

"Our" Father."

BY SPENSER B. MEESER, D. D.

LET us take this last name of God,—Christ's name for Him, that almost exclusive name which Jesus used which he taught us to use, by which he referred to God constantly, the name Father,—and see what follows concerning prayer. The Christian conception of God, as gleaned from all names given Him in the Holy Scripture, but especially from this one, is of a Divine Person. That such is the Biblical conception can be freely admitted: what relation has it to prayer and answer to prayer?

First, "Father" is the name for a personal being related to other persons.

And instinctively we feel that prayer has rationale, the moment we think of God as a Person; and there is the sense of still greater probability when we regard Him as Father, and the image of a needy child appealing to a strong parent comes before our imaginations. Familiarity with such a conception of God, is the surest cure for the fatalism of some theologues, and the equal fatalism of science. Fatherhood means more than procreation. It is Charles Kingsley, I think, who says somewhere, "if anyone is troubled with doubts about prayer, these two simple words 'Our Father,' if he can once really believe them in their full richness and depth, will make doubts vanish in a moment, and prayer seem the most natural and reasonable of all acts."

What an inspiration which led our Lord to place at the beginning of His model of prayer, the very name which stands for Fatherhood! Begin there always, "Our Father"; for, if that name is not true, possibly it is of no worth to pray; but, if it be true, then prayer has double good reason. It regards Him as Person, not force or mind only; not lost in the impersonal material of the world, or an impulse in mighty forces. As Person He is above the greater than all His creation. He can give or withhold. Yeal and more. He is the kind of a Person to ask for help and blessing. He has a heart, He can be touched by our need, He has children, so,—

Secondly,—He is personally related to men, "Our Father." We are not related to Him, simply as the most powerful thing, as the most lasting thing, as so much force or might, as the work of a man's hand to his genius and skill, or a rolling wave to the force of gravity. We are not simply the creatures of mind and will, of intelligence and force, we are children and related children to a Father, the creatures of His heart, His love and mercy. It is a personal relation, we are His relatives. God is personally related to men. Fatherhood means closest personal relation. He is a Father to children,—that means provider, helper, guide, one who seeks our advantage and responds to our need. Divine Providence is the Father's care of children. That is its philosophy and its reason. We are children to the Father, those who serve and obey, who accept counsel and direction, and who return reverence and love with obedience. There is the whole moral order in two words,— "Our Father." And the heart cries out to him, when in need or in trouble, because men feel that he, who revealed himself as Father, cannot be helpless to help, or unwilling to answer the prayer we make.

Thirdly, So these being true, the quest for God, his sympathy, his aid, his interest in our life, and his providence.

We do not come to God by sacrifices, by proxy, by mechanical force, or by philosophy, but by the same method we come to any human person, by approaching him in our own presence. Prayer is the deepest personal quest, because it opens the heart and inner life to another and seeks the same from him. It is person touching person, person seeking Person. Men are not a mass like the substance of the earth, or the stars of Heaven, to be lifted or cast down, or to be set in orbits and started going, to be weighed in balances, or to be expanded by heat or contracted

by cold. We are not pebbles on the sea in an endless wash of the tides of Divine forces, or stars dust in the oceans of space, to fall on the pressing planet, or swim about, lost, in the vast tides of time. Oh, the din of this mechanical idea of life and God, which men have conceived! The rattle and clank of its intricate working most deafens one's soul.

No! we are men, persons, whom the Divine Person seeks, whom our souls make quest for, that we may have converse with Him, that He may help us, that He may make us noble, holy, like Himself. Our communion, our relation with Him is not to be in terms of space and time, of pounds pressure or force power, in impacts of propulsive force, or in aures of friction and inertia. We are not things, neither is He a Thing.

We are to talk to Him, He is to hear us. He is to speak to us, we are to hear Him. He loves us, we are to receive love. We are to love Him, His heart will be glad in our love. He is to work with and for us, we are to work with and for Him. Friends we may be, He the Almighty and Able, we the needy; He the Merciful and Helpful, we the petitioners of His grace. We may walk with God, work with God, talk with God, trust God, live with God, labor for God. And prayer, prayer as we used to offer it,—asking His help and comfort, deliverance from trouble, salvation of our friends, the sparing of our sick and the daily guidance,—we may make with reason and justification, and will make, as soon as we break from the new scepticism that, under guise of wisdom, made us prisoners, and come back into the freedom of the old faith of Christ, that God is Father and Lord of the universe. "Our Father,—give us bread each day, forgive our sins, spare us trial, and save us from evil." Such requests we can freely make when we also say with confidence, "for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory."

