

## Answers to Prayer.

BY REV. HENRY M. KING, D. D.

Prayer is not the communion of equal spirits, but of spirits, one of which is needy, weak, dependent, sinning, and often in distress. Man has physical needs and spiritual needs. God is supreme in both worlds. He must impart life, light and peace, the power over sin and fear, and growing likeness to himself. He is also the giver of every good and perfect gift. "He openeth his hand and satisfieth the desire of every living thing." Prayer is prayer. Its very essence is asking for something which God, and possibly God only, can bestow. We ask and receive not, we are told, because we ask amiss. But if the prescribed conditions are fulfilled (and sometimes it seems when they are not fulfilled,) if we ask with a heart that longs to be pure and holy (Ps. 66:18,) that trusts in God and takes him at his word (Matt 21:22,) and in the name and spirit of Christ that the Father may be glorified in the Son (John 14:13.) God hears and answers our requests in the gift of those things that are needful for us, both for body and soul.

God may postpone the answer that he may increase our faith and our sense of need and dependence, our patience and submissiveness of spirit; but we are encouraged by God, and commanded by him, to continue in prayer, and to be importunate in prayer, not simply for the good it will do us, for our own spiritual profit, but in the belief and expectation that our requests will be granted. God does not trifle with human needs, and lure us on to asking and asking with no assurance of receiving. He does not deceive us with false expectations, and

"Keep the word of promise to our ear,  
And break it to our hope."

The reiterated promise of Jesus Christ, the parables of the importunate widow and the friend who came at midnight asking for the loan of bread, the experience of Jacob, who would not let the heavenly stranger go until his request was granted, all prove conclusively that religion, the religion of revelation and of Christ, not only has a place for prayer, which is definite petition, but makes it obligatory upon the needy soul to present its requests to God. It is this kind of prayer that meets the wants of the soul. It is this kind of prayer that meets the emergencies of life; and only as we can thus pray, pouring the longings of our hearts into the ear of the Heavenly Father, will prayer long remain the joy, the comfort, and the strength of the spiritual life. The Psalmist cried out: "I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live."

I am aware that some men are saying that such kind of prayer, viz., the presenting of definite requests to God with the expectation of receiving definite answers, is irrational and unscientific. It is boastfully urged that the progress of scientific knowledge in our day makes such a conception of prayer impossible. It may be replied that this denial is not the outgrowth of scientific progress at all. It was asserted quite as strongly by the English deism and the French infidelity of the last century. It is really the working of that old rationalistic spirit that is ever seeking to eliminate God, his presence, his interposition, his providence, from human affairs, that denies both the immanence and the transcendence of Deity, that disputes the reality of the supernatural, and reduces all things, events and forces to human beings, to an iron and unyielding system, which goes on grinding and grinding its grist of life and souls with no possibility of divine sympathy of aid or comfort.

Or, if it acknowledges the immanence of God, it denies his transcendence, and makes him a powerless and helpless prisoner bound in the chains of the laws which he has made, and unable to come to man's relief in the forgiveness of sin or in providential guidance and protection. Any man who believes that his sins have been forgiven must believe in special answers to prayer; and he who denies that prayer has power with God rules out all prayer for God's blessing upon the preaching of the gospel, upon the labors of the Sunday school, upon philanthropic effort, all prayer for the relief of the poor, the restoration of the sick and the wandering, and for the conversion of men and of nations.

It has been objected that such specific prayer seeks to change the will of God, and if the will of God can be changed, he cannot be infinitely wise; to which it may be replied that God's will, when known, should always be respected and submitted to. But God's will cannot always be foreseen. Moreover, it is comprehensive, and may include the specific prayer as well as its specific answer; so that he who should refuse to offer the prayer might be thwarting the will of the Almighty. It is "the will of God that men should pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath or doubting." In our finiteness and ignorance we need often to pray, "Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt."

