulently assumed and claimed to be in the name of Jesus.

On the other hand, those who had the spirit of Jesus, and were sharers in his nature, lived and acted and spoke and thought in his name, and had acceptance with and power from God continually. And those who were thus in his name were loved for his name, or were hated for his name, by those about them. So it is to-day with all who live in the name of Jesus the Christ.

The Father looks upon those who come to him for a blessing, and sees in their faces, and hears in the tones of their voices, and discerns in the throbbings of their

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hearts, their love for his Son, and their likeness to his Son, and their life in his Son ; and, for the sake of that Son whom they represent, he receives them and ministers unto them to the uttermost extent of their needs and of their heart longings. It is not the figure of the cross which they wear above their hearts "in His name," nor is it the form of words with which they conclude their every prayer "in His name," but it is the proof in their heart of hearts that they are one with their Elder Brother in their lives as children of God, that gives them acceptance with God for the sake of his Son.

It is not our saying, but our showing, that what we ask is asked in the name of Jesus, that God notes and takes into account. It is in this sense that the model prayer, which Jesus gave for our use, is a prayer in the name of its original Framer, although there is in it no verbal mention of his name ; and that many a prayer that has not the name of Jesus in it is more

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truly offered up in his name than many another which has his name in it, while it is not offered by one who is in his name.

If we would ask anything in the name of Jesus, we must first be sure that we are ourselves in that name, our life being hid in his life, our name in his name. Then let us be sure that what we ask we want for his sake, and that it is something he would ask for us if he were actually standing in our stead and putting up our petitions for us. Coming thus to the Father, we come in the name, in the spirit, and in the likeness, of his Son; and the Father will hear us, and will answer us, because we are representatives of his Son, enwrapped by and dwelling within his very self as the supreme representative of the Father.

VII

Prayer in Faith Better than Faith in Prayer

There is a vast difference between prayer in faith and faith in prayer. Faith in prayer is very common; almost everybody has more or less of it. Prayer in faith is anything but common; so uncommon, in fact, that our Lord questions if he shall find any of it on the earth when he comes back again. Prayer in faith is a commanded duty; faith in prayer is not commanded, nor is it justifiable. Prayer in faith is always reverent and spiritual; faith in prayer is too often superstitious and presuming, although again it is the unconscious reliance of reverent and spiritually minded—but sadly mistaken—Christian disciples.

Praying in faith is making known our requests unto God in full confidence that,

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if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us; and that according to our faith an answer to our prayers will be granted us. Having faith in prayer is believing that because certain prayers are offered certain results will follow; that the praying will secure the thing prayed for. Praying in faith comes of an abiding confidence in the Person prayed to: the confidence is in him; it is based on a knowledge of what he is, and on a conviction that he is every way worthy to be trusted. Faith in prayer is a blind, or a presuming, reliance on an agency of good; an unauthorized dependence on mere human means. Praying in faith is the act of a simple-hearted child of God. Faith in prayer is like the reliance of the heathen on their vain repetitions, "who think that they shall be heard for their much speaking."

A well-known historical incident in America furnishes a good illustration of the difference between prayer in faith and

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faith in prayer. When, in 1881, President Garfield was stricken down by the hand of an assassin, and lay for a time with his life in the balance, the Christians of the United States joined with a rare degree of unanimity in prayer to God for his recovery. So long as the suffering President lingered on the verge of the grave, it was difficult to say how much of the praying for him was praying in faith, and how much of it was a result of faith in prayer; but when the President was dead, the test of this praying came to every one who had shared in it, or who had watched it curiously.

Those who had had faith in prayer were amazed or bewildered; those who had prayed in faith were neither surprised nor disturbed. "Why, what does all this mean?" asked the former. "Where are God's promises now? If such united, fervent, humble prayer from so many of God's people avails nothing, what can be claimed for the power of prayer at any time, or for any purpose? And what advantage has

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the Christian over the scoffing unbeliever in this agency of prayer?"

But those who had prayed in faith were reading this new providence in the light of their faith. Their faith rested in God. God was not dead. They had prayed for some things which they were sure would be in accordance with God's will, and those things had been granted: they had prayed for others of which they were not so sure; and they had asked God to do concerning these things as he deemed best: he had done so. Their every prayer was answered, and they were grateful accordingly. Praying in faith was promoted by this providence in the case of President Garfield; but faith in prayer received a temporary shock.

At the first, in view of the fact that the assassin of the President claimed to be influenced by partisan motives, the nation started in horror at the possible consequences of the crime. Everything for the moment seemed to pivot on that one

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precious life. Greed for office was the crying curse of the hour. Partisan animosities were bitter and intense. The popular hope for the triumph of wise counsels and pure purposes over the follies of disappointed ambition and the crimes of government thieves, rested on the President and his immediate advisers.

In case of his death at that time, his successor would not have been judged fairly, nor have been given credit for even striving to do as well as he could. New divisions would have been made between old friends, and old enmities would have intensified. Fresh bickerings and heart-burnings would have multiplied on every side. Confidence in our institutions and in the spirit of our people would have been shaken, if not destroyed; and there was more than the possibility of financial and political and moral disaster to our nation. Then it was that the people turned almost as one man to the Lord, and cried earnestly and longingly for help. Then it was

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that those who prayed in faith and those who had faith in prayer were at one in supplicating God's forgiveness and loving favor. And those prayers to God were answered.

The precious life was prolonged. Again and again as the sufferer seemed at the point to die, God heard the prayers that were offered for him, and the shadow went back on the dial, in order that the President might linger for the service desired through him. Meantime the things that the Christian believer had a right to ask for, were being secured to the nation by the workings of God's providence. The voice of partisan strife was hushed over that sick-bed. The moral sense of the nation was raised to a higher level in condemnation of struggle for place and of betrayals of public trust. Common sympathy in a common sorrow flooded the barriers of party and of section, and brought men together in love and longing who had before felt that there was nothing in which

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they could agree. Moreover, a sense of dependence on God brought men together before God. The religious sentiment of the nation was aroused and newly disclosed, and all took heart because so many were ready to call upon God in their need.

Meantime the designated successor of the President gained steadily in the sympathy and confidence of the people, and in his own fitness, through the severity of this training for the high responsibilities to which he might, at any hour, be summoned. The dreaded disaster to the nation was averted in answer to faith-filled prayer; and only when the death of the President would cause no such harm to the nation as was imminent at the first, was the President permitted to die.

But it was for the *life* of the President that all these many prayers were offered, and that life was taken away in spite of these prayers! How can this be reconciled with God's promise to answer the united prayers of his children? Just so far as

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their country's real interests were involved in that life, were God's children justified in faith-filled prayer for its prolonging. Within those limits they could be sure that God would grant an answer of peace. Outside of that range was beyond their sphere of knowledge or of responsibility. *There* they must trust God to do as he alone could know to be best. While a sore peril of punishment or of disaster was overhanging the country, they had a right to pray in faith that God would avert that disaster; that he would forgive the national sin and turn away a national punishment. All this God did for his people in answer to their faith-filled prayers.

But when it came to the question, whether the further prolonging of the President's life would be a blessing to him, and a blessing to the country, *that* was for God alone to know and decide. Every right-minded child of God who prayed in faith admitted that he did not know as to that point, and that he wanted God to do

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what *he* knew to be good. In this, as in the other matters, God answered the faith-filled prayer; for no prayer can be in faith if it does not leave with God the settling of all those points where God alone can know what is best.

When we need wisdom as to our personal duty, or strength for our personal duty; when we need light or guidance or help in the line of our daily life, in material things as well as in things spiritual,—we can pray for it in the full assurance of an answer; for our need just there is unmistakable, and God will never fail to meet the need of one of his children in answer to the faith-filled prayer of that child. But we have no right to say that it is absolutely best for us that another's life shall be spared for our welfare, that we have a positive need of that life. Therefore we have no right to pray for the sparing of such a life,—except as God shall see it to be best for us. We have a right, however, to ask that that life shall be prolonged to us until

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its taking away shall not be to our real and permanent injury, nor to the injury of its possessor, and God will hear and answer such asking. If he takes that life immediately after such a prayer, we may be sure that it was better for all that that life should go just then.

“But,” said many, “the ‘prayer-test’ has failed. Here was a grand opportunity for God to show the power of prayer; and the opportunity has been lost. Now, this will give tremendous vantage-ground to scoffers, and a great many who believed in prayer before will never believe in it again.” And do you suppose that God made any mistake just there? Was his cause any less dear to himself than to you? or was he any less familiar with its needs? No, no! The mistake was not in his failure to work a wonder at that time in proof of his power; but it was in men’s idea that a new wonder by him at any time would create faith in him, or bring men to an abiding belief in his power.

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All the wonders of God for Israel, in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the Wilderness, failed to bring as much of faith in God among the Israelites as there is among the people of the United States to-day; and if another similar series of wonders should be wrought in our sight at the present time, they would be no real help to the faith of the believer or to the conviction of the scoffer. It is an old mistake which is repeated continually, that people who will not hear Moses and the Prophets would be persuaded if one rose from the dead, or from the brink of death.

It was well that our unauthorized faith in prayer should be shaken, and that we should come to substitute for it an intelligent faith in God. It was the mistake of scoffing scientists, that they understood the Christian believer to claim an innate power in prayer, and therefore those mistaken scientists asked to have that power put to a scientific test. Prayer is not to be depended on; but God is. Prayer is not

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to be tested ; but God is : he invites all who will to put him to the test. Those who hoped for a new argument against the scoffers in the raising up of President Garfield were disappointed. God declined to enter the lists for a local controversy on a question which was the subject of bitter personal dispute.