Fourthly, So also we know He is accessible to us each. If Jesus had thought to announce the fact that God could be gotten at by each soul, there is no name that would have so well carried the idea as the name Father. I have no special reason in mind for thinking the disciples may have doubted the accessibility of God for each soul. I remember that the Sheckmah no longer gleamed in the Temple, that even when, under wing of Cherubim and Seraphim, the glory shone, that only once a year the High Priest dared enter the Holy of Holies; that, also, only after sacrifices and purifications; and only he, the high priest. I remember that the people had never dared enter there, and that the training of the people had been in reverence and awe for God, and that no names of nearness and accessibility had been given currency in their faith, and that the nation had come to feel that God had removed Himself from them. It may be that they needed the lesson of the accessibility of God, that he had, Jesus gives us the name which carries the thought clearly and beyond dispute,— "Our Father." It is the name which comes closest to life while preserving reverence. It is an invitation in itself to come to God. It says He is near, not afar, neither in space nor in spirit, nor in disposition.

"Speak to Him thou for He hears and Spirit with Spirit can meet— Closer is He than breathing and nearer Than hands and feet."

It is a name of holiest relation, which carries in it a claim upon God,—the claim of the child on the father,—and yet a relation which conserves God's authority and the reverence due Him.

By saying He is accessible to us, we mean not that He simply can be made to hear and know our needs. He knows all the things we have need of before we ask Him. There is more than that in the name. It means He is accessible in heart, that He is touched by the feeling of our infirmities, and is responsive just as a father would be to his child. It means we address One who not only hears, but feels; who not only knows, but cares; who not only has a plan to carry out, but a love for His people to satisfy.

And I believe that it means even more than this; that the Ruler of the universe is moved by love, and orders His rule by the requirements of

love; that He is not put beyond the appeal to human sorrow and need by an order of events to which He is bound; that He has not designed Himself to be an Engineer, but a Father; that human need, appealing to love, can move the universe that is lack of God, because it can move Him who is greater than His creation, and transcends it. In a simple word, it means that we can expect that God will even change the order of events that would occur if no prayer were made, and for love's sake make it different. His will and purpose are fixed only to righteousness, not phenomena; and He is as free as a father to grant the request of an earnest heart. I am simple minded enough to believe that that name means that God will actually answer prayer as I answer the prayer of my child.

We must come back to the Christian idea of God, to the Christ idea, as men of wisdom fast are doing, satisfied that Christ's revelation of God is the best and only satisfactory one. It is "God revealed in Christ," who is to be the God of the oncoming century; not the Machine revealed by science, or the Myth conceived in far Oriental lands. We shall most come to it by way of the Bible names and especially this name,— Father.

FRETTING.

"I dare no more fret," said John Wesley, "than to curse and swear." One who knew him well said that he never saw him low-spirited or fretful in his life. He says: "To have persons at my ears murmuring and fretting at everything is like tearing the flesh from my bones. By the grace of God I am discontented at nothing. I see God sitting on the throne, and ruling all things."

TRAINED INTO VIRTUE.

A writer in the Christian Advocate shows how necessary is the training of hardship and self-denial. He says: The attainment of every manly quality is attended for self-denial. Those who read George Kennan's stories of his adventures in Siberia may imagine that nature endowed him with marvelous courage. It is not so, however. He has recently published a confession that when he was a boy he was often made ashamed by his timidity. At the age of seventeen he had become perfectly morbid on account of fear, and resolved to overcome it at all hazards. He made up his mind to go wherever danger presented itself in order to conquer his fear. He went into the most dangerous streets and alleys of Cincinnati after midnight, saying to his cowardice, "Get these behind me." By such rigid discipline he gradually gained self-respect and confidence, and at last lost all feeling of fear in the presence of the gravest perils.

Religious News.

For the past four weeks 4TH HILLSBORO. Evangelist J. A. Marple has been assisting us in special meetings with the 4th Hillsboro church, and the Lord has blessed his labors with us in the reviving of the church and the salvation of souls. On Sunday, Dec. 1st, eight were baptized into the fellowship of the above named church. At the close of the special meetings on the 7th, William Bishop and Watson Osborne were ordained deacons. We are now at work with the Caldonia church and already a number have confessed Christ. Brethren pray for us.

A. A. RUTLEDGE.

SACKVILLE. Of late our church has been wonderfully blessed of God. Several have found the Saviour precious to their souls. We have enjoyed the pleasure of seeing converts following their Lord in baptism the four consecutive Sun-