

man deputed of the king to hear thee. O that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath a suit or cause might come to me, and I would do him justice." In this iniquitous manner did he steal the hearts of the men of Israel.

He soon made use of this pernicious influence, and formed a plan for the usurpation of the kingdom; and when the plot was ripe for execution, he actually engaged in direct rebellion against his father and his sovereign, and drove the aged monarch from his throne, obliging him to seek safety for his person, from the cruel hands of an unnatural son, by a precipitate flight.

The situation and conduct of David was throughout most affecting. Perhaps on no occasion do the great qualities of his mind more display themselves than on this. We might have imagined that his spirit, broken down by years and infirmities, would have sunk in all the peevishness and querulousness of old age. We might have looked for nothing but complaints, and threats, and curses, against the inhuman invader of his throne, the ungrateful disturber of the evening of his life. But not one repining word escapes his lips. He marches forward from the city surrounded by weeping friends, himself alone unmoved by his misfortunes. The ark of God, which the officious kindness of his faithful adherents had brought with him, he immediately sent back, saying, with characteristic magnanimity, "Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favor in the eyes of the LORD, he will bring me again, and shew me both it and his habitation. But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him."

When the ark of God had left him, he then gave vent to his feelings.—"He went up by the ascent of Mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered; and he went barefoot; and all the people that were with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up."

Soon after this, Shimei came forth casting stones at David and cursing him. The attendants of the king would have taken summary vengeance on this contemptible wretch; but in the midst of all his sufferings David forgot not to exercise the nobler virtues of humanity, and in all the dignity of an intellectual greatness, which no reverses could subdue, he turned round to his advisers—"What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruihah! So let him curse, because the LORD hath said unto him, Curse David."

Perhaps an equally striking combination of the more sublime and the more tender virtues was never exhibited by any merely human being. And what is it that makes David so great even in his degradation from the throne? what is it that unites in his character a holy dignity which misfortune cannot conquer, with a susceptibility so exquisite and tender? It is the powerful influence of divine grace. It is this alone that can raise whatsoever is degrading, and soften whatsoever is harsh, in the human character. The heroes of romance present us with no such lovely union of opposing virtues; all is in extremes with them. They are at one time courageous—but then they are cruel; at another tender—but then they are effeminate. The history, however, before us exhibits a man who is great, even in his tears—amiable, even when roused by the grossest insult.

At length the day arrived in which the father and the son must contend on the bloody field of battle for the kingdom. But though David wished to be restored to the throne from which he had been expelled, yet, in spite of the vile ingratitude of his son, he felt the undiminished force of parental affection, and gave an especial charge to the generals of his army to spare the unhappy youth. "Deal gently," says the affectionate parent, "for my sake, with the young man, even with Absalom." And all the people heard when the king gave all the captains charge concerning Absalom.

This charge, sincerely as it was given, was little regarded; and Absalom fell a victim to his own sin and folly. But how did the parent receive the tidings of his death?—The king was much moved, and went up into the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, thus he said, "O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

Here is the excess of grief depicted in the most natural, and therefore in the most forcible language. Every thing connected with the scene serves to heighten the sensations produced by it. First, the character of the son was so unusually base, his conduct had been so uniformly unnatural, that the reader's sympathy with him in his sufferings is almost gone. But many waters cannot quench the love that glows in the kind father's bosom. We see it triumphing over all the faults of the traitorous son, who would scarcely perhaps have wept, had his father's head been laid at his feet in the close of this inhuman conflict.

Again, when the messenger arrived from the camp, the king asks not a word about the issue of the battle, though his kingdom and perhaps his life depended upon it. He forgets himself, and truly patriotic as he ever had been, he forgets for the moment his country also. He is wrapt up in Absalom alone; his only question "Is the young man Absalom safe?" And when the awful tidings are announced, he immediately hastens from the place where he was exposed to perpetual intrusion, that he may in solitude give ample scope to the overwhelming sorrows which were confined within his bosom; for grief when it is excessive always seeks retirement. It is, however, a very fine and affecting stroke in the narrative, that though his feelings urge him into retirement, they do not wait till he arrives there, before they find utterance. He knows he ought to restrain them, but he feels he cannot; and as he is going up the stairs which lead to his private chamber, he bursts forth in all the violence of irresistible grief.

It is worthy of remark, that, as his son is the great object which fills his mind, he begins and ends his exclamation with the words "my son." He can only think of Absalom as of his son; he cannot view him as an enemy, or the murderer of another of his children, as the seducer of his subjects, as the author of unknown miseries to his country: "my son" words every thought concerning him which is present to the father's mind.

