

SPECIFIC AND INTENSE PRAYER.

"As the hart panteth after the water-brooks."—
Ps. xlii. 1.

We lose many prayers for the want of two things which support each other,—*specificness of object*, and *intensity of desire*. One's interest in such an exercise as this is necessarily dependent on the co-existence of these qualities.

In the diary of Dr. Chalmers, we find recorded this petition: "Make me sensible of real answers to actual requests, as evidences of an interchange between myself on earth and my Saviour in heaven." Under the sway of intense desires, our minds naturally long to individualize thus the parties, the petitions, the objects, and the results of prayer.

Sir Fowell Buxton writes as follows: "When I am out of heart, I follow David's example, and fly for refuge to prayer; and he furnishes me with a store of prayer. . . . I am bound to acknowledge that I have always found that my prayers have been heard and answered; . . . in almost every instance I have received what I have asked for. . . . Hence, I feel permitted to offer up my prayers for everything that concerns me. . . . I am inclined to imagine that there are no *little* things with God. His hand is as manifest in the feathers of a butterfly's wing, in the eye of an insect, in the folding and packing of a blossom, in the curious aqueducts by which a leaf is nourished, as in the creation of a world, and in the laws by which planets move. I understand literally the injunction: 'In everything make your requests known unto God;' and I cannot but notice how amply these prayers have been met."

Again, writing to his daughter on the subject of a "division" in the House of Commons, in the conflict for West Indian Emancipation, he says: "What led to that division? If ever there was a subject which occupied our prayers, it was this. Do you remember how we desired that God would give me his Spirit in that emergency; how we quoted the promise, 'He that lacketh wisdom, let him ask it of the Lord, and it shall be given him;' and how I kept open that passage in the Old Testament in which it is said, 'We have no might against this great company

that cometh against us, neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon Thee'—the Spirit of the Lord replying, 'Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's?' If you want to see the passage, open my Bible; it will turn of itself to the place. I sincerely believe that *prayer* was the cause of *that division*; and I am confirmed in this, by knowing that we by no means calculated on the effect. The course we took appeared to be right, and we *followed it blindly*."

In these examples is illustrated, in real life, the working of these two forces in a spirit of prayer, which must naturally exist or die together,—intensity of desire and specificness of object.

Let a man define to his own mind an object of prayer, and then let him be moved by desires for that object which *impel* him to pray, because he cannot otherwise satisfy the irrepressible longings of his soul; let him have such desires as shall lead him to search out, and dwell upon, and treasure in his heart, and return to again, and appropriate to himself anew, the *encouragements* to prayer, till his Bible opens of itself at the right places—and think you that such a man will have occasion to go to his closet, or come from it, with the sickly cry, "Why, oh! why is my intercourse with God so irksome to me?" Such a man *must* experience, at least, the joy of uttering hopefully emotions which become painful by repression.

On the contrary, let a man's objects of thought at the throne of grace be vague, and let his desires be languid, and from the nature of the case, his prayers must be both languid and vague. Says Jeremy Taylor: "Easiness of desire is a great enemy to the success of a good man's prayer. It must be an intent, zealous, busy, operative prayer. For consider what a huge indecency it is, that a man should speak to God for a thing that he values not. Our prayers upbraid our spirits, when we beg tamely for those things for which we ought to die; which are more precious than imperial sceptres, richer than the spoils of the sea, or the treasures of Indian hills."

The scriptural examples of prayer have, most of them, an unutterable intensity. They are pictures of *struggles*, in which