

For the Colonial Churchman.

WANDERINGS OF THE MIND IN PRAYER.

The believer in Christ, discovers in his prayers innumerable wanderings of the mind, and perpetual distractions, more particularly in public worship in the midst of solemn prayer his heart will sometimes wander on some worldly business, or perhaps be engaged in thoughts of doing good, but on a subject foreign to the prayer then offering up with his lips. And although he strives to prevent them from intruding, they will intrude notwithstanding; not only worldly thoughts but good thoughts will often come thus unseasonably to hinder him in the present duty, and draw his mind aside from God. After all his care and watchfulness he has gained but a transient moment of devotion; he therefore becomes humbled in viewing so many defects in his prayers, and mourns over it, and in view of his weakness and insufficiency, he fully appreciates the blessed doctrine of free justification by faith in the atoning blood of Christ, and of his prevailing intercession; and is led to seek more earnestly for the blessed assistance of the Holy Spirit, to enable him to pray in an acceptable manner.

There is a continual contest carried on in the christian's breast during worship, of which the mere formalist whose heart is unchanged and unrenewed by divine grace, is wholly ignorant. His end is gained, his conscience is satisfied, if he has appeared in the house of God, and merely repeated his prayers. He thinks thus a meritorious service, and is well pleased with himself, being a stranger to that faith which relies entirely for salvation on the blood of Christ, that "blood, which cleanseth us from all sin." He has a vague notion that this performance, as well as some other acts of devotion of his that he may deem meritorious, will on the day of reckoning, be put on the credit side of his account. And although not daring to hope that he will be admitted into those mansions of bliss, which our Saviour has prepared for those that love and obey him, he yet thinks all may be well with him. Not so the watchful Christian. It is his continual aim to worship God in spirit and in truth; and after all, he finds that his best endeavours fall far short of what it ought to be. He therefore becomes more humbled under a sense of his manifold deficiencies, and smiting his breast exclaims, "God be merciful to me a sinner."—Knowing that God is a heart-searching God who has declared, "I know the things that come into your heart, every one of them." The more wandering the heart is, the more wearisome the duty, while the nearer we draw to God, the more warmth, and life, and comfort, we enjoy. The work of prayer ceases while our hearts wander. Many there are that make light of wanderings in prayer on account of their frequent occurrence, but God greatly condemns them. To those that make light of them, may be applied the words of Ezekiel—"They come unto thee as the people cometh, and set before thee as my people,—for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after covetousness." And again, "I saw the place of righteousness, and iniquity was there." It is evidently a great insult to the great and glorious God, when praying to Him, to quit him in the midst of our prayers, as if we were conversing with an inferior, and turn away from him, as if we were unmindful of his presence. Oh! how much should we stand in awe of God when we come before him to worship.

The general cause of our wanderings in prayer is the power of Satan, and the remaining strength of our corrupt nature. Though the believer is born of God, he has two contending parties within—the old man, and the new; and distractions mainly arise from the weakness of grace, the strength of sin, and the temptations of Satan. We find the remains of our corrupt nature, an oppressive load, but if we ask and diligently seek for the aid of the Holy Spirit, that burden under which we are ready to sink, will be removed. He will relieve us in our necessities, and will help our infirmities. His sanctifying influence, is needful in preparing our hearts for holy intercourse with God, and for desiring those things which will glorify Him and benefit our souls. The prayer of the Psalmist is very suitable, "Create in me a clean heart O God, and renew a right spirit

within me," "cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me."

If we thus contend against our spiritual enemies, we will overcome them, and whenever we find our heart wandering we should send up short but fervent petitions for Divine aid. This is an effectual help; it engages God against the power of sin and Satan. St. James says, "resist the devil and he will flee from thee," "draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you." Our blessed Saviour, who is at the right hand of God, full of compassion, tenderness, and love, intercedes for us. "He ever liveth to make intercession." He has said "whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name He will give it you; ask and ye shall receive that your joy may be full."

"It will be a help in prayer," the late Bishop White has observed, "before entry on it, to make a pause for the fixing of the mind on the character of the great Being to be addressed, especially on His having vouchsafed to reveal Himself to us, as the hearer of prayer. In several branches of it also, as far as possible without an unseasonable suspension of the train of thought, there should be a direction of the mind to the particular attributes, on invoking the name of God." We should consider that He is the high and lofty one, that inhabiteth Eternity, whose name is Holy "The foundation of prayer," says Paley, "in all cases is a sense of want. No man prays in earnest, or to any purpose for what he does not feel that he wants, know then and feel the meekness of your nature." The more lively views we have of God's character, presence, and glory, the more we shall seek to know him. The great thing is to keep our mind and affections fixed on the duty before us, and to have it engaged, and the affections excited suitably to every part of the prayers, we are then engaged in. We ought by faith to realize the presence of God, and when in His house we should feel with holy David in saying "holiness becometh thine house O Lord forever," looking up for the divine blessing to give life, efficacy, and unction, to our prayers, and be enabled to say with the Psalmist, "O God, thou art my God, early will I seek Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee, my soul thirsteth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is, to see thy power and glory, so as I have seen Thee in the sanctuary."