Again, it has been objected that specific prayer ignores the order of nature, which is from God, and therefore sacred, to which it may be replied, "Not so." God often, perhaps most often, answers prayer in the way of nature, by the use of natural forces and agencies. He

feeds the hungry who cry to him for bread by the generous thoughtfulness of his servants. They are his ravens. He restores the sick to health by giving skill to the physician and blessing the remedies which are employed. He converts souls to himself in answer to prayer by the personal effort, the kind invitation and warning, and the life of consistent piety of those who love them and him. But this belief does leave God free to act in the world which he has made, as free an agent as we ourselves are conscious of being, free to do his will among the armies of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth. Otherwise, instead of man being made a little lower than God, God would be made a good deal lower than man. This world is not governed by fate. God is in it and above it. Man is free. God is free. There is opportunity for the free play of his Spirit upon our spirits, and the interposition of his hand for our guidance, and protection, and deliverance.

Still again, it is objected that this belief in prayer throws all the responsibility upon God, and is an idle way for a man to excuse himself. By no means, when it is rightly held. There may be times when a man is helpless and can do nothing, when he is shut up to God, when his only effort is a cry for help and mercy, when the only thing he can do is to pray. It is the blind man crying by the wayside, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." Was it wrong? Was he wickedly seeking to change the will of God? Was he wickedly ignoring the laws of nature? Was he lazily throwing the responsibility upon the Son of God? Did Christ do wrong, when he opened his poor blind eyes and let the beautiful sunlight in? Who of us is cruel enough to say it, and to condemn the specific prayer and its kingly answer.

But, ordinarily, when a man rightly prays for a specific thing, he becomes a worker together with God by that very act. He puts himself in God's hands to be used by him, if need be, for the accomplishment of his prayer. Does he pray for the poor, the needy, the distressed? he seeks to be God's instrument for their relief. Does he pray for the conversion of children, of friends, or of the world? He leaves no possible effort undone, and no reasonable consecration unmade, for the successful issue of his prayer. Is he himself sick, or hungry, or in need of some special deliverance or blessing? He watches, as well as prays, for he knows not in what way God's answer will come.

Such prayer is warranted by the Word of God, and illustrated by the repeated instances which it records. The whole history of God's people, individually and collectively, is luminous with examples of answered prayer. It is not to be philosophized about.

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatius, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy." But it is to be accepted by humble faith, and tested in the practical experiences of life. Not that prayer-tests are to be instituted, and God put on exhibition before a curious and unbelieving world, but that every child of his is invited to come to him, in all his grief and need, and pray and never faint.

Indeed, this whole matter resolves itself into the question, "Who is God and what is his relation to us?" Is he a distant and unfeeling Creator? Is he an almighty energy, working by unchangeable law? Or is he the spiritual Father of his children, our friend, our Redeemer, our helper in every time of trouble? If God is my Father, if that is the relation which he represents himself as sustaining to me, then I can go to him in all my need; then I must go to him in childlike faith; then I may go to him with the assurance that my prayer, born of my necessity and of the indwelling of his spirit, will be graciously heard and answered. Has not Christ the Son of God and teacher of all truth, told us that "God is more willing to give good things to them that ask him, than earthly parents are to give good gifts unto their children?" Verily, verily, I say unto you, God dealth with us as with sons.

"If earthly parents hear  
Their children when they cry,  
If they, with love sincere,  
Their varied wants supply,  
Much more wilt thou thy love display,  
And answer when thy children pray."

—Zion Advocate.

## The Three Mighty Spiritual Forces.

BY MERTON.

All Christians are elected by God the Father, redeemed by God the Son, and regenerated by God the Holy Spirit. The evidence to the church and the world that they are elected, redeemed and regenerated, is seen in their lives. Jesus says, "By their fruits shall ye know them." To claim to be one of the elect and yet not to produce fruit is to deceive one's self. Upon every one elected, redeemed and regenerated there are three mighty spiritual forces at work, producing a strong and beautiful character which shall shine luminously before the assembled hosts of the universe in "that day" when Christ shall bestow the awards of eternity. These three great forces are of God and divine in their nature. The giving of them manifests God's love to his children and

his desire for holiness of character in them. These forces are Faith producing good works, Love producing toil and sacrifice, and Hope producing patience or endurance. When these have produced perfection in the soul, then will the man be in the perfect image of Christ the perfect Man.

