

### THE DIVINE USE OF HUMAN PRAYER.

We considered last week the reasonableness of our belief that prayer is an influence whereby man can affect man and his surroundings in ways real, although unseen and immeasurable. We saw that there is a perfect naturalness in prayer as a vital human power; and that, on the grounds of the unseen mechanism of the universe, there can be no scientific objection to prayer as out of harmony with what man knows for certain about nature.

But the difficulty that some find in believing the power of prayer is not so much on these mechanical as on spiritual grounds. If we thought rightly of God as the Supreme Spirit, Will, Mind, Person, as the Ever-living, Ever-present Father of spirits, the belief in prayer would disclose and unfold itself naturally, as corolla flowering from this all-enveloping chalice of faith in the Universal Fatherhood.

But, alas! the truth of the Fatherhood of God, greatly though it has been revived of late years, is still very much of a dead letter in the popular Creed. Our loss of faith in prayer is indeed a visitation, upon these generations, of the sins of those parents who did not teach their children that God was the Father of fathers, the Eternal Father of spirits, ever present with, ever begetting, ever in every spirit, more truly than mortal father, aye, than mortal mother is with the child in the moments of supremest parental enfolding. Well did the prophet say that 'the Lord our God is a jealous God,' jealous for our love as the mother over her new-born babe; for He knows the store of alienation and prayerlessness that must ultimately come from the sin of the parent who engraves in the child's mind any other image of the Most High than that of the Father Eternal. Yes, prayer and belief are so hard for many to-day because religion was too long a making and a worshipping of graven images, of schemes of salvation, instead of the Father of spirits, eternal, immense, unseen.

The mystery of the action of spirit upon spirit passes into melodious harmony with all our conceptions of law when once we believe in the eternal Father of spirits as the Supreme Eternal Mind. It is only through the Supreme Mind, Who is above all and through all and in all, that even the humblest human mind can act upon another mind for good. The Father of spirits is the medium whereby any spirit of man acts upon the spirit of man for good.

In our second collect at Evening Prayer, which dates from days (fourteen centuries ago) when nobler thoughts of God animated the utterances of the Church, we say, 'O God, from Whom do proceed (sunt) all holy desires, all good (recta) counsels, and all just works.' God, the Supreme Mind, Will, Spirit, is ever moving every human mind, will, and spirit, to do His work. We can yield to His moving, or resist it. And in so far as we, either thinkingly, or by happy habit unthinkingly, are giving way to holy desires, good counsels, just works, we are allowing ourselves to be fellow-workers with God, from Whom all these do proceed. And if our holy desires, our good counsels, our just works, are brought to bear upon others, it is God Who through us as instruments is acting upon them, and God's will is then being done by us, as in heaven so on our little bit of earth. If, then, any one is exercising any influence upon anybody else for good, the good influence is not, as it were, straight from mind to mind, as if those two minds were the only minds in the universe. If any one gives way to any holy desires, good counsels, or just works, through anything that I say, or do, or will, or pray, those holy desires, and good counsels, and just works, come to that person from God,

Whom I on that occasion have not resisted, but have allowed to do His gracious will through me for that person. Thus God, the Father of spirits, Who is above all, and through all, and in all, is the connecting link between spirit and spirit, will and will, mind and mind, whenever spirit acts upon spirit, will upon will, mind upon mind, for good. To this assertion we commit ourselves whenever we say the words which the Church gives us in our daily Evening Prayer for peace.

And if God be thus the source from which, and the medium whereby, we influence one another whenever we influence one another for good, we are in the verge of prayer oftener than we know. And the distance of space between our bodies, or the dissolution of our bodies by death, can make no difference in kind as in power of acting one upon another as spirit upon spirit.

The Eternal Son, through Whom we are thus one with the Eternal Father, says, 'If ye abide in Me and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you.' All true prayer is prayer that God's will may be done. We are certain (are we not?) that it is God's will that everything should be done which we ask for, e. g., in the words of the Church's services. It is God's blessed and bountiful plan to put it largely into man's hands to work out His gracious will for Him. Of course, this graciousness of God inevitably gives us a power for the time of thwarting His will. Prayer is the uplifting of the heart to God in desire that His will may be done, and done by our hands and hearts, as far as in us lies; as in heaven so on earth. If then we abide in Christ, and His words abide in us, if we really pray through our Lord Jesus Christ, then what we will become what *God wills*, and through our prayers God's will is worked out, as by His 'means' of grace.

