

Knowledge Through Prayer.

Sermon preached at Wolfville on The Day of Prayer for Colleges, Feb. 9th, 1902.

REV. H. R. HATCH.

Ps. 119: 18:—"Open thou my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."

The 119th Psalm may be entitled, "The Praise of God's law." In every verse but one—the 122nd—there is a direct reference to the law of God under some one of the various terms in which that law is described. The particular term in this verse—the Torah—while it came to be used in the technical sense of the law of Moses, in its earlier history had a more general meaning and referred to every instruction which God gave to men, either directly through his spirit, or indirectly through some medium or messenger. Thus the law was God's message or God's will for men. We might translate the verse of our text thus: "Uncover thou my eyes that I may look upon the wonderful things of thy teaching." And this means, evidently, that the Psalmist prayed that he might have the ability to understand God's messages. The point that I wish to make is this, to the devout Hebrew mind and heart God was continually speaking his message, giving his instruction, not in one way merely but in all ways, and his chief desire was to understand this message of his God. So the Psalmist prays his prayer to God: "Open thou my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."

That prayer almost looks as if the Psalmist expected God to show him these wondrous things without effort on his part; but a careful reading of the entire Psalm will correct that impression. The law of God was his constant meditation; God's word was laid up in his heart; God's statutes were his delight; God's testimonies, his rejoicing; and in God's commandments he walked. His prayer then is that he may have spiritual discernment so that he may see the law of God in its wonderful beauty and activity and especially in its relation to his own life and his life in relation to it. The author of the 119th Psalm was a great student, and the object of his study was to find out the wonderful things of God, and so as he studied he prayed that God would enlighten his understanding.

Our theme this morning is "The Relation of Prayer to Study." To define the two leading terms in our theme—prayer and study. What is it to pray? What is it to study?

Comprehensively stated, prayer is communion with God, the object of which is fellowship with God in all his will and purpose for our life. Or we may put it this way,—prayer is the outgo of a human soul to the Supreme Being and seeks that companionship with that Supreme Being which will mean perfect union between the soul and him. Doubtless you can state it more briefly and in a much better way; but I trust that my meaning is clear. Let me emphasize especially the object of prayer—it is to come into fellowship with God in all his will for us.

On the other hand study is the earnest application of the mind to gather knowledge of any or of all kinds and its ultimate object is wisdom. But truth, be it expressed in science, in art, in morals, or in religion is only the expression of God's mind. Certainly no one can deny that everything expresses an intelligence of a matchless and supreme order; and intelligence, we know belongs to personal being. The marvellous adaptation in nature, the wonderful harmonies of color and in relations, the accurate operation of the laws of physical and chemical activities, all are evidences of a creative intelligence of a supreme order with infinite resources. But the same and greater marvels in law, in adaptations, in beauty we find in the world of moral and spiritual being; all, we believe traceable to the same supreme intelligence and infinite power. Learning is simply finding out these wonderful things which are written in God's universe and in the constitution of our humanity, and also revealed to us in the book of revelation, all written and revealed for our instruction and the training of our lives towards their destiny. To stop short of God in our learning is still to remain in ignorance and folly; while on the other hand to accept the conclusion both of our own reason and of revelation and to live in accordance therewith is to find wisdom and to get understanding.

These remarks may help us to see something of the relation between prayer and study. Prayer in its last analysis being communion with God in order to know and to do his will; and study in the last analysis being the attempt to learn the mind of God as he has expressed it in the various and multitudinous forms of creation and facts of human experience so that we may know life in all its relationships and live in accordance with the intent and purpose of our being, then prayer has a direct and vital connection with study, which no earnest student should overlook, and by student I mean not only the young men and maidens who may gather in halls of learning but also men and women everywhere who in the various walks of life are seeking to find out the value and meaning of existence. We are all students more or

less. The students in the schools have the special advantage.