The recurrence of the words "son," and "Absalom," and especially the former, marks more distinctly than any laboured process of proof could do, how unutterably keen his feelings were. Here is much repetition in a little room, but no tautology. Every succeeding word deepens the impression made by the former. The language is that of unfettered grief. Nothing is so natural in the circumstances in which David was placed, as the constant dwelling upon one single idea, which fills up the whole field of vision. Every departure from a simple expression of the feeling which predominated, and of those generous and often romantic wishes which arise immediately out of this feeling, seems an impertinence, and diminishes our confidence in the sincerity of the speaker. In the passage before us, the only glance which the afflicted father gives at any other object than his son, is at himself; and it is in such a way as to shew that he thinks nothing of himself in comparison with this darling son—"Would to God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

The wish itself cannot be justified; but who has the coldness to blame it in such a father, and at such a time? Ardent feelings break through every bound which can be prescribed to them: for a moment they seem irresistible, and it is not till we have a little season for calm recollection that we can expect to see them subdued.

But whatever judgment may be formed of the propriety of David's conduct, considering him as a child of God, we must allow that the father beams in the passage before us with unusual benignity, and that the subject of this essay derives abundant elucidation from the parental tenderness which it exhibits.

J. K.

THE CHURCH PRAYERS.

A DIALOGUE.

(Continued from page 31)

Mary.—With these thoughts and feelings about it, James, you at least, and all like you, must indeed enjoy your worship. I'm more and more ashamed of my ignorance of the value of the Holy Prayer Book, and it astonishes me that any one should be found to make a mock of it. Would you suppose that they have something to say against the minister's and people's changes of posture in their worship at church?

Old Steady.—Yes, Mary, I know their talk too well—none of this is new to me—I've heard Mr. Lovechrist speak with the greatest pain of the way in which people of this sort treat our Church-worship, when they come to it. "They come in," says he, "often so late, as though they hold the praying part of the service in utter contempt; and they carry such a look and manner with them, as though they thought they were paying a compliment to the house by coming; and they seem to take their seats with minds more prepared to sit in judgment on the Word of God, than to let the world judge them, and to dispute about the message, than to bow before the authority of 'the message of the Lord of Hosts.'"

O! it grieves me, Mary, to have to talk about such characters—if they have got time, and the mind, to be quarrelling with this custom also, I can pity, better than dispute with them—'tis enough that our holy forefathers pitched upon such postures, and changes of posture, in our worship, as seemed best suited to the business in hand, and most likely to be edifying to the worshippers. And, if there be any who are disposed to make a mock of this, let them just give modesty and humility their due, so far as to consider that there is a "multitude, which no man can number," now before the throne of God, who utterly differ from them. I don't trouble my mind, Mary, about this or that smaller matter in the order of public worship. The charge of my immortal soul is one that demands all my diligence to keep, and I have no time to spare for trifles. But order is certainly one of the most beautiful marks by which we may trace God in his work and appointments; and, in the instructions which he has given about the public worship of himself, he has shewn that this is pleasing to him. Now, our Reformers took what their consciences approved of in this matter, out of the customs of ancient churches, and added such as seemed good themselves. In some cases, Mary, we have gone high for our examples. We have taken our custom of the congregation answering the Minister, from the worship of the blessed Seraphim, who, as Isaiah tells us, (VI. 3) "cried, one unto another, holy, holy, holy; is the Lord of Hosts." But there is a picture of the worship of heaven, which my mind's eye delights to look at, and perhaps it may please and profit you also. You turn to the 5th chapter of St. John's Revelation, and you will find an account of it all, as he beheld it.—There were "the beasts and the elders" (which means the ministers and people of Christ's Church,) close round the throne, and, outside of them, in another circle, an "innumerable company of angels." Well, the redeemed church began what we may call the service; falling down and singing their "new song"—and then the angels, "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands," took it up, and proclaimed the worthiness of the Lamb; and next, "every creature in heaven, and on the earth, and in the sea, raised a full chorus of 'blessing, and honor, and glory, to God and the Lamb.'" And then, (once more it would seem,) the "beasts and elders" fell down and worshipped, and closed it all with a loud Amen! Here is the order of the worship of heaven, Mary, which I hope you and I shall join in another day. We must, however, I believe, learn something of that "new song," and practice the worship of God and the Lamb down here; and, though our harps may be but half-strung, and our "golden vials" dim and drossy, I despair of ever finding on earth a form that comes so near to the heavenly one as our own. Look at the "Te Deum," beginning, "We praise thee, O God." There is a hymn all but divine, and I'm almost bold to say, not unworthy of an angel's tongue. I never join in it without being reminded of the worship described by St. John. Its lofty strain of praise teaches our earthly souls to mount, and keeps them aloft too, singing, like the lark, as they soar; and again, there is just enough of humble prayer in it, to suit the purpose of a redeemed sinner not yet in glory! And picture to yourself, Mary, a devout congregation, worshipping after the order of our Church. Hear them with one heart and voice confess, and supplicate, and praise—mark, how minister and pro-

