

devout men, and, in thoughtful minds, is taking the place of a former and more imperfect idea of the nature and object of prayer. More than thirty years ago, Professor Jowett wrote in *Essays and Reviews* the following trenchant remarks on the subject:

"There is nothing that more requires to be stated than that prayer is a mental, moral, spiritual process, a communion or conversation with God, or an aspiration after Him, and resignation to Him, an anticipation of Heaven, an identification of self with the highest law, the truest idea, the blending of true thought and true feeling; of the will and the understanding, containing also the recognition that we ask for nothing but to be better, stronger, truer, deeper than we are."

To conceive of prayer in the simple light of filial speech with the Father of the spirits of all flesh, in which His child seeks "to realize and vitalize his relations with the Supreme and Eternal Spirit," is to embrace a conscious connection with God's purposes, which are evolving by a Divine process the answer to prayer,—a devout communion with an Almighty and All-loving Helper, a tender yet righteous and holy Father. The will is thus brought into line with the Divine will, and the sense of co-operative dependence and trusts rests on whatever means the Divine Father may be pleased to use to carry forward His beneficent designs for ourselves and for others.

It is, perhaps, less difficult to understand the value of this communing with God, as far as it effects our personal growth in that which makes for our highest good, than it is when our converse goes out on behalf of those who are living in ignorance, darkness, or sin. We naturally pray that these may experience such change as shall bring them the good we ourselves are conscious of receiving. We ask God to bring about this result, and so we pray for the "conversion of the

heathen at home and abroad." Is this right? Certainly it is. But it is an imperfect conception of facts if we think we care more about it than God does, or that we are to urge Him with prolonged importunity to work out this result. He is always working, even though we may not understand His way; and, so far as we are concerned with the work, prayer will become the avenue by which we discover that our first duty is that of obedient sonship, seeing to learn how we can best co-operate with the mind of God for the uplifting of the race. In short, prayer is translated into active co-working with God; it is God in action through us—"The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working." (R. V.)

The child-mind begins very early to feel the necessity of asking for what it desires. Material benefit is its first quest. By degrees it becomes conscious of wants which are not material, and learns their nature by intuition, as well as by observation of what the parent desires. The feeblest utterances or dim yearnings of child-life in spiritual things should not be despised or condemned, even when they take a very primitive and material form. It is an important part of the duty of parents, teachers and preachers to lead the mental perceptions of the child, as he is able to bear it, into correct lines of thought on the nature and privilege of prayer. When the kindergarten and picture-book stages of mental training are passed, they will be found to have formed a valuable base for the development of higher mental activities. So in spiritual education, a child will soon comprehend from the lesson of its material wants supplied by a parent's care, the supply which the Father in heaven only can give to the spiritual needs of His child, and for which He imparts the impulse of prayer—which is asking—in order that the heart of His child may be receptive of His good. The words of a