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HELPS TO MEDITATION.—NO. 1.

Attributes of the Almighty, as ascribed to Him by the Jews—2 Macab. 1. 24.

O Lord—Lord God Creator of all things, who art fearful and strong, and righteous and merciful, and the only and gracious king, the only giver of all things, the only just, almighty and everlasting.

Meditations on these ten awful and yet consoling attributes of our God, may well be commended to the thoughts of the christian reader.

Sanctify God in your hearts. 1 Pet. 3. 13.

Sanctify—to make holy—to set apart for holy services—to treat as holy. Exod. 19, 20, 22, 23, 30. 5 Deut. 12. Isa. 8, 13, 19, 23. 5 Eph. 26. 1 Thes. 5, 23.

Matthew Henry's Commentary on the above passage is at once expressive and striking—"We sanctify the Lord God in our hearts when we

- 1. With sincerity and fervency adore him.
2. When our thoughts of Him are awful and reverend; and when we rely upon His power—trust to His faithfulness—submit to His wisdom—imitate His holiness, and give Him the glory due to His illustrious perfections."

All true christians fervently pray that God's kingdom may come—that the heathen (that is, those who are without His written word) be turned to His glorious name. On this important point our church thus furnishes the outlines of our devotions—"O God, be pleased to make thy ways know unto all men—thy saving health unto all nations." So these lines—

Art Thou my king—my Father styled,
Am I Thy servant and Thy child,
Whilst wretched millions draw their breath
In lands of ignorance and death?

DOCTRINES OF THE CHURCH.

Chap. 2.

CHANGE OF HEART.

From the doctrine of human corruption arises the necessity of an entire change, in our natural affections, wrought in our hearts by the renewing and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, by which we are again made 'partakers of the divine nature.' And this change on the disposition, and views, and feelings of fallen man,—this renewal of his heart,—this restoration of the lost image of God, is what is meant by the scriptural expressions—"being born of God"—'renewed in the Spirit of our minds.'—'putting off the old man, which is corrupt, and putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.'

The absolute necessity of such a change is declared by our Saviour, when he says,—'except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.' (John 3. 5). And why? Because by nature we are 'born in sin,' and are 'the children of wrath,' are opposed to every thing virtuous and holy, and 'inclined to evil continually.'—Now the volume of immutable truth tells us, that unless we 'be converted we shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven'—that without holiness no man shall see the Lord.

This spiritual change is well described by our Church as 'a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness.' It is true that so long as we live in these frail and mortal bodies, there will be some remains of sin: the evil inclinations of our nature will not be entirely rooted out. There will always be a struggle in the very best of men, between the flesh and the spirit, and they will feel and lament 'many sins that so easily beset them.' They will often find, to their grief, that 'though the spirit is willing, yet the flesh is weak.'—Still there will always be in the renewed heart a prevailing love of religion—what the Apostle terms 'a delight in the law of God after the inward man,'—a general hatred and dread of sin,—an earnest desire and endeavour to lead a righteous, sober and godly life.

The Church, in one of her articles, and every where in her offices, teaches and inculcates, as a fundamental doctrine of Scripture, man's utter inability to do any thing good, without God's 'special grace, which he must learn at all times to call for by diligent prayer." The language of her 10th article is—"The condition of man, after the fall of Adam, is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith and calling upon God; wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing, (that is going before) us, that we may have a good will, and working with us when we have that good will.

On this subject more will be said under the head 'Of the Holy Spirit.' We now briefly remark that it is the office of this Divine Person to enlighten our understanding, which is by nature darkened,—to purify our heart, which is naturally corrupt,—to direct our will, which is naturally perverse,—to strengthen our good resolutions, which are naturally weak,—to make us love things, which we naturally hate,—and to enable us to walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing,—when if left to ourselves, we should continually be going astray from his commandments.

All these are the gifts of that Spirit, 'without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy,'—of that Spirit, who puts into our minds holy thoughts, holy desires, holy resolutions, and enables us to bring the same to good effect: in a word, who excites, carries on, and perfects in us, that 'holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.'—Churchman's Manual.

Consolation.—To those who are in sorrow, religion comes like the dove returning to the ark, with an olive branch in its mouth, announcing a resting-place from the storm.

Come from the house of God as the spies did from the land of Canaan, laden with good fruits.

Lord Burleigh.—That great and wise minister was used to say, "I will never trust any man not of sound religion, for he that is false to God, can never be true to man."