

patriarchs and prophets. It is also a prominent feature of the Gospel economy. It was practiced in the homes of the primitive christians. Tertullian says, "they are united in spirit and in flesh; they kneel down together, they pray and fast together, they teach, exhort and support each other with gentleness." The Reformation period of the 16th century was marked by the glow of piety flashing upon the home altar. Genuine christians in every age and country have felt it as being essential to their very existence, to keep the flame burning continually upon the family altar. It is a well known fact that declension in religion commences by the omission of the closet and family devotion. Hence, how true that,

"Prayer is the Christian's vital breath, the Christian's native air;
His watchword at the gates of death: he enters heaven with prayer."

We see, therefore that family devotion is not a trifling measure, but an essential ingredient in the very constitution of home, and co-existent with home itself. The necessity of family prayer arises out of the constitution and mission of home. Family mercies and blessings, family weaknesses and dangers, family hopes and temptations,—all bespeak the importance of family worship.

The duty therefore to establish and maintain family prayer is imperative. It is a privilege and blessing as well as a duty incumbent. It is the condition of parental efficiency in the discharge of all other duties; and the true mission of home cannot be complete without it. The moral and spiritual development of the household depends upon it. All instruction, discipline and example of parents are vain without it. When faithfully performed it is one of the most effective means of grace. It is a powerful bulwark against sin; a benign promoter of family peace, prosperity and happiness—its hallowed and harmonizing influences distilling like the dew of Hermon, thus forming home into a paradise, and causing each member thereof to realize "how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity;" and that *here* the Lord commands "the blessing even life for evermore." Family devotion is moreover a sure preparation for the sorrows and separations which sooner or later must overtake every household. Its influence not only smooths the pillow of death, but restores many a prodigal to his father's house. Hence nothing can justify its omission. Christian parents are bound to the performance of this duty by the most sacred covenant obligations as well as by the interests of their household. Those who have dedicated their little ones to God in baptism, and pledged themselves to train them for His service, cannot be faithful to their vows, or hope to see their children walk in the true path, if the family altar is neglected.

Notwithstanding, it is fearful to contemplate that no home-duty is more grossly abused and neglected than that of family prayer. Many attend to it only in a formal manner and at intervals—perhaps only in times of sickness and distress, or on the Sabbath. Others observe it more regularly, merely to satisfy their conscience of having discharged a duty; without seriously considering that, "Prayer is an offering up of *our desires* unto God for things agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of His