

## PRAYER.—No. 1.

"And when thou prayest thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are : for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou when thou prayest ; enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father who is in secret ; and thy Father who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly."

Our present subject is the utility of secret prayer. We shall not attempt to exhaust it ; we shall only briefly notice and illustrate some of the most obvious benefits which result from this part of Christian devotion.

1. The first of these is the cultivation of our own spiritual nature. If it is a law of the human constitution, that all its powers and susceptibilities are developed and strengthened by exercise, then what can be more beneficial than the devotions of the closet ? There is no other place beneath the heavens, that is so favorable for the legitimate exercise of our moral faculties. Even in the religious assembly, the attention is often arrested, and the heart made to wander, by some improper display of the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. But from the closet, all such evil influences are excluded. There is no motive to deceive or to make a vain display of our persons, our dress, and our good works. But there the mind turns in upon itself. There the conscience is awakened. There we see ourselves in the light of Heaven. And there, under the deep, solemn, conviction, that we are on holy ground, and that the eye of God is upon us, we are almost compelled to be humble ; to repent of our sins ; to forgive our enemies ; to sympathise with the afflicted ; to adore our Creator ; to love our Redeemer : and to exercise all the powers of our souls in harmony with the will of God.

An hour in the closet may, therefore, do more to rectify and strengthen our religious impressions and moral faculties, than many days of ordinary service in the public congregation. And hence all the great moral heroes of the world, have been distinguished for their devotion to the closet, and for the consecration of much of their time to the duties and privileges of secret prayer.

2. It forms a habit of close union, communion, and fellowship with God. The law of habit is well understood. All men live and act under its influence. The man who frequents the theatre, the ball-room, the drinking or the gambling saloon, soon feels that he is by an invisible and almost irresistible influence drawn to these haunts of idleness, vice, and dissipation. He may see poverty, disgrace, misery, and wretchedness before him ; and he may feel the awful forebodings of an awakened conscience within him ; but the force of habit overcomes all his fears and feeble resolutions. Under its still increasing power, he visits and revisits these charnel-houses of iniquity, till a dart strikes through his liver, and by his own folly he seals forever the doom of his eternal infamy.