God's response to any call on him to show by a sign on which side he is in a purely personal discussion comes to-day as it came of old : " A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign ; and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet." When Jonah prophesied judgment on Nineveh, and the Ninevites cried to God for mercy, God heard and answered their prayer. When the people of the United States seemed threatened with dire punishment in the sudden death of President Garfield, they cried to God for mercy, and God averted the judgment. A new generation had again the sign of the prophet Jonah.

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The form of prayer used to-day by more persons than any other form the world over, is not even understood by millions who employ it. It is a sentence of six syllables in common use among Buddhists. Two of those syllables are mere ejaculations having no direct relation to the other four, and conveying no meaning to their average user. The other four syllables express a mere figure of speech, of which the primitive meaning is lost to the people who employ it.

This Buddhist prayer, "*Om mani padme Hum*," is not only repeated orally by myriads of devotees, but it is multiplied indefinitely by being inscribed on printed scrolls or engraved cylinders, and made to revolve, by water-power or other mechanical agency, as a means of obtaining a blessing for the one who sets the prayer going. It is faith in prayer that causes this praying; but there is no praying in faith by such a formal and mechanical use of an unintelligible formula.

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The fatalist Muhammadans believe that praying is in itself both meritorious and potent; and their dervishes give themselves to continued cries on God in prayer hour after hour, in the conviction that so much praying must bring more or less of a blessing. And there is a great deal of this dervish faith in prayer among Christian believers. How often we hear it said of some wild and wayward boy: "Oh! he must be saved; for he is the child of many prayers." "That boy's mother's prayers for him cannot have been in vain. They must be answered." Not the mother's faith is rested on, but the mother's prayers—whether of faith or of doubting agony.

The writer of this, in the days of his army chaplaincy, once pressed the subject of personal religion on a dissolute and reprobate soldier. "Oh! I think more of those things than you suppose, Chaplain," was the quick response. "I've got a praying mother; and I've great faith in her prayers. When I'm in a sharp fight, and

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men are dropping about me, I often feel that my mother's prayers save me. I've great faith in those prayers." And he took another drink of whisky, and died of *delirium tremens* in front of his colonel's tent, without giving any sign of penitence, or of even offering a prayer in faith, with all his sentimental faith in prayer.

Jesus said to his disciples: "Have faith in God"—not Have faith in prayer, but "Have faith in God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou taken up and cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that what he saith cometh to pass; he shall have it. Therefore I say unto you, All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye have received them, and ye shall have them."

That promise has never failed the disciple of Jesus who prayed in faith; but it has frightfully staggered many a disciple who had faith in prayer. That promise stands as firm to-day as ever. Whatsoever a child

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of God has any right to ask for unqualifiedly, he receives just as it is asked for. Whatsoever the child of God ought to leave to the decision of God, he does leave there, in his prayer; and God gives the decision—as the believer asks for it. Faith in God never deceives us; faith in prayer often does—as it ought to.

VIII

Mistaking Presumption for Faith

There is no personal duty more positive or more unqualified than the duty of faith. "Have faith in God" is a command as explicit, and of as universal application, as "Thou shalt not steal." Nor is there any danger of too great a reliance on faith. "The just shall live by his faith;" and no child of God has come to the standard of his full duty and of his full privileges as a child of God, until he can say in all sincerity and heartiness, "That life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me."

It is both right and safe to have faith in God, for his guidance and help in our every emergency of life, and also in our more ordinary experiences of daily living; in our toilings and in our trials, in our

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business and in our recreations, in our health and in our sickness; and for our loved ones as well as for ourselves. We cannot trust God too implicitly. We ought to trust him absolutely and in perfect restfulness.

But while there is no danger of too much faith in God, there is a danger of wrong substitutes for faith. Faith is a well-grounded trust in a trustworthy person; faith in God is a restful trust in the loving and wise and all-powerful God as our Father in heaven, whose word to us is not to be doubted, and whose watchful care of us will never fail.

Faith goes beyond sight, and in its truest exercise it begins where knowledge ends. Faith does not decide for itself what it must have, but it leaves with God the decision of the desired supply, even while it makes known its desire to God. To claim unqualifiedly beyond the limits of knowledge, or to refuse God's proffered help in one line because of a preference for

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God's help in another line, is not faith, but presumption; and presumption is very often mistaken for faith.

He who is our Example, as well as our Saviour, gave in his personal experiences illustration and emphasis to this truth that presumption is not faith, and that true faith does not presume. When Jesus struggled with the prince of this world in Gethsemane, he would not choose for himself whether or not he should have relief in his physical needs, but his submissive cry was, again and again, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." An unqualified choice on his part, in that hour, would have been presumption; but he had faith, and did not presume.

When, yet earlier, Jesus was on the pinnacle of the temple at Jerusalem, there were two ways of descent from that lofty height: one was by the human agency of winding stairs; the other was over the parapet, through the empty air, borne up by God-sent angel arms. It was the arch-

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enemy of mankind who then and there whispered that faith in God would be shown by rejecting the human agency of the temple stairs, and trusting to the sustaining power of the angels. The very Bible text which would justify this exercise of faith was pointed out by the tempter:

“He shall give his angels charge concerning thee:
And on their hands they shall bear thee up,
Lest haply thou dash thy foot against a stone.”

But Jesus said that to refuse the help of the available stairs would be presumption, and not faith, and that it would be in violation of the command, “Thou shalt not tempt [or improperly put to the test] the Lord thy God”—by multiplying dangers unnecessarily, in order to have an added supply against those dangers. Thus in the example of our Lord, as in all the precepts of the Bible record, the truth stands out that presumption is not faith, and that true faith does not presume.

In many ways the danger of confounding faith with presumption shows itself in

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the experiences of poorly instructed or seriously mistaken Christian disciples. To claim the right to expect from God health, or wealth, or honor, or more influence, or more friends, or more appreciation from one's fellows, even though the thing prayed for be desired that it may be used for God's glory and for the welfare of his creatures, is presumption, and not true faith.

Sickness may be a means of greater good than health; poverty, a richer gift than wealth; obscurity, an advantage over prominence; loneliness, a better training than social privileges. God knows as to this. A child of God may properly ask for what seems to him to be preferable in such a matter, but if he does not leave the decision with God, instead of assuming that the best thing, for him or for others, is certain to be just that which the petitioner designates in his prayer, he is presumptuous.

To take the matter of health or sickness as an illustration. It is evident that some

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of the richest blessings which God gives to his loved ones are during and by means of sickness; and the delay of healing is often the sign of God's loving providence, and not a token of Satan's control. There are promises of God which can have their fulfilment only in the hours of sickness.

"The Lord will support him upon the couch of languishing:

Thou makest all his bed in his sickness."

How can these be made good if a couch of languishing and a bed of sickness be no place for a child of God in his life-struggle? What presumption it would be to claim that God must lift us instantly from the couch of languishing, and that he ought not to continue us on a bed of sickness!

See how it was in the course of the father of the peculiar people of God under the old dispensation. So long as Jacob stood in ruddy health, he was a scheming supplanter. It was not until he was touched by the finger of God so that he became a cripple for life that he stood erect

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as Israel, a prince of God. Jacob never walked straight until he limped.

When again God would prepare for himself a spiritual father of the outside nations, he fitted Paul for his new work by giving him a stake in the flesh,—“a messenger of Satan” it was, but a messenger which was now set at God’s work, by the will of God,—in order that the infirm apostle might do a better work than a well man could do. And when Paul besought the Lord thrice that he might be of sound body again, he was told explicitly that it was in just such a state as that in which he then found himself that God’s power could be best displayed. And from that day until the present, some of the best work in the Lord’s cause has been done by the sick, and God has been honored and glorified rather by those who were in combat with disease, than by those in the possession of bounding health—free from all physical conflict, and from the benefits which successful conflict brings.

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It is true that disease is a consequence of sin, that sickness is in the world because sin is in the world, but it is not true that sickness or bodily infirmity is always a specific result of sinning. Our Lord rebuked that notion among his earlier disciples, as he would also rebuke it among misguided Christians to-day. "Rabbi, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind?" was their question to him on one occasion. "Jesus answered, Neither did this man sin, nor his parents [as a cause of this infirmity]: but [this man became blind] that the works of God should be made manifest in him."

The works of God, in his sustaining grace and in his transforming power, are very often shown in the lives of the blind and the deaf and the bed-ridden, and the patient wrestlers with disease, as those works of God could be shown in no other way; even as, also, the "poor as to the world" are often chosen of God "to be rich in faith," to the honor of God, and to

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the confounding of those who trust in their earthly riches. For men and women in buxom health to claim that they are blessed of God above their sick fellows, mainly because of their fulness of health, is no less presumptuous than it would be for a company of Christian millionaires to parade themselves with labels of their aggregate bank credits, and with the boastful legend, "See whom the Lord loves."

In the struggle with disease, as in the struggle with poverty, God's appointed means are to be used with all wisdom and diligence, and are to be used in faith. To refuse to employ available human means in an hour of human need, and to ask God's help while neglecting them, is in itself presumption. The prompting to refuse these God-provided aids is a temptation of Satan. To yield to such a temptation is more than a culpable weakness ; it is an immorality.

When the Lord would miraculously heal King Hezekiah of his sickness, in response to his importunate prayer, he directed that

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human means should be employed for his recovery from the disease. A poultice of figs—which to this day even in our country is often used in such a case in preference to bread and milk, or flaxseed—was applied to the malignant boil, and God's promise was given that in three days—not instantly, but in three days—the fig-poulticed patient should be able to go out to church. When, again, Paul found that he must continue to battle sickness, although he would have liked to have health, he obtained as a traveling companion a beloved physician; and it is even possible that it was on this physician's suggestion that Paul wrote that famous prescription for the stomach's sake and the often infirmities of young Timothy.

