

PRAYING IN SECRET.

BY THE REV. E. E. JENKINS, M.A.

"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."—MATT. vi. 6.

WE ministers are frequently conversing with men of business, and when the conversation takes a religious turn, there is a sadness about it. When they tell us what is in their hearts, and when they tell us what is the subject of their fears, one does not wonder at the sadness. In addition to that unspeakably negative temper in regard to Christ which Christ Himself condemns as positive antagonism, and which largely infects the atmosphere which our men of business are compelled to breathe every day, your faith has to stand frequent attacks. There is, first, the conversation of respectable, moral, godless men, which sometimes goes out of its way to cast a sneer upon the faith of Jesus Christ; then there is the intellectual, anti-Christian spirit of the daily Press; and then there is a half-learned science, correct enough in its facts, but startling your most precious traditions by the audacity of its generalisations; and there is, unhappily, a spirit—I pray God it may not be ours—of unworthy hesitation, in the daily growth of the Church, and in the testimony of Christian experience; and, lastly—the most mournful peril of the series—there is, I am afraid, in all of us, I am sure, in most of us, an active bias of unbelief, a sympathy with doubt, a mental unrest.

You cannot find a refuge from this danger in the perusal of the books of our Christian evidence; you have not time to study them, and if you had, and were able to master them, it is very likely that your apologies would answer every question but the question you wished answered, and would remove every difficulty but the particular difficulty which embarrassed you. You can resort to the sanctuary. Thank God, that is an open retreat for us! Here you can find effectual help. Books, the dogmatic teaching of the pulpit, intellectual authority, united confessions, and sympathy with the devotion of numbers, are intended by the Holy Ghost to be instruments for the revival of our faith; but though you must not neglect the house of God, and must not neglect the obligations of Christian fellowship, your defence against the attacks of a sceptical world is strictly in private, and rests on your secret retirement with God.

Some will say, "We have not time for it." You will have time to die; you will have time to decay; have you no time to preserve your spiritual life? In the closet we try our faith upon God. We prove Him in private; we challenge Him in public. When we go into our closet we are separated from the excitement and sympathies of human fellowship. We are guided to the mercy-seat by no human voice; we depend upon no holy symbol; alone with God we are obliged to dwell very much indeed upon ourselves. The world is not not before us, and no one is at our elbow to tell us what to do; we are shut up with God; we are silent, and no one sees us; and when we pray and wait for light, and trust begins to dawn, and day slides into our souls, the light brings the hidden things of darkness into a prominence that appals us, and we wish them back.

You and I have heard many wonderful sermons—sermons that searched our hearts through and through; but we have never had elsewhere such revelations as we have had in the closet. Our hypocrisy, our untruthfulness, our self-conceit, our ingratitude, and the pitiable failure of our life there disclosed, have saddened and appalled us, and we have been ashamed to look around, lest the very furniture of the room should be aware of the conduct we were reviewing.

Yes, you and I have had dreadful revelations when alone with God. We never could have had such knowledge anywhere else. And yet in the deepest shade there was a comfort in the thought that God knew it all. Sin is no barrier; but dissimulation is a barrier; and when everything is open and confessed to God, there is a kind of secret pleasure that He knows it all. And yet, though we be speechless, there is in the silence a mighty cry for faith; and if our thoughts could be made vocal, we should let them escape in some such cry as this—

"Didst Thou ever see a soul
More in need of help than mine?
Then refuse to make me whole,
Then withhold the balm Divine;

But if I do need Thee most,
Come, and seek and save the lost.

"Me, the vilest of the race,
Most unholy, most unclean;
Me, the furthest from Thy face,
Full of misery and sin;
Me with arms of love receive;
Me of sinners chief forgive."

Blessed be God, the light that brings us into fellowship with the Father, brings into alarming contrast His purity and our vileness; and we feel our need of fellowship also with the Son, Jesus Christ, our refuge. The Father draws us into the refuge, and when we get into it, we try it, its sufficiency, its power, its sources of comfort. We are alone with God; we are in Christ; we are filled with the Spirit, and overshadowed with a Divine presence.

That is the way for public work. Oh, these precious words! "He shall reward thee openly"—*openly*." The Father comes into the closet with thee, into the chamber, and when thou shuttest the door, He is there; but when thou goest out He does not stay within, He accompanies thee. In the chamber it is sufficient that when we are listening for God, God will come and listen for us; but when we are away in the world, and reflection is finished for a while, yet we have to do most important business; we have at a moment's notice to decide upon most important issues. We are not thinking of them long beforehand, and we have but little time for thinking then; but in the chamber we consecrated the day to Him: "Grant that this day we fall into no sin, neither run into any kind of danger." We are in the midst of the world's hurry; yet He stands by while we are transacting business, and He saves us from errors; He restrains others, but others do not see Him; and He rewards us openly, taking charge of the open life.

Oh, how wonderfully does this tell upon us ministers! My brethren, when God pours out His Spirit upon us in the chamber, and baptizes us with the Holy Ghost, then it is that we feel in the pulpit the power which works on the judgments and the consciences of men. Ofttimes—and my brethren will join me in what I am going to say in these two or three concluding words—ofttimes in the house of prayer we seem to be on the very threshold, on the border of Canaan, our inheritance; we seem brought up to a crisis; and yet for want of another effort of faith the blessing has been withheld, and the congregation has broken up. Brethren, if the people of God and the minister, before they came into the house of prayer, had prepared for their work by prayer and faith in the closet, and proved God there, then they would have inherited the land.

May the Lord bless these observations! May He speak the command to my heart and to yours: "Enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly." May God grant His blessing! Amen.

TIME.

The hours glide on, they noiseless pass
Like footsteps on the summer grass.
We onward haste, then look behind,
But no trace of our steps can find.
And so each minute, hour, and day,
We count not till they've passed away.
But that hour which the year doth end,
Which ends the Old, and brings the New,
To it our hearts perforce attend,
Whilst years long past our thoughts review.
"Count up my hours," the Old Year cries,
"And let them to thy memory rise.
Count up my hours—they'll soon be gone,
The New Year cometh quickly on;
Count up my hours—they swiftly fly,
I'm passing surely—rapidly.
Count them—they ne'er will come again,
Ah! wilt thou have them spent in vain?
Those precious hours that God hath lent,
Say, have they to His praise been spent?
Serve Him—and then, come joys, come woes,
Each year for thee most peacefully close."

From the French of Alphonse de Lamartine.