

ually scorns the Almighty—his soul, and the happiness of eternity; that,—he deliberately keeps himself detached from all that could save him from plunging into perdition!

Next, if we would cast an all-penetrating look through what is performed under a semblance and name of prayer; the slight formalities of it in private; the public ceremonial performances. Would it not be the mere affectation of charity to doubt whether it be the fact, that a vast majority of the performers never pray at all? If it might, by Him that knows, be revealed to you in how many instances, a vital earnest breathing of soul goes out to Him, would you not, in terror and pity, decline such knowledge? "Let me not see the proofs against my fellow mortals, of what I already too sadly believe."

But it was not so much our purpose to animadvert on the entire absence of real prayer, as to make a few admonitory observations on the great defectiveness of it in those who do feel its importance, and are not wholly strangers to its genuine exercise. And which of us can assume to stand clearly out of the reach of such admonition? "Thou restrainest prayer before God."

It may well come upon our thought to reflect how much of this exercise, in its genuine quality, there is or has been in the course of our life habitually. How much do we see marked and distinguished by this sacred colour? How much, as compared with our other exercises of mind and speech? There should be some proportion in things. A matter of pre-eminent importance should not be reduced to occupy some diminutive interstices and corners of the active system. A mere worldly-wise man is seen acting on this principle of proportion in things. Then, as Christians, how is it with us in this important matter?

That which is confessedly the most powerful of all our means and resources for good should not be left nearly out of use, for us to extol the while its great power, and be miserable through a dependence on other means. If the people on the parched tracts along the Nile had a mighty engine for raising the water to irrigate their fields, what would be thought of them for toiling with little earthen vessels, from which the element would almost evaporate while they were carrying it? Now look at our means for good. There is one pre-eminent; is just that the one that lies nearly unemployed? One image of this sort suggests another. The poor, superstitious multitudes of India believe that their adored river comes from heaven, and they are consistent. They pant to go to it; they have recourse to it with eager devotion; they purify their vessels with it, and themselves; they consider it a precious element in their food; they are happy to be carried to its banks when dying. Now if we know that our grand resource of prayer is a blessed privilege granted from

heaven, of a peculiarly heavenly quality, where is our consistency, if we are indifferent and sparing in the use of it?

"Thou restrainest prayer before God." Is there a very frequent, or even a prevailing reluctance to it, so that the chief feeling regarding it is but a haunting sense of duty, and of guilt in the neglect? This were a serious cause for alarm, lest all be wrong within. A consciousness like this, is a stronger summons to the very exercise itself than if a host of the dead were to arise to command it. That man is infatuated if he withholds prayer. What thing more urgent can mortal have to crave than this,—that he should not have to make out the safety of his state under so fearful a sign!

Is it, in the course of our days, left to uncertainties whether the exercise shall be attended to or not? Is it considered not a positive fixed thing, no more to be dispensed with than our daily bread, or the common recurring offices of life? Is the case so that a man might be supposed to say to himself, "I intend to pray to-day, or this morning, or evening; I hope I shall, but I am not certain, I may fail." *May* you fail? It is, then, too probable that you *will*! "*May* you"—? then that *may* befall you which will teach you what it is to fail of such a duty!—"May you"—? then you *may* lose the very last opportunity that will be granted to you!

Is there a habit of letting come first to be attended, any to inferior thing that may offer itself? A man may judge *when* is the fair and proper time for this exercise. When that time is come shall he wait, as if to see whether any thing else will occur to put in its claim, as if God should be admitted but on the condition that nothing else shall make a claim? He will not have waited long before something *will* come in between, and that will bring something else, and that again some other thing. This great duty is then set aside for an indefinite time, and the disposition lessening at every step, and perhaps the conscience too; and when he reflects, what reproach and shame may he not often feel to think what he has suffered to set it aside! And the weight of the reproach should fall, not on the fact merely of the neglect, but on the disposition of mind which could permit it.

"Thou restrainest prayer before God." "Another time, a later hour, will be much more convenient." How many prayers are thus precluded! "I shall be in a better tone of feeling; my thoughts more composed; there will be less liability to interruption; such an affair I shall have disposed of, and discharged from my mind. It were even irreverent to approach the divine Majesty just as I now feel." As if that commanded serious effort, required in such approach, were not one of the best expedients for putting the mind in order. And then what does experience say, as to the actual occurrence and improvement