When James counseled the calling in of the elders of the church to pray over a sick person, he added the caution that they should not neglect the use of oil, which was the commonest medicine in all the East then as now. "Let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of

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the Lord : and the prayer of faith shall save him that is sick, and the Lord shall raise him up ;" that is, the Lord shall raise him up in response to the prayer of faith in connection with the use of oil.

The word here rendered " anointing " is *aleipsantes*, oiling, or smearing, the skin, as is done after bathing ; it is not *chrío*, the word which designates the sacramental anointing. To smear, or anoint, the body with olive oil, cool or warm, is the commonest native treatment for bodily disorders in Syria and Egypt. Prominence is given to this treatment in the " Memoirs Relative to Egypt, during the Campaigns of Bonaparte," in a paper " On the Use of Oil in the Plague," by Citizen Desgenettes, chief physician to the army in the East.

In all sickness, as well as in all times of health, faith in God is more to be relied on than any human agency ; but faith never decides for God in a matter which is clearly beyond human knowledge ; nor will faith ever tempt God by refusing to

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employ gratefully the means of help which God has already placed within its reach.

It may be best for us, or for our loved ones, to continue in sickness ; if so, let us learn, in whatsoever state we are, by the will of God, therein to be content. It may be that God will grant our faith-filled prayer for restored health, to ourselves or to those dear to us ; if so, let us use faithfully the means which tend to restoration ; for James, who knew as much about the right use of faith and its wrong use as any of the Bible writers, declares explicitly that "faith without works is dead ;" and a dead faith is only another name for presumption. To mistake presumption for faith is a sad mistake.

IX

Praying for Others

Prayer for others is as positive and important a duty as prayer for ourselves. Indeed, we cannot rightly pray for ourselves unless we include others in our prayers. Even if we were disposed to think chiefly or only of our personal interests, we must have a thought of what others can do for us and be to us, in order to our safety and welfare.

“None of us liveth to himself” alone ; and, situated as we are in this world as it is, we are sure to be helped or harmed by others, apart from our own choice or power. If we would have God minister to or protect us, we must rely on his influence over others, and his guidance of them in their sphere, to secure to us that which we desire for ourselves. Unless God can control others, he is powerless in our behalf ;

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hence prayer for ourselves is incomplete except as it is prayer for others also.

A tourist, in climbing an Alpine summit, finds himself tied by a strong rope to his trusty guide, and to three of his fellow-tourists. As they skirt a perilous precipice, and he seeks God's protection along that dizzy height, he cannot pray confidently, "Lord, hold up *my* goings in a safe path, that *my* footsteps slip not, but as to my guide and companions, they must look out for themselves. Each of us is responsible for himself alone." The only proper prayer in such a case is, "Lord, hold up *our* goings in a safe path, that *our* footsteps slip not. Guide our guide, and keep all of us steady; for if one of us slips all of us may perish." Nor is this Swiss mountain-climbing the only thing in which we stand or fall with our fellow-travelers.

Prayer for ourselves includes prayer for others, when we are sick and trust ourselves to a physician. If we ask God's help, we must ask it for our doctor also.

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If we pray for protection on an ocean voyage, our prayer should be for the captain and engineer of our steamer as well as for ourselves, in order that God may give us safety. If we would ask to be kept from harm on a trolley car, we must expect God to give skill and fidelity to the motor-man. Our protection in life and property pivots on the alertness and efficiency of the policeman, the night watchman, and the fireman, in their sphere, and when we would plead with God to keep us by day and by night we ought to take them into the scope of our prayers. Prayer for our daily bread involves the idea of prayer for the cook or baker, who might give us poison in our food.

In every sphere of life we are linked with others, and dependent on others for life and comfort. And it were useless for us to pray for God to help us, unless we include in our prayers the thought of God's oversight of others, and of his working for our good in and through them.

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This is putting prayer for others on the lowest plane of mere selfish interest ; but when we think of others in an unselfish way, we have need to realize that all that we wish and will and do in behalf of those dearest to us must fail of compassing our loving purposes for their highest welfare, unless God works in the direction of our holiest longings for them. Nothing that we can do for others is sure of a good result without God's blessing.

Nor does God leave any person wholly to himself for a personal decision on matters of the highest importance, or of the lowest, apart from the force of influences and circumstances outside of himself. If, therefore, we would do the best in our power for our dear ones, we must seek the help of Him who can do more than all others in bringing potent influences for good to bear on them, and in averting from them potent influences for evil.

Although it is true that "each one of us shall give account of himself to God," and

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shall be compelled to meet the responsibility of his own decisions in every emergency of life, it is not for any one of us to say that he has been prompted to his final decisions by his uninfluenced personality, as if he stood all alone in the world. Nor can any one of us say that he is in no degree responsible for the influence he has exerted, or has refused to exert, over the lives of those he had the opportunity of shaping.

We are linked with others in the Alpine climbing of moral heights, as of material ones, so that our slipping or standing causes others to fall or to stand; and, if we put out a hand of help, or refuse to do it, when our fellow is in peril, we are responsible for his course as well as for our own. This truth carries with it a corresponding measure of duty. The command to us, "Bear ye one another's burdens," is set over against the declaration that "each man shall bear his own burden." Just why we are responsible for

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others, while they are responsible for themselves, we cannot understand or explain ; but we know that it is so, and we must bear ourselves accordingly.

If we would have a child of ours preserved from temptation to evil, or preserved while in it, we ought to be ready to ask a friend, who was near that child while we were at a distance, to have a watchful eye over him, or to speak a timely word to him. Our consciousness of the child's freedom of choice would never hinder our seeking from another good offices in his behalf. And why should we think that God is unable or unwilling to exert as positive influence over one dear to us as any human companion ?

As in the case of a child, so in the case of any one in whom we have a personal interest. God is always near one whom we love. God is always ready to hear prayer for one for whom we pray. God has made the prayer of faith a potent agency in the universe ; and if we would have the influ-

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ences of the universe work together for good to one with whom we are linked by visible and invisible ties, we owe it to that loved one, to ourselves, and to God, to pray in faith for his protection and guidance and control.

Bible teachings are in accord with the lessons of reason and experience as to our responsibility for others, and as to our duty of including others in our prayers. Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and other Old Testament worthies, prayed for others, and were heard in that for which they prayed. Jesus honored the prayer of faith in behalf of those who as yet showed no sign of personal faith in their choice. When a sad-hearted father brought a demon-possessed son to Jesus with the prayer, "If thou canst do anything, have compassion on us [on me and my child], and help us," Jesus answered with the words, "If *thou* canst! All things are possible [in another's behalf] to him that believeth." The father

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believed, and the child was made whole. Jesus did not say, "If that child wants help, let him ask for it in faith," but he said, as it were, "If thou canst have faith in his behalf, there is hope for him, for all things are possible to him that believeth in another's behalf."

This was in a matter of demoniacal possession, but why should we doubt that it will be the same in the matter of spiritual choices? "Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins are forgiven, or to say, Arise, and walk?" Jesus evidently believed in the power of intercessory prayer, and he was not staggered by the difficulty of explaining how God could give wholeness to a man in answer to another's prayer without interfering with that other's freedom of choice.

When Jesus saw that his disciple Peter was in special danger of falling away from his service, he did not refrain from intercessory prayer because he knew that Peter was finally responsible for his own action

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in the moral crisis, but he prayed earnestly and in faith for Peter's upholding. "Simon, Simon," said Jesus, "behold Satan asked to have you [or obtained you by asking], that he might sift you as wheat: but I made supplication for thee, that thy faith fail not: and do thou, when once thou hast turned again, stablish thy brethren."

When the Roman soldiers were crucifying Jesus, his intercessory prayer for them with his dying breath was, "Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do." Jesus evidently had no reluctance to intercessory prayer because of his fear that God could not grant any spiritual blessing to a sinner who did not himself ask for it. The first word in the prayer taught by Jesus to his disciples is "our," as showing that we are to pray with and for others, and not for ourselves alone.

As we love God we ought to love all whom God loves, and our prayers ought to be as earnest and as constant and as far reaching as our love. When the Jews were

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about to be carried away into Babylon, the message of the Lord to them was, "Seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace." In the same spirit Jesus said to his disciples, "Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you: that ye may be sons of your Father which is in heaven."

In emphasis of this Christian duty of praying for others, in the spirit of Jesus, and in truest God-likeness, the Apostle Paul writes earnestly, "I exhort therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings, be made for all men." Unless we pray for others, we are lacking in that spirit in which alone we can pray hopefully for ourselves, and we are living in neglect of a prime duty to God's dear ones who need and deserve our prayers.

X

Leading Others in Prayer

It is one thing to be in the spirit of personal prayer at all times; it is quite another thing to be ready to lead others in prayer at one time in particular. Yet these two things are often confounded; and the mistake is made of supposing that the possession of a spirit of prayer gives a fitness for leading others in prayer on every occasion. This mistake it is which makes public prayer so much less the impressive and inspiring service that it ought to be.

Being alike ready at all times for any service whatsoever, is being poorly fitted for such service at any time whatsoever. He who never falls below a common average, never rises above it. A dead level is always a *dead* level; there is no life in it. The most tiresome scenery in the world is a boundless plain.

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Water will stagnate and corrupt, if it has neither fall nor tides, neither ripple nor waves. He who is just as ready at one time as another to sleep or to eat, to laugh or to cry, to ride or to walk, to sing or to pray, to sit at home or to go out and see his neighbors, can never do any one of these things with a real relish, or to the satisfaction of those who are with him. He who is never excited, never off his center, never enthusiastic and never depressed, might have got along with the Laodiceans, who were never cold, nor ever hot, but always nauseatingly lukewarm; but he is the last man in the world to make friends or to win admiration in the communities which are in the van of social progress nowadays.

