

world lasts, that God reigns and not laws, of fate, nor fatalism—we who believe that, in answer to prayer, God is healing and delivering us, and has delivered us, are this day to approach that table, the first that has been spread within these walls since that deliverance; and while we thank Him for many blessings,—blessings more than tongue can tell, we do in this act,—for it is one of special thanksgiving; it is the eucharistic ordinance,—we do thank Him that He has kept our eyes from tears, our feet from falling, and our soul from death. But never let us forget this—that only will the judgment be withdrawn when the prayer is not exclusively “Deliver us from pestilence,” but “Deliver us from the evil.” God withdraws the punishment when man ceases to do evil and learns to do well. Pharaoh prayed, “Withdraw the frogs,” but David prayed, “Take away my sin.” The way to get the punishment withdrawn is to put away the sin. We may depend upon it, that the plague that smote us so terribly, and that is still smiting other nations, is not gone; it is suspended still, as the wisest and most knowing will tell you, waiting, if we shall dishonour God, if we shall desecrate His Sabbaths, if we shall do wickedly before Him—waiting to come again with tenfold force; and we shall see that there is no safety from plague, but in safety from sin; for God, by a law that never can be repealed, has so ordered and constituted it.

In this petition, too, I may notice in the next place, we not only pray as children addressing a father to deliver us, but we pray as brothers for brothers; each congregation forming a group by itself, but still praying in the presence of another group, composed of sufferers and sinners, and as brethren, because children of the same Father, saying, “Our Father, deliver us from evil.” So God has beautifully arranged it that we can never pray selfishly; however selfishly you may live, you must pray in the plural number.

“Our Father, deliver us,” if you pray as Christ taught you. So He has made sympathy one with another, the feeling of brotherhood, the consciousness of common wants, and sympathy with each other in common danger, to be part and parcel, as it were, of our daily prayer. No man prays for himself who does not in that prayer pray for his brother also. Beautiful it is that on each Sabbath, as it dawns, belts, as it were, of petitioning brethren surround the globe like a bright and a broadening zone of light each one looking up to the common Father, in one common Saviour, and crying one for another, and one with another, in the name of Jesus, “Our Father, deliver us from evil.” And beautiful it is to think that these very words were prayed by Polycarp at the stake, by Ignatius amid the wild beasts, by the Apostles when they suffered martyrdom at Patmos, in the silent subterranean catacombs of Rome, in the crypts and dungeons in

which martyrs were crowded, in the Cottian Alps, in the cells of the inquisition, upon the grey moors and bleak hills of the North, on Smithfield when martyrs were burned; and that this cry, “Deliver us from evil,” has arisen from redeemed and believing humanity in all ages, in all circumstances, and in all places; and ever as it rises it approaches nearer to the universal response when creation (says the Apostle) shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, and restored to the glorious liberty of the children of God. We are delivered from the curse of sin by the blood of Christ; we are delivered from the power and pollution of sin by the Spirit of Christ; and whilst we never forget the preface that runs through the whole prayer precedes every petition, “Our Father,” let us never forget the name that ends every petition and closes the whole prayer,—“in thy name, through the mediation, the shed blood, and prevailing intercession of the Lamb that was slain for us, our only and perfect oblation and sacrifice.”

Having thus tried to explain the truths embodied in this beautiful petition, let me now call upon you who have been delivered from many evils—and if Christians, you have been so delivered—to come to the table of the Lord, and there express your thankfulness for it. Have you been delivered from the bondage of slavery into the glorious freedom of the sons of God? Have you been delivered from the curse of unforgiven sin, and introduced into the sunshine and enjoyment of the blessedness of that man whose sins are forgiven, and whose iniquities are covered? Have you been delivered from those suspicions of God that so dishonour Him? from those doubts of the faithfulness of God that so injure you? Have you been delivered from despair, from despondency, from gloom, from fear, from sorrow, from trial? Then, brethren, let us at that table, silently, it is true, visibly, it is equally true, acknowledge God our Father to be the deliverer, and, before all who like to look on, not be ashamed to say so. Have you, in the next place, been delivered from afflictions in your family—from sickness which has laid you on the sick-bed? Have you been spared from plague, and pestilence, and famine; and for no reason upon earth in yourselves, but only for some reason known to God out of yourselves? Then, are you not asking, “What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits to me?” While this friend is numbered with the dead, whilst that relative sleeps,—his ashes in the silent tomb—while the green turf covers that brother,—why does the roof-tree cover me and mine, still healthy and happy? While many a bright fire has been quenched, and many a heart round it is bleeding, why is it that mine burns so cheerily, and that my heart bounds so joyfully? There was nothing in yourselves; it was not the precautions you took, valuable as these,