ple stir up each other's souls by praying for, or exhorting one another—listen to the solemn Amen rolling every now and then, round the house of God—and then, hear the universal burst, as they call upon "Our Father which is in heaven," or glorify him in one of the "Songs of Zion." Is not this, Mary, as a well-known hymn says, "like a little heaven below?" I verily believe if a perfect stranger to our worship were suddenly to be placed in the midst of a congregation so worshipping, he would be struck beyond measure, not only with the beautiful order and solemnity of the service, but with the powerful language and spirit of its devotions.—They are a mass of scripture worked up together, with wonderful skill, for a believing sinner's use. Oh, Mary! if the thousands and thousands over our King's dominions, who are kneeling together at the same moment, calling upon God in the same petitions, and glorifying him with the same praises, did but use our Liturgy in the life and power of faith, what blessedness would be brought down on our beloved country! How soon would Satan quake for his kingdom! even now, as it is, I do think that the united "effectual" cry of the faithful worshippers prevails to beat back, and keep in bounds that swelling tide of corruption and sin which is running under his management all over the world,—and therefore, I often call the Liturgy the Church's breakwater, like that wonderful one which I saw at the same place where I saw "Eddystone Light House."

Mary.—'Tis impossible to hear all this, James, and not say at the end of it these two things; how pride, or something else, must blind the enemies of the Prayer Book, and to what a poor account we have turned our own means of grace.

Old Steady.—Ah, Mary! I believe that none but a truly enlightened man can understand, and none but a truly converted man can really use so spiritual a form of prayer as ours. A Liturgy you know must be made for real Christians—new-born men—men who are alive to God, and can therefore pray to him. No marvel then if those who are still "dead in trespasses and sins," (and who can number them?) use the words without having the spirit of the prayers, and therefore use them in vain.—Of course the fault and the guilt are their own.—'Tis no good to profess to admire and love the Liturgy, unless they verily and indeed use it. It can do nothing to save them, except as a means of grace—but it will do much to condemn them, as a great mercy abused. The Jews gloried in their noble temple, and would die for it; but they disregarded the temple's God.—Let us beware, while we glory in our Prayer-Book, lest we neglect Him to whom that book takes us in every page, the "God that hears and answers prayer." For those who despise our Liturgy, I have only further to say, that I do not believe the Divine Spirit would ever lead any one to dislike, or think scorn of that which, whatever its imperfections, is certainly full of his own mind; and with the kindest feeling I would say to them; it is well worth your while to consider whether you, and not it; may be in fault. And lastly, to your own dear countrymen, who are members of the "National Church," I would affectionately and humbly say,—learn to rightly use the Liturgy, and then you will learn to rightly value it. 'Tis the fashion, now-a-days, to neglect the prayers, when there is no sermon afterwards; but there is a grievous mistake here, Mary. This is preferring the lesser before the greater benefit, the means before the end. I myself love preaching as much as any one—I need not say I love our dear minister, for I owe my soul to him—but I don't set hearing the word above prayer: Prayer, in its full meaning, seems to me to be the great business of a Christian man's life. It is the first cry of the new-born soul, and the proof of its being alive—it moves when it begins to pray.—Then by prayer it obtains all the graces that make up its character, and in prayer these graces are brought into play and practice—the soul grows as it prays—prayingness is its soundness and prosperity, and the lack of it, its disease and ruin.—My greatest privilege; therefore, on earth, is prayer, Mary, and the Sabbath is my best day; for then, more than at any other time, I wait on the Lord in his own house, and that house is a "house of prayer." It is true I live by the Word, preached or read, as a means; but that Word shews its quickening power in me by sending me to prayer. I want light to understand it, and faith to receive it. I have to pray for its abidance in me, and for its growth—for the fulfilment of the promise on God's part, and of the precept on mine—that I may "hold forth the word of life," and "adorn the doctrine" and that I may be sanctified and transformed thereby. This is but little of what might be named, besides thanksgiving and praising, and interceding for others, which are parts of prayer; but let this suffice—and just take notice, that, in our prayer-service, there is such a large portion of pure scripture read, that I am exercising these two great duties and privileges together; hearing the blessed Gospel, and acting it in united prayer. Moreover, I might add that, in preaching, another is engaged for me; in praying I am engaged for myself. My minister tells me of a throne of grace, where a full pardon and riches unsearchable, and heavenly mansions, are all to be had for nothing, by poor, guilty rebels, that go armed with the passport of Christ's name. I act upon his word and go. And, whilst others content themselves with forever hearing of the "tree of life in the midst of the garden, with its twelve manner of fruits," I enter in and eat of them, and experience their healing virtue. Don't you mind, Mary, the Queen of Sheba wasn't satisfied with the hearing so much about King Solomon? She must needs go and see him. The poor Greeks could listen no longer to the winning accounts of the Saviour, but they make a request to Philip, 'Sir, we would see Jesus.' Let you and I, Mary, do the same. I would give each ordinance its proper place and respect; but remember, he who goes to our prayer-service, goes, if he be a true worshipper, into the favoured presence of Almighty God on his own audience-day, and there, for an hour or so, transacts the great business of his soul's salvation! Is this a privilege either to be neglected or despised? I'm sure they who heard the word best will be the ones to value and enter into the prayers most.

Mary.—Alas! I feel myself among the guilty ones, in this respect, James: but I hope I shall never again bring such a loss upon myself, or such a slight upon the ordinance of my God.