There is an old Latin proverb which reads thus: "*Bene orasse est bene studuisse.*"

Translated it would read as follows: "To have prayed well is to have studied well." That proverb is worthy a place beside the proverbs of Solomon. We believe that it sets before us a most profound truth. It tells us that there is a real sense in which prayer is study, and that the object of prayer and study are one. In the thought of the Psalmist prayer supplements study. And after all the unveiling of any truth depends upon whether God chooses to unveil it. So study ought always to be pursued and at all points supplemented with the prayer, "Open thou my eyes that I may see." For it is possible for us to have eyes, yet see not; to have ears, yet hear not. How often have we gone forth among the beauties of nature, seeing, yet not seeing, hearing, yet not hearing. But one day there came a change, and the sun was warmer, and the skies were brighter, and the beauties of nature were more charming than ever they had been before. What made the change? Two things, perhaps; one thing, certainly. The two things were knowledge and sympathy, the one thing was sympathy. There was a fellow feeling with it all, which related us to it and it to us. If there was new or special knowledge it simply enhanced the sympathy. This brings us to our first point in the relation of prayer to study.

1. Prayer begets and develops sympathy, to which Truth unlocks her secrets, and so leads to the discovery of the wondrous things of God.

This sympathy involves two elements, chiefly, reverence and love.

(a.) First consider reverence. By reverence we mean that profound respect and esteem for the truth which leads us to honor it above all things else. Such reverence may be ours only as we apprehend that all truth is the expression of the mind of God, and should therefore bring our minds into direct touch with deity. Prayer puts God in his proper place in relation to all manifested truth and accordingly fills the heart of the student with the devout and reverent attitude. Indeed the Bible tells us that the fear of the Lord—that is, reverence for the Supreme Being—is the beginning of wisdom. And as the end of true study is to make us wise unto the perfecting of our life, then the fear or reverence of him who is the truth is the first step towards becoming wise. Prayer helps us to take that step.

Go back with me 3,000 years or more to the desert of Midian. For forty years a man had been tending sheep in that desert until he must have known every bush and rock and ravine. On this side the bare and rugged peaks of Sinai climbed to the clouds, and all around, the horizon was hemmed in by precipitous mountains, and the world beyond was shut out. There in those dreary wastes, for forty years, Moses kept the sheep of his father-in-law, and meditated on the things of God and man. One day something happened, we know not what, whether it was that the eyes of Moses were opened so that he could see what always had been, or that some unusual manifestation took place before the ordinary eye. In any event he saw, and what he saw, was a bush aflame with fire but unconsumed. All at once the reverent devotion of years reached a full measure of strength and made it possible for God to speak to Moses in clear and ringing message. Moses was a praying man. Prayer had brought his soul into intimate union with God and therefore God spoke to him out of the flaming bush. Hundreds of shepherds before and since Moses have kept their flocks in the wilderness of Midian, but to none has the bush been aflame with deity. For among them there has been only one Moses with his mighty spirit searching the depths of life and the universe to find God. And yet Mrs. Browning tells us truly,

"Earth is crammed with heaven

And every bush is aflame with God;"

and out of every bush God speaks—only so many of us having eyes see not, and ears hear not. Soon, over these hills and dales will flow what Lowell calls,

"... the high-tide of the year,
And whatever of life hath ebbed away
Comes flooding back, with a rippling cheer,
Into every bare inlet and creek and bay;"

and this valley will be filled with the glad acclaim of a world's teeming life; and the praise of earth's thousand voices will ascend to God. In front of my study window is a large apple-tree, to day trunk and limbs bare, apparently cold and dead. But some fair morn in "the flood-tide of the year" I will look out and see that tree covered with the glory of leaf and blossom, and out of all that glorious beauty the God who made heaven and earth will speak to me of blossom-time and fruitage, of life fulfilling its mission, of death and then of the resurrection beauty and joy. Could that tree ablaze from ground to topmost bough with a bright but unconsuming glory tell me more of God and of life's mission? Indeed, if I have gotten hold of right things in life, is it not thus that the floescent tree and the tree fruit-laden and also the tree in the mighty grasp of these northern frosts is literally aflame with the glory of the invisible but infinite Creator? So we believe. And to him who

has a heart to understand, the words of Lord Tennyson are pre-eminently true,

"Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies,
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower—but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is."