Peculiarly is it true in the field of mental activity that no general acquisition obviates the necessity of special preparation. If you hear a man make a good off-hand speech, you may be sure that that speech was not made off-hand. It was prepared

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for, in some way. If you find that a man seems always ready with his voice or his pen, you may set it down as certain that he makes himself specially ready for each call on his voice or pen. There are no exceptions to this truth.

On one occasion, when Daniel Webster was urged to make an address, he pleaded lack of time for fitting preparation. "O Mr. Webster!" was the response, "anything you say, even without preparation, will have weight with an audience. You need not prepare for it." "If my words have weight with others," said Mr. Webster, "it is because I never speak without preparation." And that is the thought of every wise leader of his fellows.

When some one complimented M. Thiers on his effective impromptu speeches in the French Assembly, M. Thiers replied, that he never insulted the Assembly with impromptu speeches, but he rose at five o'clock every morning to prepare his "impromptus" for the day.

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Dr. Thomas Arnold declared that he never taught a lesson—even in the line of studies that he had a lifetime of general preparation in—without specially preparing himself for that one class recitation. And that it was that kept Thomas Arnold the good teacher to the last. So it is all the way up and down the scale. He who shows any special fitness for any special work has made special preparation for that special work. General fitness is not a safe reliance for anything in particular.

Public prayer is a very different matter from private prayer. Private prayer is the emptying of one's soul unreservedly to God; there need be no constraint in it whatsoever. Public prayer ought to have no such emptying of the leader's personal soul to God, in the presence of others; constraint so far is a duty, from the beginning to the end of such prayer.

If one is in the constant habit of personal prayer, accustomed to keep himself always open before God in confession and

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supplication, he is in all the greater danger of failing to lead others fittingly in public prayer; and there is all the more need of his making himself ready, by deliberate plan and purpose, to keep himself within the bounds of proper public prayer while leading the worship of others, as distinct from that unrestrained freedom of personal prayer which is as natural to him in his daily life as his instinctive breathing.

A member of the congregation of a prominent church went to his pastor at one time with a word of warning about his pulpit prayers. "You do altogether too much of private confession of your sins in public," he said. "You let yourself out there in entire freeness to God, forgetful of the fact that your people are hearing you. Some of your confessions they could join in; but others they know nothing about. You give yourself away as a pastor, by telling aloud your weaknesses, your temptations, and your special sins. It is all right to tell God of those things in your

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closet, but don't say anything about them in the pulpit." There was a wise caution for other pastors in that counsel from an observant hearer.

Praying is not the same thing everywhere. It is one thing in the closet, another thing in the family, another thing in the Sunday-school, another thing in the social prayer-meeting, and yet another thing in the sanctuary, with the general congregation of worshippers. He who does not consider these differences, and make himself ready accordingly for the special service to which he is summoned, neither knows his duty nor does it, in the line of prayer.

As a practical matter, the clergyman who has power in public prayer is sure to be found a clergyman who makes special preparation beforehand for his public prayers. It is a shame for any clergyman to go into his pulpit without specific preparation for every portion of the service he is to lead,—for his Bible-reading, his hymn-reading,

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his preaching, and his praying.' It is not enough for him to be in the general spirit of Bible-reading, and hymn-reading, and preaching, and praying. He has a particular duty for that day, before that congregation, in view of the peculiar needs of those who are there before him, and the peculiar circumstances of that hour—as apart from every other hour of their lives and of his life.

Unless he makes ready for that particular duty he is unready for it; and his hearers are aware of that fact before the service is half over with, whether he knows it or not. Special preparation for the public prayers of the day is made by the best clergymen generally. Those who fail to make such preparation show it in their failure to have the results of that preparation. And that such failures in pulpit services are pitifully common cannot be denied.

Our Lord told his disciples that there were times when they need take no

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thought in advance how or what they should speak before others, for it should be given them in that hour what they were to say; but when they asked him how they should *pray*, he did not tell them to rely wholly on the inspiration of the hour, but he gave for their guidance a pattern of prayer, the structure and methods of which he seemed to think were worthy of their study. There are, however, ten leaders in social or public worship who take pains to make ready for a sermon or an address, where there is one who prepares himself for a public prayer. Why does any man slight the latter service in comparison with the former? Is it because he deems it of less importance? Or is it because he thinks he has so much more skill and power in leading others in an address to God, than in making a direct address to his fellows?

A prominent clergyman, in addressing the students of a divinity school, urged the importance of careful preparation for all

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pulpit exercises. Referring to the common idea that God would inspire the unprepared clergyman to pray effectively in public, he said, "Remember, young men, that God does not inspire vacuity." Another clergyman, when asked if a man could be as earnest and sincere when he had prepared himself carefully for such a service, as he could be if he trusted to the inspiration of the moment, replied: "God puts no premium on slovenliness. You need God's help if you have done your best to make yourself ready for his service. You have no right to ask his help, if you have neglected preparatory thought and prayer."

If a clergyman needs special preparation for leading in public prayer, much more so a layman. And the best laymen recognize this fact. Professor John S. Hart, the first Editor of *The Sunday School Times*, was quite a model superintendent in his day. He was a man of disciplined mind, of ripe culture, and of rare devoutness. He had

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much experience, and much impressiveness and unction, in public prayer.

If any superintendent would be justified in feeling that it was unnecessary for him to make special preparation for an opening prayer in his Sunday-school, it would seem to be such a man as Professor Hart. But, on the contrary, *he* always prepared himself with much pains for this service. He told the writer, on one occasion, that during all the time he was in charge of the State Normal School of New Jersey he made particular preparation for each day's morning prayer at the opening of school, and that he still preserved the outline plans of all those prayers.

Writing on this theme in counsel to superintendents, not long before his decease, Professor Hart said of the methods of study for a prayer, and of the value of such study: "Each week some new want will arise. Some scholar or teacher will be sick. Some family connected with the school will be in trouble. Some inquiring

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soul will be craving for an expression of sympathy. Be it your care to study how these various wants may find expression in your opening prayer, without improper and offensive personalities.

“ Besides these wants, each week's lesson, you will find, has certain leading thoughts. It has been selected with the express design of teaching certain religious truths, and these truths have a direct bearing upon the daily life of every member of your school, both scholars and teachers. Having yourself studied the lesson and filled your mind to saturation with the truths which it contains, you will find how much you need divine help to bring those truths home to your heart and conscience, so that you may carry them into practical life. This, your want, is the want of every teacher and scholar. See how you can in your prayer, without offense, give utterance to this want. Try, in short, to turn the lesson into a prayer, without turning it into a harangue. Let it be a real prayer, ad-

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dressed to God, not an exposition addressed to the school."

In testimony, out of his experience and observation, Professor Hart added: "As you grow older in the service, you may learn that those superintendents who have been longest in the harness, and are most familiar with the work, are often the very ones who habitually make the most painstaking preparation for each specific occasion. I could tell you of veteran superintendents who habitually spend from one to two hours of each Sabbath evening in preparing for the opening service of the next Sabbath."

It may seem to some that it would be easier for such a man as Professor Hart, with his habits of study, to prepare himself for an appropriate prayer, than for one unaccustomed to systematic and persistent study to do a thing of this sort. "I could never study for a prayer," says one superintendent or another. "I shouldn't know how to set about it. If I pray at all, I

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must ask the Lord to guide and help me, and then go right at it, forgetting all about theories and plans."

But many a man who has at first said this same thing about the study of a lesson, has afterwards learned how to fit himself by lesson study for lesson teaching. He, then, who never has studied for a prayer, ought not to feel that he never can do it. When he realizes the importance of thorough preparation, he can set himself to learn its methods. Now for an illustration in this line.

Some years ago the writer was at a Sunday-school in a town in Michigan. The lesson for that day was "The Smitten Rock," the narrative of the rock smitten by Moses in the wilderness. As the superintendent went on with his opening prayer, the writer was impressed with both its spirit and substance. It was strikingly appropriate to the day's lesson. It was delightfully reverent, inspiring, and impressive. It seemed to bring together and to

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uplift the entire school in devout and loving communion with God, over the theme of the hour's study, and to express the love and the longing of every grateful and needy heart in the assembly.

The writer felt that he had rarely listened to such a Sunday-school prayer, had rarely been so helpfully led in prayer; and at the close of the school, in conversation with the superintendent's wife, he expressed his interest in that portion of the service. "I am glad you feel so," was the answer; "for my husband gives a great deal of study to his Sunday-school prayers." Ah! that was it. It was the same there as elsewhere. Faithful and faith-filled work was not without its effect and its reward. And at once the writer applied to that superintendent to learn his method of preparing to pray, nor did he seek information in vain.

That superintendent was a railroad conductor, having little time—only odd moments at the best—for preliminary study

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of any sort. Early in his Sunday-school work he had felt the importance of preparation for his opening prayer in the school; but for a time he had hesitated to give study to this exercise, lest he should deprive it of some of its vitality and fervor. Even when he was convinced that it would be quite right and safe for him to take with him thoughts and words, as well as feeling, when he turned to the Lord as the leader of a praying Sunday-school, he was yet unfamiliar with wise methods of study; but he finally worked out and adopted a satisfactory plan.

From the beginning of each week he would have his next Sunday's prayer in mind, as he studied his next Sunday's lesson. Filling himself with the lesson, becoming imbued with its spirit and impressed by its teachings, through prayerful study, he would proceed to make an outline of its main features to guide him in the plan of a prayer.

