

true dignity of his manhood, conceiving a high idea of character and self-control, he sets that idea up before him in an ideal which he aims to reach. He believes in the positive power of prayer; and so he shuts himself up daily alone with God, and makes this grand self-conquest the subject of earnest wrestling with God. He believes God hears him, and that he receives a higher divine help and strength. He goes out of his closet, consciously stronger, like a giant exhilarated with new wine, and in course of time he actually becomes a transformed man; his bodily appetites are no longer his masters, but his slaves; greed no longer vexes him with an insatiate lust of gold; ambition no longer excites him with an insane desire for place and power; he becomes gentle and generous, meek and unselfish, and renewed in the whole tone and temper of his being. He attributes it all to the power of God working in him, in answer to those mighty daily wrestlings with God.

Now your transcendental philosopher says: "All this is a harmless delusion, but let him believe it, if it comforts him. The fact is, that God has nothing to do with the matter; it is simply self-culture. The man has been reflecting, and sees his true self mirrored. He sees his moral deformities and sets himself to correct them. He forms a true idea of what man ought to be, then he shapes his idea into an ideal, perhaps an example; some heroic soul, living or dead, becomes a perpetual presence before him, inciting and inspiring to a noble victory over self." Seneca advised one of his friends to represent to himself Cato, Socrates or some other sage, as a constant observer, a formative power. Alexander's statue inflamed Cæsar, and Cæsar's image inspired Napoleon. The victories of Miltiades would not suffer Themistocles to sleep, and so Themistocles became the rival of Miltiades for military glory. In some such way does modern naturalism account for all spiritual attainments and achievements secured by the praying soul. They are the natural

results of self-serutiny and self-conquest and self-culture, under lofty ideas and elevating and educating ideals of character and destiny. A man puts his hand on a lever, and by it lifts a weight which, without it, he could not stir from its place; or he pulls himself up by a pulley-rope. He thinks that God's power is exerted on the lever, and raises him by the pulley; in fact, says the skeptic, it is only a right application of human strength in accordance with laws of natural philosophy.

I give to the naturalist's explanation of prayer ample room, because I want the theory fully apprehended, that we may be warned against its plausible philosophy, and that I may present the answer both of Bible truth and historic fact.

There is no doubt that, as far as this explanation goes, it is true; but it is only a half truth. There is a whole hemisphere of truth and of fact, not visible from this point of view, not included within this horizon.

The text affirms a positive advantage in prayer. "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them." Here Jehovah is represented as hearing prayer and interposing to save the suppliant. And the idea is further expanded by a reference to the deliverances wrought by the "Lord's angel." This reference carried great weight to a Jew. The angel of the Lord was a historic reality, working supernatural signs and wonders all through that wonderful career of the chosen people of God. Not less than one hundred times does this mysterious personage appear in Hebrew history, and with what marvelous miracles are his golden footsteps attended! He pours a rain of fire on Sodom, and opens a fountain for Hagar in the desert, and provides a lamb for Abraham's altar; he smites the first-born of Egypt, and guides the exodus of Israel; he arrests Balaam with his drawn sword of flame, and consumes Gideon's cakes with miraculous fire; he ascends un-

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