Men call this an irreverent age. Whether that be a true characterization the future must declare. But this we know, that while the profane and irreverent crowd may linger in the porch of the temple of truth, they who would enter the holy of holies must approach thereto with reverent and devout spirit. Ay! indeed, it is only to such spirits that there is seen to be a most holy place. Men with skilful hand but unsympathetic spirit may dissect the living or the dead body and fail to discover anything except matter nervously organized; but to him whose heart is reverently attuned to the eternal realities, in all the delicate and intricate mechanism of this body of ours is revealed the masterful will and wisdom of the divine creative energy. Prayer is the golden key that unlocks the gates of reverence and lets the spirit of man soar away to the infinite Father, God, in the search for truth.

(b.) Secondly, consider the other element in sympathy of which we spoke, viz.—love. God is love. Prayer opens the heart of man to love God, and therefore to love the truth. This much is as certain as any demonstrated proposition in geometry,—no man will ever enter very far into the truth without a deep and sincere love for the truth.

In the book of Proverbs in the 8th chapter, wisdom is personified and cries out, "I love them that love me." If we would apply our hearts unto wisdom and get understanding, we must love the truth. In short—to use the words of another—"we must love, to know."

Surely we are all familiar with this principle. At least every teacher is. There are lower motives which may lead one to apply himself to study. It may be the wish of his parents, or the pride of his own heart to make a fair showing amongst his fellow students. But it is only when the whole affectional nature of the student is given to the study pursued and the object to be gained, that he makes rapid progress and finally reaches the goal. The men who stand out prominently in any department of human knowledge are the men whose life has become absorbed in the studies which they pursue, and whose greatest glory is their enthusiastic love for the truth they are seeking. This is the uniform testimony of human history, and we must accept it. The most precious treasures of truth are hidden to all, except those who have enshrined truth in their hearts.

In the experiments of Marconi with wireless telegraphy, we are informed that the chief difficulty has been in perfecting an instrument, called the coherer, for the receiving of the electrical waves which the transmitting machine may set in motion. The transmitter and the coherer are made to correspond by a process called tuning so that only a coherer attuned to a transmitter can receive the message sent out by that transmitter. For example, if a transmitter is radiating a half million vibrations per second, the corresponding coherer will be able to receive only a half million vibrations. This process of tuning, we are told, are still open to very large improvements, but the principle is generally accepted. This illustrates what I am trying to say about love and sympathy for the truth and the receiving of the truth. Prayer is the process by which our hearts and minds are attuned to love and sympathy for the truth. And this love and sympathy for the truth is that necessary correspondence between us and the truth that renders it possible for us to receive the message of truth which the Great Transmitter sends out in electrical truth-waves to the earth. Is it too much to say that the whole spiritual ether is vibrating with these electrical truth-waves, and that whenever the heart of man is properly attuned to receive these waves Truth floods the soul with her divine light?

Just as a child placed in the midst of a group of merry, romping children catches at once their spirit of gladness and laughter, because his own heart is in sympathy therewith, so a human soul set in all this wonderful truth of God in God's universe, if his heart is attuned to love and sympathy therewith, catches the spirit of Truth and he worships in her Temple. Prayer is the homage of our hearts to Truth, and keeps the channels of communication open between us and the Truth.

II. Secondly, Prayer, besides attuning one's soul to sympathy for the truth, brings the spirit of the student into obedience to the truth. Truth locks her temple against the disobedient soul. Just as the mathematician in order to solve the more difficult problems of equations must be obedient to the primary laws of numbers; so the student in all department of knowledge in order to understand the mysteries which remain to be uncovered must at every step be obedient to the laws and principles already mastered. Truth wherever found is reality, and therefore is vitally related to highest personal well-being. Accordingly, if I would enter fully into the deepest and holiest realities and understand myself in all my rela-