First he would consider in what char-

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acter God is presented in the lesson, that he might be addressed in that character,—as Father, as King, as Guide, as Rock, as Tower, as Captain of Salvation. Then he would note the figures or comparisons in the lesson by which God's dealings with his people are shown, that they might be employed in the petitions or thanksgivings of the prayer. The teachings of the lesson would be next observed, that supplications for their practical benefits might be offered up for all. In closing, there would be an ascription of praise to God, in the line of the opening recognition of his distinctive character as shown in that lesson.

The prayer would be brief, not above three to four minutes at the outside; but it would have just as much more in it than an ordinary prayer of two or three times its length as was secured to it by the added study which it represented.

In the case of the prayer which the writer heard, the schedule of preparation

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had been preserved by the superintendent, and it was shown in illustration of the method asked for. In that lesson God appeared as the merciful and compassionate God, and Christ was pictured as the spiritual Rock. The opening call of the prayer was, "Most merciful God, our kind heavenly Father, help *us* to drink from that spiritual Rock—the Rock Christ Jesus."

Among the symbols and likenesses of the lesson were the flinty rock, the potent rod, the gushing waters. Among the petitions of the prayer were these: "And as at the touch of the rod in Moses' hand the refreshing waters came forth from the rock in plentiful abundance for the thirsty children of Israel to drink, so today, blessed Saviour, let the touch of our prayers of faith bring forth the richest joys of heavenly refreshing from thee—thou fount and source of every blessing. And likewise may our hearts, touched with the finger of thy love, burst forth in joyful,

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in triumphant, and in everlasting, praises of our Redeemer and our Lord."

The lesson teachings noted were, that all good comes from God; that we are in daily dependence upon him; that we need his sustaining presence, and that we should obey all his commandments. The petitions based on these teachings were: "Assist us, we pray thee, to fully comprehend the truths taught in our lesson to-day: that all good cometh by thee; that daily and hourly we are in need of thy sustaining presence to carry us through the sore perplexities and trials of this life; and that in *all* things we should observe perfect obedience to thy commandments and requirements—perfect submission to thy holy will."

The closing ascription was, "And unto him who leadeth us in green pastures and beside the still waters, and who will at last, if we are faithful unto the end, lead us to living fountains of heavenly waters which forever flow from out the great white

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throne of God and of the Lamb—unto him be honor and glory and dominion, forever and ever. Amen.”

The fervor and spirit of this prayer are of course in a measure lost by a formal quotation of its language ; but they were certainly none the less real and impressive because of that superintendent's intelligent interest in the theme of his prayer, and of his previous understanding of what he was to ask for.

He was not in the habit of writing out his phrases of prayer in full, but of noting under the several heads what he purposed to pray for. Hence he could say, in speaking of the results to himself of his preparations, “When I stand up for prayer, I have not to grope blindly about for this or that and the other thing to say. I have my prayer-heads mentally before me, and I pass from one to the other, and when done I have drawn the prayer right out of the lesson as water from a well, and tried, at least, to make it one which

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can lift the school with me to Jehovah's throne."

This illustration discloses one plan of preliminary study for the opening prayer in Sunday-school. It may be suited to many persons; to others it may not be. As the superintendent said of it, "It is a plan which all would find easy after a little time. At first, and especially if their memory was poor, it would be hard; but study will do much, and asking Jesus' help will do the rest." Yet no one plan is best for all superintendents. The chief thing emphasized by such an example is the truth that preparation for public prayer is wise and practicable, and that it in no degree diminishes the spiritual fervor of the prayer.

And the superintendent who prepares himself for leading his school in prayer will not expect his teachers to be ready for a similar service without similar preparation. Henry P. Haven—"model superintendent" as he has been called—was in the habit of notifying his teachers, at the opening of

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the month, of the time when they would be called on, during that month, to lead the school in prayer. Then they had no excuse for being unprepared to lead in prayer when the time came. Similarly, there are thoughtful superintendents who quietly notify in advance the teacher whom they are to ask to close the ordinary weekly teachers'-meeting with prayer.

The superintendent who would call on a teacher to lead in the opening prayer of the Sunday-school without a word of previous notice evidently lacks an appreciation of the privilege and duty of preparation for public prayer. Mr. C. B. Stout, of New Jersey, gave this illustration of the difficulties in such a case: "Farmer Johnson comes to Sunday-school very much troubled over a sick cow. As he is thinking of her, he is suddenly called on to lead in prayer. If he prays out freely, he'll find it hard not to pray for that cow. It isn't fair to put Farmer Johnson to such a test."

We are not to attempt, nor are we to

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expect others to attempt, to lead others in prayer without having been led in preparation for such prayer. For ourselves and for others the injunction is: "When thou goest to the house of God," and art called to lead in prayer, "be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few"—and well considered.

XI

Helping Another in Prayer

Prayer in private, for one's self or for others, is a purely personal and individual concern. It is wholly between one's self and God. No one else is to be considered in its thought or phrasing. In this it differs from public prayer with or for others. When others are to be led in prayer, they are carefully to be borne in mind in what is spoken and in the spirit of one's speech. Public prayer is necessarily quite different from private prayer.

Still another kind of prayer, differing from prayer by one's self and prayer with an assemblage, is prayer with and for another individual, prayer by a sick-bed, prayer with one in bereavement or sorrow, prayer with an anxious or a doubting soul, prayer with one who needs help and guidance and comfort. Such prayer is often a

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duty, and it behooves one to be ready for it when necessary, and to conduct it considerately, sympathetically, and wisely.

If you would help another in prayer, you must first put yourself alongside of him as he is, in order to bring him to the plane where you would like him to be. If he is cast down by sorrow or penitence, or perplexed by doubt or anxiety, it will not do for you to start out with a clear, sharp note of triumphant faith, or of confident rejoicing. He is not ready for that. It is likely to discourage him. If he thinks that you cannot understand his case, or be touched by the feeling of his infirmities as he is, you are not the helper that he needs. His heart cannot open out toward yours.

Unless you perceive his present state of mind, and see just how he is feeling, and why he feels so, you are unprepared to pray with him in such tenderness and sympathy as convinces him that you are his friend and helper, and makes him ready to be led along by you in the path you

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would have him walk. If your opening words of prayer seem to condemn his present state of mind, or to reproach him for feeling as he feels, you will fail of winning his confidence or of being his personal helper. Beware of such a beginning of your prayer as puts a barrier between him and you at the start. You can never help a despondent soul upward by soaring above him, and summoning him to rise and accompany you in your flight, before you have stooped down to him, and gained a hold on him in his despondency. He must be taken as he is, even though you do not intend to leave him so.

It touches a heart deeply to find itself understood and sympathized with, especially if it has felt itself stricken beyond comparison or appreciation. "The heart knoweth its own bitterness." There is no doubt on that point. And when, in its grief, the heart's hopeless cry is, "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, where-

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with the Lord hath afflicted me," it is a startling surprise, that may even bring comfort to the soul, to find that another understands this bitterness and sorrow, even if it has not experienced its very like. Help like this comes in sympathetic prayer from one who kneels by the stricken one, and pours out to God his own soul in supplications that the aching heart can make its own, even while it could not have framed them intelligibly.

Kneeling by the bedside of a bereaved mother, who was mourning hopelessly the death of her dearest child, and who did not even wish to be comforted by any words of cheer, a clergyman who had experienced the loss of a greatly loved child under peculiarly trying circumstances, began his gently spoken prayer substantially thus: "Dear Saviour, thou knowest the depths of this great sorrow; and we are sure that thou wouldst gladly give help, even by bringing back to the longing heart of this mourning mother the dear child whom

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thou hast taken from her. Thou canst do it, dear Lord ; and we know that somehow, hard as it is for us to understand it, only love keeps thee back from doing so. Thou understandest this mother's love and this mother's grief. Thou dost thyself love her, and love her child, very dearly. Her dear child understands thee now better than she can ; and that dear child would say to her as thou dost say, Mother, take comfort. If you knew all, you could not wish it different"—

At this point, the mother burst out with the cry, "Do you think that's so?" Her heart was now open to a comforting thought ; and the way was ready for a common prayer by the two believers to their common Saviour, in their common sorrow. She was led into a frame of mind for that prayer by being sympathized with while she yet lacked that frame of mind. Similar words of comfort and help are often spoken in prayer by one who seeks to minister to a needy soul in the spirit of

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Christ. They ought to be spoken yet more frequently.

An army deserter in war time was under sentence of death. Handcuffed and fettered, he was crouching by starlight on the banks of the James River. A chaplain sat by him, who had vainly proffered him help and counsel. The deserter wanted no prayers in his behalf, no advice or sympathy. He said he had "lived game," and he would "die game." The chaplain had, however, learned enough of his story to know that he had a mother in his distant home, for whom he still had feelings of affection. The chaplain knelt and began a prayer tenderly in behalf of the condemned soldier. Praying to the God of all comfort, he asked that, even though he might lack comfort, it might be given to the crushed and sad-hearted mother, when she learned, in her lonely home, of the death of the son of her love.

At this mention, in the prayer, of the breaking mother-heart, the stubborn son

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uttered a wild cry, as if his own heart had burst, and he threw himself forward on the sward, and sobbed great sobs of grief. The chaplain stretched himself alongside of him, and for a while he simply showed his sympathy by holding his arm lovingly about the soldier's neck and letting him cry out his cry. Then he spoke tenderly, and asked if he might not pray for that mother's boy as well as for her. All stubbornness was gone. The two prayed together now, and the chaplain could help the soldier in prayer as he could not before.