First we have faith producing good works. All good works, spiritual fruits in the life, are the results of faith in the soul. "Without faith it is impossible to please" God. Real gospel faith is the spirit of obedience. Hence where it exists in the soul, when opportunity presents itself, it will be seen in the life. Faith in God's promises always leads us to test them by filling the conditions upon which he makes them. As is the faith in our souls, so will be the work in our lives. Unbelief always chills the affections, clouds the mind and paralyzes the efforts to do good. One who has faith in God seeks to render obedience to his commands. Paul fully believed the words of the Master, hence his heroic efforts to make them known. No difficulties could chill his ardor or cause him to cease his labors in establishing Christ's kingdom. His enemies might kill him and drag him out of their village, as they did on one occasion, yet he would rise up and return again to resume his preaching of God's Word.

Missionaries on foreign fields, true heralds of the Cross, as they believe the truths of the gospel, labor most earnestly to publish them everywhere to the people. Unbelief cuts the nerve of endeavor at home and abroad. An unbelieving church ceases to be missionary, and soon sinks into a calm and criminal indifference to the Master's great commission—"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." "To him that believeth all things are possible." The mighty workers in the vineyard of Christ have been the heroes of faith. Paul says: "Faith is the substance of things not seen." Hence faith puts us into possession of the joys of heaven and renders certain the realities yet to be enjoyed, thus supplying motives to earnest and constant work in the cause of God.

"Faith lights us through the dark to deity;

Whilst, without sight, we witness that she shows  
More God than in his works our eyes can see;

Though none but by those works the God-head knows."

Another mighty spiritual force is Love, producing toil or sacrifice. Love is the most potent force in the universe. Whatever is its object, it leads to immense toil and sacrifice. The love of money, "the root of all evil," often leads to the sacrifice of home, ease, principle, honor and even life itself. We behold the fearful sacrifices of miners made in delving for gold. The wife and children are left behind and health is ruined in the search. See how the love of fame and earthly glory leads to the sacrifice of all that is held dear. It led the great Napoleon to break the heart of Josephine, to burn cities, desolate countries and crush the hearts of millions. The great military chieftains of all ages, under the controlling influence of this love have deluged the world with blood. Love to God and man has led to most wonderful sacrifices. It led two Moravian missionaries to enter the deadly home of lepers, never to come out again until released by death. Millions moved by this mighty force have toiled, sacrificed and died in accomplishing their object. This brought the Son of God from heaven to earth, and held him here until his death in agony on the cross. Supreme love to God and love to our neighbor as ourself will produce a character brighter and more beautiful than that of angels, for these conform us to the image of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Truly—

"'Tis nature's second sun,  
Causing a spring of virtues where he shines:  
And as without the sun, the world's great eye,  
All colors, beauties, both of art and nature,  
Are given in vain to man . . .  
For love informs them as the sun does colors:  
And as the sun, reflecting its warm beams  
Against the earth, begets all fruits and flowers;  
So love, far shining in the inward man,  
Brings forth in him the honorable fruits  
Of valor, wit, virtue and lofty thoughts,  
Brave resolutions, and divine discourses."

Under its mighty influence man becomes godlike, capable of the most sublime sacrifices.

The third mighty spiritual force is Hope, producing patience or endurance. Hope, says an apostle, is the "helmet of salvation." It is compounded of expectation and desire. Without it men cannot live. A hopeless man is a dying man. Despair, hopelessness, leads to insanity. Hope exercised in a Christian cheers his affections, gives strength to his purposes and dispels the gloom of doubt. Hope of bliss in the future life enables one to patiently endure the present afflictions, however severe they may be. Those exercising it can say with Paul: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen." It throws a halo of glory upon the darkest hour. Every tomb is encircled by a rainbow of hope. A "good hope through grace" throws wide open the pearly gates of Paradise, and bids the eye of faith behold the visions of splendor. Beautifully has the poet Young written:

"Hope, of all passions, most befriends us:  
Passions of prouder name befriend us less,

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