

first, with the character of the suppliant ; secondly, with the nature of the thing requested ; and thirdly, with the purpose and prerogative of God himself. By attending a little to each of these their importance will be manifest. In the first place, the success of prayer is conditioned by the character of the suppliant. Not every kind of asking is acceptable prayer. That which men desire simply for the gratification of malice, or the aggrandising of selfishness, God has nowhere promised to bestow ; and unless there be in them the spirit to subordinate everything to the honor of Jehovah, men have no warrant to expect an answer. Beneath every genuine prayer there must be, furthermore, the disposition which is expressed in the doxology, " For thine is the glory ;" otherwise, the reproof of James will come in with fearful pungency, ' Ye ask and ye receive not because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.'

Again, the desire that simply flits across the soul, as the shadow of the cloud glides over the summer grass, is no true prayer. It must take hold of the spirit and gather into itself all the energy and earnestness of the man. The popular idea, indeed, is that prayer is a very simple matter ; but in reality it is the highest exercise of the soul, and requires for its presentation a concentration of all its powers ; and the English prelate was right when he said that " no man was likely to do much good in prayer who did not begin by looking upon it in the light of a work to be prepared for, and persevered in, with all the earnestness which we bring to bear upon subjects which are, in our opinion, at once most interesting and most necessary." So much as this must be evident from the phraseology of the Scriptures. Observe the gradation in the terms " asking, seeking, knocking." The asking is the lower form of requesting ; but the seeking implies the activity of one who puts himself to the labor of a search ; and the knocking refers to the continued importunity that repeats its application, until it is satisfied that there is no one in, or, until the door is actually opened. Here, too, come in those parables spoken by Jesus, to the end that