Many a soul which cannot, as things are, help itself in prayer, can be helped by another in prayer. It waits for some man to put its needy form into the healing waters of the spiritual Bethesda, that it may receive a blessing, and it ought not to wait in vain. If a needy soul cannot go alone to Jesus, it should be carried. As the palsied man was borne by loving hands, and let down through the roof, to be laid at the feet of the Great Physician,

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so it is for us to upbear on our arms of faith, in faith-filled prayer, one and another spiritually palsied soul, and lay them down at the feet of Jesus. He can heal them, and we can help them thus to their healing.

Praying with another, who is not in a state to pray for himself, is one way of using prayer to a good purpose, and is one way of helping another who sorely needs help. Prayer is always to the same Hearer of prayer, and our prayers are always from the same petitioner, but different ones who are prayed with require different words and methods of prayer.

XII

Praying to God as a Friend

We are accustomed to think of going to God as to a father, in the spirit of a child, to tell him of our troubles, and to ask help from him in our needs; and it ordinarily seems to us as if there could be no closer or dearer relation than this between God and ourselves. But we have a right to aspire to a yet nearer and more intimate relation with God than a child, as a child, can have with a father as a father,—and that is the relation of friend to friend. The highest and most sacred relation in which a man can stand toward God is that of a friend; and that relation, which is open to all of us, is recognized so rarely!

It is a crowning glory of the religion of the Bible—the one true religion—that it opens the possibility of a *friendship* with God. Other religions, in their imperfect-

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ness at the best, teach men to fear the gods, and even to have a hope of serving the gods; but only the religion of the Bible gives the conception of God as the friend of those who will lovingly trust themselves to him, and as welcoming their friendship. In the universal prayer-cry of men, terror or despair seems to be a prompting cause, where there is no love or trust. Many will cry out to God, or to the gods, to let them utterly alone, or to spare them from harm, who never think of seeking divine communion or fellowship with a heavenly Friend.

In the early history of the race God tried in vain to win men to himself in willing trust; but they stood aloof from him, and would not believe that he was as loving as he claimed to be. By and by, in his effort to disclose his spirit and purposes to men, he took one man out of an idolatrous nation, and, as it were, put his arm about him, and drew him to himself, asking him if he would let him be his friend. And

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Abraham believed God, and yielded himself to God in the spirit of a friend; and that was all that God asked of him. So God counted that loving trust of Abraham as evidence of Abraham's friendship, "and he was called the Friend of God."

Abraham "the friend" thus became the father of the faithful, and to this day the dearest children of God are those who count God their friend, and who are willing to live as friends of God, being, through their loving faith in God as their friend, the children of faithful Abraham—God's friend. When Jesus Christ came into this world as the manifestation of God's love as a friend, he called to himself those who were willing to love and to trust him; and before he left them he told them that he counted them his friends, and he wanted them to trust him as their friend. "Ye are my friends, if ye do the things which I command you," he said. And so, in the Old Testament and the New, the highest, closest, and most sacred relation between

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God and God's dear ones is that of friendship.

What comfort in going to God in prayer as to a friend ! It is so different from going to him as to a sovereign. It is different even from going to him as to a father. It is not that God has ceased to be both sovereign and father to him who approaches him ; but it is that, while sovereign and father, he is above all a friend. A subject who realizes that his sovereign is his personal friend, approaches his sovereign as a friend rather than as a sovereign. And when a son has come to count his father as his best friend, that son merges his thought of his father in the higher and holier thought of him as his friend. This truth may give us a suggestion of how God loves to have us come to him in prayer, and how we are privileged to pray to him.

In a true friendship, each friend is more interested in his friend than in himself. His thought is not of what his friendship

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demands of him, but of what it permits him to do and to be for his friend. The extremist claims of his friendship are counted by him, not tasks, but privileges. There is no room for selfishness in its fullest exercise. Yet there is a joy in the communion and intercourse of friendship. See how this showed itself in the dealings of God with Abraham, and in the ways of Abraham with God.

When God was to execute judgment in the home of the kinsman of Abraham, he said, "Shall I hide from Abraham that which I do?" God's friendship forbade such concealment, and he made known to Abraham his purpose concerning Sodom. At once Abraham recognized and responded to this proof of friendship, and his chief thought was of whether it would be well for God's reputation for him to do as he purposed. "Wilt thou consume the righteous with the wicked?" he asked. "That be far from thee: shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" On this

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basis his prayer went up to God repeatedly. He prayed as a friend to a friend, freely and trustfully. Of course, such praying was welcomed and approved by God.

Again, when Israel incurred God's judgment by idolatry in the wilderness, Moses prayed as a friend to a friend. He asked God not to blot out Israel as a people, lest God himself should be misjudged among the nations. "Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, saying, For evil did he bring them forth, to slay them in the mountains?" Moses asked that he himself might die, instead of the people, and thereby God be an avenger of evil without suffering in his repute as a covenant-keeping God. "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin!" he cried. "Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written." This prayer God heard and answered, because it was a prayer of friendship. And such praying is always acceptable to God.

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What a privilege thus to pray to God as to a friend! To go to him in loving trust, interested in his cause, and sure of his being interested in us and our welfare; to tell him of our needs and our trials; to ask his counsel and help, and to commit our case and cause to him with never a doubt or a fear! Such praying may be ours. We have no right to come short of it. God is the friend of whoever will accept his friendship; and all that he was to Abraham he will be to us, if we will but trust him as Abraham trusted.

"A Friend in sorest need,
Of kindest word and deed,—
And, best of all, a Friend
Whose love flows on and on, and knows no end."

This privilege we often fail to improve, and it is to our shame that we do so. If we realized always that God is our friend, we should be readier to bear ourselves toward him as his friends. And this attitude on our part is an unfailing duty. In coming to God as a friend, our prayer

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should be, that we may ever manifest to him the spirit of true friendship.

“ Lord, make me coy and tender to offend :

In friendship first, I think, if that agree

Which I intend,

Unto my friend's intent and end.

I would not use a friend as I use thee.

“ If any touch my friend or his good name,

It is my honor and my love to free

His blasted fame

From the least spot or thought of blame.

I could not use a friend as I use thee.

“ When that my friend pretendeth to a place,

I quit my interest, and leave it free ;

But when thy grace

Sues for my heart, I thee displace ;

Nor would I use a friend as I use thee.”

XIII

Getting Comfort by Prayer

One of the most comprehensive, suggestive, and satisfying descriptions of the God of love, as given in the Bible, is that he is the "God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort them that are in any affliction, through the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." Comfort is what every one of us needs, and what every one of us values. Others also need and value comfort. To be able to get comfort and to give comfort, makes us blessed and a blessing.

Comfort is a great deal more than is ordinarily understood by it. To comfort is to give solace, soothing, cheer, sympathy, refreshing, to brace up, to support, to impart strength, to make courageous, to guide, to instruct, to inspire. A comforter

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is one who stands by another, making that other's cause his own. All this and more is included in the idea of the comfort which the God of all comfort gives to us, and enables us to give to others; the various words in the Old Testament and the New which are translated "comfort" combine to indicate this. As prayer in its widest sense is communion with God, prayer is the means of comfort to us whenever we need comfort of any sort for ourselves or for others. And this is the comfort of prayer to the God of all comfort.

No one of us can say at all times that he is so strong, so capable, so well furnished, and so independent, that comfort from another is not essential to his happiness and efficiency. Emergencies are sure to come to every one of us, when he needs comfort, and when he would welcome it gratefully. In sickness a physician within call is a comfort. In loneliness or sorrow a sympathizing friend is a comfort. In time of doubt or bewilderment a sure guide

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is a comfort. In peril from enemies, or from the elements, a strong helper is a comfort. Even at the best, it is a comfort to be inspired to higher, better achieving, through the example, the encouragement, and the wise counsel, of one whose superiority we cannot but recognize and rejoice in.

In every sphere of human thought or action there comes a time when "two are better than one," and when it is "woe to him that is alone when he falleth, and hath not another to lift him up." As on the lower plane of our human needs, so on the higher plane of our spiritual possibilities. He who is in loving communion by prayer with the God of all comfort, is superior to the trials and necessities of life, and never knows the wo of being alone in any trouble.

There are in the Bible special promises, from God, of comfort in response to prayer, in every emergency in which we find ourselves; and the testing of those promises brings the comfort we need. In sickness, or other bodily infirmity, the best human

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physician knows that he cannot give health or help except by God's blessing ; but God is the Great Physician. His word is explicit, "I am the Lord that healeth thee;" and when we cry to him in faith, "Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed," we may know that just when and as it is best for us the answer to that prayer will come, and will cause us to say in gratitude, "O Lord my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me." Meantime, the praying sick one is assured that "the Lord will support him upon the couch of languishing," and make "all his bed in his sickness." There is comfort to the sick, and to the friends of the sick, in faith-filled prayer under circumstances like these.

There are times in our human experience when no earthly friend or helper can be to us all that we need, and when we seem utterly to lack the comprehension and sympathy which we must have, or despair. We dare not hope for a full understanding of our innermost self by any human heart, or

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any ministry to our uttermost wants. The cry of the sinking soul is :

"If all the gentlest-hearted friends I know
Concentred in one heart their gentleness,
That still grew gentler, till its pulse was less
For life than pity, I should yet be slow
To bring my own heart nakedly below
The palm of such a friend, that he should press
Motive, condition, means, appliances,
My false ideal joy and fickle wo,
Out full to light and knowledge. I should fear
Some plait between the brows,—some rougher
chime
In the free voice."

Yet he who made us understands us, and we need not fear to have our hearts open to his loving look. "The Lord is full of pity, and merciful." His love for us is not because of our loveliness, but because of his lovingness. There is comfort in this thought, as we turn restfully to him before whom "all things are naked and laid open," and confidently ask his sympathy.

