

character. The specification of a *period* is liable to become a snare. It suggests to them the notion of something great to be done in a given time, and then there is to be an end of it, and they may return to their old habits. Vast numbers came out during the week who will be seen at the ordinary gatherings for prayer no more till the next great occasion.

On carefully looking through the Scriptures, we find no precedent for these settled periods. The only limit to the special supplications there set forth was the bestowment of the blessing. If, for instance, we look at Daniel, we find there was no fixed period resolved upon at the close of which he had resolved to stop. He "set his heart to understand," and continued to pray on "three full weeks," till he obtained an answer to his supplication. Had the time been double, treble, tenfold, he would have persevered.

So, too, in the New Testament, Paul besought the Lord "thrice" concerning his "thorn" before he got an answer; and it is clear, that, had it not then come, he would have gone on regardless of the number. In the beautiful parable of the Saviour concerning the widow and the unjust judge, the object was not to enjoin prayer for fixed periods, but "always." The widow did not settle with herself to apply a certain number of times, and then, if unsuccessful, drop it; she thought of no limit other than success. This it was that roused the wicked man. The thought of her "continual coming" alarmed him; and hence he did her justice, that he might get rid of her importunity!

There is, verily, a fault among Christians upon this subject. The bulk have no adequate conception of the "prayer that has power with God." When once the Spirit of God shall descend in power, and, as in the case of Paul, "work mightily" in the souls of the faithful, prayer will then become an awful exercise. It will rise to agony! It will be assimilated to the prayer of our Great High Priest Himself, when, in the days of His flesh, He offered up His prayers "with strong crying and tears!" That, *that* is the "effectual fervent prayer of the righteous, which availeth much." The great Essayist, Foster, had correct and elevated conceptions when he penned the following passage:—

"I am assured, also, that in a pious mind the humiliating estimate of means and human power, and the consequent sinking down of all lofty expectations founded on them, will leave one single means, and that far the best of all, to be held, not only of undiminished, but of more eminent value than ever was ascribed to it before. The noblest of all human means must be that which obtains the exertion of Divine power. The means which—introducing no foreign agency—are applied directly and immediately to their objects, seem to bear such a defined proportion to those objects as to assign and limit the probable effect. The strict proportion exists no longer, and therefore the possible effects become too great for calculation, when that expedient is solemnly employed which is appointed as the means of engaging the Divine energy to act on the object. If the only means by which Jehoshaphat sought to overcome his superior enemy had been his troops, horses, and arms, the proportion between these means and the end would have been perfectly assignable, and the probable result of the conflict a matter of ordinary calculation. But when he said, 'Neither know we what to do, but our eyes are up unto Thee,' he moved (I speak it reverently) a new and infinite force to invade the host of Moab and Ammon; and the consequence displayed in their camp the difference between an irreligious leader, who