

*PRAYERS AND PRAYING.*

IF it be worth while to pray at all, it is worth while to pray aright. It is foolish to waste time in doing anything in a way that can be of no use. It is mad to go through what is, in itself, an act of religion, so as to make it a sin. To say prayers is not to pray. To kneel is not to worship. There may be much love in the words used, but none in the heart of him who uses them. There may be a lowly manner which tells of no bowing down or drawing near of the proud cold heart.

Failure in prayer saddens many. They wish to pray; but every time they try, they seem to lose heart more, or else get into an easy, careless way of not minding. People forget that worship is hard, real work, as well as a great privilege and consolation. Thought, feeling, and will should be roused, before coming to God's mercy seat: and when the prayer is said, there should be a new aim set before the soul, with a new assurance of added strength. No one ought to dare to begin to speak to God without thinking over what he means to say,— what he has to thank God for, to confess before Him, to seek from Him. And in every prayer there is an acknowledgment of duty and a profession of will to do it. So, in the psalms, prayers are often called "vows." The meaning is that it is only as those who are bound to serve God, and are ready to serve Him, that we have a right to pray to Him. And, moreover, we undertake to use for God all gifts with which He trusts us, and to work with Him in the strength He gives, to do our part in bringing about what we ask Him to do.

Time spent in getting ready to pray will help us to pray as we ought. If we put before us the meaning of prayer—who God is and what we are—and try to gather up the whole force of our being for the earnest work of worship, we shall not find our thoughts so quick to wander. And when we rise to go forth to the other works of life, we shall feel that we take up our burden as those who have prayed, and have sought to be fellow-workers with God in furthering the good ends of His will. Those who rush into God's presence while their heads are full of the world's thoughts, and hurry through a set of words, and then put God and their prayers out of their heads, have no right to wonder that their prayers seem vain, without comfort, and without blessing.

Those who lounge against their beds and bury their faces in the clothes when they say their prayers, must not wonder if the weariness of body to which they give way is matched by sloth of soul; and if their souls are not awake, their bodies are in a fair way to fall asleep. The body, as well as the spirit, should be braced to the utmost, and God's help should be laid firm hold on, or else we cannot hope to keep true, in spite of all that tries to loosen the hold on God which right prayer gives.

If we use a form of prayer to help us as a guide to thought and words, it is well to have our book and look hard at. If we have to remember and to pray, taxing memory and devotion at the same time, we are very apt to give the mere headwork most of our strength. Far better to be quite free to press upon God that