In some hour of sad bereavement we feel that no sorrow was ever like our sorrow, and that in our loneliness we cannot be com-

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forted. Then the gentle voice of our Father comes with its matchless assurance of tender ministry in our grief: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted." And that promise is made good to us as we rest on it.

Disappointed in the failure or betrayal of one on whom we had leaned without the shadow of a doubt, it seems to us that no one can ever again be trusted, and we are ready to give up even faith itself, and to despair. A gracious whisper speaks comfortingly to our souls: "I the Lord change not." "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day, yea and forever."

When tempted and tried beyond our conscious strength, and our fear is that we cannot bear up against the terrible pressure, the one word of comfort that is sufficient for us is: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the

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way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it."

When we find ourselves incompetent for any work we have to do, or feel ourselves weak in any contest to which we have been summoned, we are entitled to call confidently on God for courage and strength and support, and the comforting answer will come back to us: "Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

When we are at our wits' end as to our duty, and long to know just what to do and how to do it, the divinely authorized message comes to us: "If any of you lacketh wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing doubting." And thus the way is clear to comfort in prayer for any discouraged or perplexed soul.

So all the way along in our human life

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course. No man need be without comfort while the gates of prayer are open to him. He who enters within those gates can have comfort in all things and always. God has comfort for him in his every hour of need, if he will but call for it, and accept it as proffered. No human friend can get so near to us as God. We cannot find such sympathy from any human heart as he gives to us freely. There is no such comfort on earth as that which comes in and through prayer. No man can know what real comfort is if he refrains from prayerful communion with the God of all comfort.

Take comfort, then, daily, in constant prayer. In such communion with God

“We kneel, how weak! We rise, how full of prayer!

Why, therefore, should we do ourselves this wrong,
Or others—that we are not always strong;
That we are ever overborne with care;
That we should ever weak or heartless be,
Anxious or troubled, when with us is prayer,—
And joy, and strength, and courage, are with
thee?”

XIV

Perils of Prayer,

A great deal is said of the privilege and the advantages of prayer, while very little is said of the responsibility and the perils of prayer. Yet every privilege is sure to impose a correspondent responsibility; and every responsibility has its accompanying perils. He who would exercise the privilege of prayer, should know that that privilege, like every other, brings perils with its responsibility.

Christian believers are accustomed to quote with hearty satisfaction the Bible injunctions and encouragements to prayer, and to comfort themselves with the Bible record of delightful answers to prayer. "Call unto me, and I will answer thee;" "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive;" "Continue in prayer;" "Pray without ceasing;"

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“Come boldly unto the throne of grace ;”
“The prayer of faith shall save the sick ;”
—such texts as these are often in the mouths of those who love the Word of God ; and the wonderful answers to prayer vouchsafed to Abraham, and to Moses, and to Elijah, and to Elisha, and to Hezekiah, and to Daniel, and to Cornelius, and to Paul, are taken to heart by them as they turn to God in prayer.

But believers are not so ready to note and heed the various Bible warnings on the subject of prayer. “Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God ; for God is in heaven and thou upon earth : therefore let thy words be few ;” “We know not what to pray for as we ought ;” “Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.” To such texts they ascribe less importance in considering the duties which grow out of the privilege of prayer. Nor are they so quick to appreciate the plain lesson of the

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inspired declaration concerning the praying Israelites, in the wilderness, who asked amiss, that they might consume it upon their lusts: "God . . . gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul." Yet it is quite as important to recognize the perils of lustful and unwise prayers, as it is to realize the true privilege of right-minded and reverently trustful prayers.

King Hezekiah had a good record in a well-spent life, when God gave him notice that he was to finish his earthly course and enter into rest. But Hezekiah was not content with God's ordering. He wanted to live on in his earthly rule, not for God's sake but for his own. God granted his prayer, and gave him fifteen years more on earth; and how sad was the result!

His vainglorious display of his treasures to the messengers of the king of Babylon excited the cupidity of that king, and all Jerusalem and Judah suffered in consequence. It was after he rose up from his sick-bed that a son Manasseh was born to

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him, who, as his successor, not only became an idolater himself, but led his people into worse forms of evil-doing than the old Canaanites were guilty of.

If Hezekiah had prayed for prolonged life in order to do some special service for God here, a blessing might have come with an answer to his prayer. But his prayer was a selfish one, and its answer brought consequences that were cause for mourning and sorrow. The Bible narrative illustrates the perils of unwise praying.

To turn from the Bible record to the record of our personal experiences, it will be found that there are few Christians who cannot recall some longing of their hearts, and some cry of their souls, which subsequently proved to be against their own highest welfare; who cannot, in fact, remember some prayer to God, offered by them in all earnestness, which would have proved their ruin had it been answered according to their desires. In the causes of gratitude which flood our souls when

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we look back over the way in which God has led us to the present day, hardly anything stands out more prominently than God's love in refusing to grant to us many of the prayers which we offered to him.

And just so long as God's wisdom is superior to our wisdom, there is need of our relying on his love to deny us our petitions, when to grant them would prove our ruin, or would sorely harm us; and there is reason for our trembling in view of the perils which accompany the privilege and responsibilities of prayer.

"O sad state

Of human wretchedness; so weak is man,
So ignorant and blind, that did not God
Sometimes withhold in mercy what we ask,
We should be ruined at our own request."

In the plan of God, faith-filled prayer is made a positive force in the universe. Many things are conditioned on such prayer:

"More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of;"

and because this is so, it behooves him

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who prays, to have a care how he employs that force which

—"moves the Hand which moves the world."

A man has no right to neglect prayer ; for neglecting prayer he loses the gain which right prayer brings : but employing prayer, he has need to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in giving direction to his longings, and he has no less need to ask God not to grant any foolish or sinful prayer which his foolish and sinful heart sends up.

At the holiday season, or at birthday times, many a parent asks his children to say just what they would like for a present. A child who has such a choice proffered to him is likely to recognize a responsibility along with its privilege ; and commonly he hesitates among many things before he fixes on any one.

There are children, indeed, who have already learned the fallibility of their judgments, and who understand that that which now seems to them most desira-

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ble may before long seem all unworthy of their cravings, and because of their distrust of their own judgments they ask their parents to choose for them in such a case. Again, there are children who are prompt to ask for something which ought to be denied them, and if their parents refuse to harm them by granting their requests, they incline to complain of the refusal. And these ways of our children are much like the ways of God's children—wise and foolish.

When we kneel in prayer, we have reason to consider well lest we pray amiss; lest our choice be of those things which are for our personal gratification, to consume upon our lusts, or according to our own poor judgment for those who are dear to us; and with all the confession of our present longings and desires there should be ever a sub-tone of entreaty to God not to give us our request if it would send leanness into our souls. Only in such a sense of the privileges and the perils of prayer is

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there true wisdom, and is there true faith,
in meeting the responsibilities of prayer :

“ If when I kneel to pray,
With eager lips I say :
‘ Lord, give me all the things that I desire ;
Health, wealth, fame, friends, brave heart, religious
fire,
The power to sway my fellow-men at will,
And strength for mighty works to banish ill ; ’
In such a prayer as this,
The blessing I must miss.

“ Or, if I only dare
To raise this fainting prayer :
‘ Thou seest, Lord, that I am poor and weak,
And cannot tell what things I ought to seek ;
I therefore do not ask at all, but still
I trust thy bounty all my wants to fill ; ’
My lips shall thus grow dumb,
The blessing will not come.

“ But if I lowly fall,
And thus in faith I call :
‘ Through Christ, O Lord, I pray thee give to me,
Not what I would, but what seems best to thee,
Of life, of health, of service, and of strength,
Until to thy full joy I come at length ; ’
My prayer shall then avail,
The blessing will not fail.”

XV

Praying at Others

There is a familiar story of two boys at bedtime, which represents Tom as having said his prayers and clambered into bed, while Bill remains upon his knees at the bedside. Bill prays aloud: "O Lord, forgive Tom for being so unkind to me." "Bill! you stop that," cries out Tom from the bed. Bill continues to pray: "O Lord, make Tom a better boy." Tom says: "Bill, if you don't stop that kind o' praying, I'll punch your head for you." One more like petition from Bill brings Tom to the floor, and the boys' evening prayers end in a rough-and-tumble.

Now, whether this story is true or not in fact, it certainly is true in principle. It illustrates a truth which has its practical bearings in many a sphere of religious life. A great many persons pray after Bill's

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fashion ; and a great many others feel as Tom felt, on being prayed for, or on being prayed at, in this style. Prayer is often aimed at one's fellows instead of being offered up to the Hearer and Answerer of prayer ; and the immediate effect of such prayer is not soothing or helpful to the minds of those prayed for.

As an illustration of this truth it may be said, that an advertisement was actually sent around, more or less widely, to the religious papers of the United States, asking the prayers of God's people in behalf of the pastor and other officials of a young church in a certain city who were persistently addicted to the habit of tobacco-using, much to the grief of the church-members who were now making this fact public. About the same time a faith-teaching religious periodical made, in its editorial columns, a specific charge of unfair dealing against a well-known religious publisher in another city, and wound up its series of denunciatory criticisms with a

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request that the readers of the periodical would pray for the unworthy and wickedly dealing publisher.

Every once in a while we hear of some minister of a divided church praying in his pulpit for the forgiveness of his slanderers or persecutors, with more or less of particularity in explanation of the slanders and persecutions referred to. Those who are most familiar with church and social prayer-meetings know that it is by no means an unprecedented thing to hear prayers offered with an evident reference to some personal grievance in the petitioner's relations with his pastor or fellow-members.