God has parted for a time with some of His power to us. And prayer is one great means whereby we may exercise His power committed to us so that His will in all things may be worked out. Thus prayers is at once Divine service and the service of man.

Prayer is the putting ourselves into such a relationship with God, through Christ, that forces, which we know that we as human beings possess, may be used for the furtherance of God's kingdom, the accomplishment of His will upon earth as in heaven.

Prayer ceases to be prayer if, in effect, it is an asking that God's will may not be done. Prayer in any matter about which we pray is the asking that God's will in the matter may be done, if possible, through our prayers joined with the vast intercession of Christ and His members. Many difficulties of thought about prayer will vanish if we can always believe that God's will on any subject must be better than ours, and that He is never desiring less, but always more of good than we desire. If we start from a belief in the infinite goodness of God there is seen to be, in the most earnest prayer, nothing like an asking God to change His will.

Why then, it may be said, *should there be any asking*, if God's will is so entirely for the very best that man can desire; if, as we say in one prayer, He is accustomed 'to give more than either we desire or deserve.' But we have now prepared the way for a ready answer to this question, 'Why should God require any asking?' Why, indeed? Why should He allow us to be His instruments, the workers of His will, in any of the many ways in which we know that we must work out His will if at the time it is to be done? Why should He put Himself at our disposal, as in all reverence it must be said He does, when He allows us, through Him, to exercise influence for good upon one another and upon His world? Why, indeed, but because He is the Eternal Father of all spirits, and, as such, cannot but give us who, as spirits and as His children, are made

in His image, some of His Divine nature and power.

We know that we possess, through God's grace, the power of influencing one another and the world. In prayer we beseech Him that these powers of His that He has placed in human beings, spirits, wills, minds, and bodies, may be used as channels of His will and means of His grace. We cannot but ask this of Him as the Father of spirits; and, as the Father of spirits, He must love to have us asking this in everything. If He be the Father of spirits the best thing we can do in everything is to ask Him to guide us, and, through us, or in spite of us, to accomplish His will.

Yes, belief in the power of prayer upon the world follows from belief in the Fatherhood of God, 'above all, through all, and in all.' And therefore it is that communion with the Father, through our Lord Jesus, the Vital Head of the human race, is such an inseparable adjunct to prayer. Therefore, the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ—the Blessed Sacrament of *that in Him* wherein He stoops to fellowship with *that in man* which is common to all men—has ever been held to be the indispensable 'means' of prayer as of all grace; 'generally necessary,' necessary, i. e., for the *genus* or grace, and for every one who would live up to his vital relationships with his fellow-men, and so render himself able to exercise duly his God-given powers of prayer and intercession for all men. Prayer is the recognising and living in the most real of human life. Nothing short of prayer is full life; and the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of the Lord of Life is the Bread of this life, and therefore the very Food of prayer.—*G. S. in Church Bells.*

### CHOIRS.

If the music in our churches is to be efficiently rendered, it is absolutely necessary that there should be regular rehearsals, and that they should be conducted in a proper manner. In churches where the choir meets but once a week for practice the time generally chosen is Friday or Saturday evening, or after one of the Sunday services. This latter arrangement, however, cannot be recommended, as by the close of service every one is tired and anxious to get home, and certainly unable to begin to practice with much prospect of pleasure or profit. Moreover, the time at disposal is not sufficient for a really good practice; an hour or an hour and a half is not too much if the Sunday music is to be properly rehearsed. One evening during the week, therefore, should be specially set apart for the practice, and it should be remembered that it is only by the regular attendance of all the members that the efficiency of any choir can be kept up. If a few are irregular the others quickly follow the bad example, and the consequence is that the music is known only by a portion of the choir, and most probably the others come in on Sunday and for want of preparation spoil the work of those who know their parts. Irregular attendance is frequently the result of indifference and want of system on the part of the choir-master. He should make a point of being at his post punctually at the time appointed for commencing; he should be strict in enforcing order and attention; he should be prompt in correcting all mistakes; and last, but not least, he should not continue the practice long enough to exhaust the singers. Choirs should remember that 'practice makes perfect.' According to the amount of attention they give to preparation depends the state of worship-music of the sanctuary to which they belong. A responsibility, therefore, rests upon them, the full weight of which they should fully comprehend, and which they should willingly and efficiently discharge.