Occasionally, indeed, when one brother has spoken on some mooted question in fact or doctrine, another brother, on the other side of the question, will rise, and "throw his remarks into the form of a prayer" in frank exhibit of the sad error of the one who has preceded him at the throne of grace. "O Lord, we know that thy feeling is very different from the feel-

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ing of some of us on this subject. Thou knowest that those who are denounced here so positively this evening are thy faithful servants, approved of thee." This was the style in which one brother opened his prayer after another brother had spoken slightly of a prominent Christian denomination.

A chaplain in a legislative body sometimes misuses his office by praying at those in the assembly who take a different view of pending political or social questions from himself. This is thought by some to be a legitimate and desirable practice on a chaplain's part. On one occasion while a stringent prohibition measure was pending before a state legislature, a zealous advocate of it went to the chaplain just before he was to make the opening prayer for the day's session, and said in substance: "Put in your best licks at those other fellows in your prayer this morning. It will help to carry this thing through." He seemed to think that the chaplain's duty was to pray

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at the opponents of prohibitory legislation, instead of praying to God that a right spirit might prevail among all the members.

It may be, indeed, that some Christians will say that they find in the Bible-teachings concerning prayer a warrant for this calling on God in their personal behalf against their enemies. They will, perhaps, refer to the imprecatory psalms as illustrations of this kind of praying. They will recall the injunction to "pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you."

Possibly there are those who would be irreverent or unthinking enough to cite the fact that the dying Jesus prayed openly for the forgiveness of his murderers; as if our innocency, our sufferings, and our spirit, were to be held in comparison with his. But the difference in position between even David, the civil and religious head of Jehovah's peculiar people, in opposition to the avowed enemies of Jehovah as such, and an ordinary Christian minister or church-member in opposition to his

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brethren or fellow-men, is a difference that would seem to require no illumination of spiritual vision for its discerning.

Old Thomas Fuller covered this point when he said: "Lord! when in my daily service I read David's psalms, give me to alter the accent of my soul, according to their several subjects. In such psalms wherein he confesseth his sins, or requesteth thy pardon, or praiseth for former or prayeth for future favors, in all these give me to raise my soul to as high a pitch as may be. But when I come to such psalms wherein he curseth his enemies, oh, there let me bring my soul down to a lower note; for those words were made only to fit David's mouth. Nor let me flatter myself, that it is lawful for me, with David, to curse thine enemies; lest my deceitful heart entitle all mine enemies to be thine, and so what was religion in David prove malice in me, whilst I act revenge under the pretense of piety."

As to praying *for* our enemies in the

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closet, that is very different from praying *at* our enemies in public—in pulpit, or prayer-meeting, in the newspaper, or even aloud at the bedside of the one prayed for.

The root of the trouble with such prayers is the selfish element which predominates in them. They evidence a wrong conception of the relation of the petitioner and his God, and of the use of prayer as an agency of communication with God. It is quite too common for Christians to think chiefly of what God can do for them, instead of thinking of what they can do for God. They are readier to ask God's help against their enemies, than to proffer their help against God's enemies.

Absorbed in the thought of themselves, and of their enemies, and of their apparent needs, they ask God's help against those who oppose them, without stopping to consider whether *they* may not be in the wrong, and their enemies in the right; while all the while their prayer ought to be, that God would bring success to the

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right, even though their plans should fail through God's success. They ask and they receive not, because they ask amiss, that they may consume it upon their lusts—that it may minister to their personal pleasure or advantage.

To assume to speak as if in God's name against one's mere personal opposers, is to assume a grave and fearful responsibility. To pray at another, to use prayer as a means of personal abuse or criticism, is to misuse one's position as a child of God, and so to misuse the name of God which that child has been privileged to bear. Against such a misuse of God's name, the commandment of God stands out in terrible explicitness: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain."

XVI

Loss through Unoffered Prayers

Since it is clear, from the authority of God's word and from the lessons of God's providence, that positive good comes in response to specific prayer, it must be equally clear that the lack of such prayer causes the lack of such good. Prayer being a recognized force in the economy of the universe, the results which pivot on the exercise of that force are necessarily missing if the force be not exercised. Loss through unoffered prayers is as truly a fact as is gain through prayers proffered.

To many it seems as if simple non-doing could not be, in itself or in its consequences, as grievous a wrong as the commission of a sin of positive performance; yet we are taught in the Bible, both in the Old Testament and the New, that not to do a plain duty is as offensive to God, and is

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as sure to merit condemnation and punishing, as the doing of that which ought not to be done. One of the fiercest maledictions under the Old Covenant is recorded against a people who were simply inactive when they ought to have taken part in a pending contest. It is in the song of Deborah, after the battle of Israel with the Canaanites at Megiddo. Rehearsing the details of that contest, and praising those who were faithful, she cried out against the recreant non-doers :

“Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord,
Curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof;
Because they came not to the help of the Lord,
To the help of the Lord against the mighty.”

It was, again, the lips of the loving Jesus that taught the wickedness and guilt of non-doing, and foretold the terrible doom of those who did nothing more reprehensible than to do nothing. It was the man who simply kept his one pound wrapped in a napkin, instead of putting it at interest or using it in trade, who was

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called the "wicked servant," and from whom his treasure was taken away.

It was the man who merely failed to invest his talent at remunerative rates who was denounced as "wicked and slothful," and was to be stripped of his possessions, and cast, as an "unprofitable servant," into outer darkness, where there "shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." In the inspired description of the day of final account, the fearful doom pronounced by the Judge of all the earth against the lost is not based on the fact of their evil-doing, but on their evil non-doing. "Inasmuch as ye did it not," therefore "depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels."

Can there be any loss greater than the loss of one's very self for all eternity which results from simple non-doing when one ought to have done? This thought suggests the irreparable loss through unoffered prayers, in face of the fact that faith-filled prayers are a force in God's providential

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plan, and that God's children are commanded to proffer them.

In the whole realm of nature, loss through non-action is quite as real and positive, and may, indeed, be quite as ruinous, as loss through actual wrongdoing. A man, by not reaping, not sowing, not plowing, may as truly lose a harvest as by setting fire to his standing grain; and neither drought nor frost, neither mildew nor locusts, can more surely be a cause of famine, among those dependent on the crop, than could be a simple neglect of processes which would in God's providence secure first the blade, then the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear. A man's family can be as truly shelterless through his failure to build a house, or to buy or rent one, as by his turning them out of their home, and blowing up their dwelling with a charge of dynamite.

To fail to take needful food or drink, or to secure fresh air in a room filled with stifling gas, may be a means of as sure

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death to a man as a pistol or a razor employed for self-destruction. As with one's self, so with one's fellows. Simply to fail to reach out a hand to a drowning child, when within reach of him from the river bank, or to speak a word of warning to a blind man on the edge of a precipice, or to hold back a deaf one from stepping before a coming train, may bring on one's soul the blood of the man lost as truly as if he were deliberately murdered.

Neglecting to provide needed shelter, or food, or clothing, for a child, may cause its death. Neglecting to give it wise counsel or ample protection may result in that child's going astray to its ruin. Failing to pray for and with one's child day by day may be as culpable neglect as failing to give it material sustenance and ministry. Whatever is to be gained by prayer for one's self or for others may be utterly lost if that prayer be held back.

A man in mature life, who had for years stood well in the church and the commu-

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nity, was arrested for forgery, and charged with various acts of embezzlement. His aged mother visited him in the jail. As she entered his cell, she fell on his neck in an outburst of tears. She had no word of reproach for him, but she reproached herself most bitterly. "My poor boy!" she cried out; "this is all my fault. I haven't been praying for you as I ought to. While you were a child I prayed for you constantly; and so all along, until I saw you in the church, active in Christ's service. Then I thought you safe, and I only thanked God for you in my prayers. Now you have been led astray, while I was neglecting to pray for you. Poor boy! poor boy! your old mother is to blame for it all."

Whatever may be thought of that mother's division of responsibility in the case of herself and her son, it is evident that she had a sense of loss through unoffered prayers; and who shall say that if that mother's prayers for the gracious upholding of her

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son had been ceaseless and full of faith, he might not have had his feet kept from falling. If a mother's prayers are potent for good, their lack may be a veritable loss. And there are other prayers than those of a mother that have power with God, and that cannot be neglected without loss.

He who fails to pray for God's protection as he sleeps, or for God's guidance as he wakes, omits to take a precaution for his safety that is as important as it is real. Why should he think he is not likely to have a resultant positive loss from that omission? If he does not pray for special wisdom and grace as he attempts to write or to speak, to teach or to pray, for the benefit of others, can he hope that his work will show the gain that it could have through such prayer? Can he hope that there will be no actual loss from his neglect? Blessings that are promised in response to faith-filled prayer cannot be expected if faith-filled prayer is not offered.

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Loss stands over against gain in the neglect of the duty and privilege of prayer.

"Heaven is the magazine wherein God puts
Both good and evil ; prayer's the key that shuts
And opens this great treasure ; 'tis a key
Whose wards are Faith, and Hope, and Charity.
Would'st thou prevent a judgment due to sin ?
Turn but the key, and thou may'st lock it in.
Or would'st thou have a blessing fall upon thee ?
Open the door, and it will shower on thee."

To fail of using wisely the key of prayer is to fail of guarding against the dreaded outflow of evil, and to fail of securing the desirable outflow of good.

There are those who are near us, and those whom we hold dear, who are suffering to-day from lack of blessings that would have been theirs had we done our duty in the proffer of faith-filled prayers in their behalf. We ourselves are losers in spiritual life and power through our failure to be instant and earnest in gaining blessings that are promised only in response to fitting and timely prayer. God forgive us for our lack and our loss ! Let us pray !