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1873

PRAYER AS A POWER.

A

BACCALAUREATE DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED AT

DARTMOUTH COLLEGE,

JUNE 22, 1873.

BY ASA D. SMITH,

PRESIDENT.

CONCORD, N. H. :

PRINTED BY THE REPUBLICAN PRESS ASSOCIATION.

1873.

DISCOURSE.

GENESIS 32: 28.

“FOR AS A PRINCE HAST THOU POWER WITH GOD AND WITH MEN, AND HAST PREVAILED.”

The spirit of prayer, in a qualified sense of the expression, may not inaptly be classed among the natural instincts. There is in the human soul, with all its pride and self-exaltation, a deep and ineradicable sense of dependence. We are neither self-made, we feel, nor self-sustained. We lean perpetually on props without us. In our blindness and weakness, and in the insufficiency of all earthly aids and resources, we turn, by a resistless inward prompting, to a power above us. The idea of God, if it be not innate, is at least most natural—of a God who can and will help us, and whose ear is open to our cry. So prayer has a place in all religions. There is not a mythology but embraces it; there is not a creed, either of Christian or non-Christian lands, but gives it warrant and prominence. Nay, there is scarce a human being, especially where the light of revelation

shines, who does not, after some form or manner, at times if not habitually, take the attitude of a suppliant. This normal tendency of our being is well set forth by Mrs. Barbould. "If prayer," she says, "were not enjoined to the perfection, it would be permitted to the weakness of our nature. We should be betrayed into it if we thought it sin; and pious ejaculations would escape our lips, though we were obliged to preface them with—'God forgive me for praying.'"

But man, in his fallen estate, is a bundle of contradictions; and so, in this relation, as in many others, there is often a lurking, if not an outspoken skepticism. "They say, How doth God know, and is there knowledge with the Most High?" And "what profit shall we have if we pray unto him?" It is the tendency of modern infidelity to eliminate all the great personalities from religion, and to substitute for them unintelligent, impassive forces. It either takes from us wholly a personal God, or the privilege, at least, of communion with him. And "science, falsely so called," lends to the doubter her glass and her crucible. In all the potencies she recognizes, prayer has no place. It may be a harmless and pleasant employment—a profitable exercise to the suppliant himself. But beyond that, she sees no fruit of it. Sad, indeed, are these questionings in one view, but in another we rejoice in them. The recent discussions have turned

the thought of all Christendom to this great subject. The truth in regard to it has been unfolded as never before; and it will be more and more eclaired. God will be more fully revealed to men, and men will be brought nearer to the divine Fatherhood. As presented in the text—one of the most remarkable in the Word of God—and as commended, especially, to those who are just beginning the great battle of life, it will not be found, surely, an inappropriate or unprofitable subject. This passage has reference to the great supplicatory struggle of the patriarch Jacob—that wondrous night-scene, when “there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.” Without entering into the particulars of the inspired narrative, it will suffice to say, that, as well in its unique symbolism as its literal statements, it naturally suggests as our theme, PRAYER AS A POWER.

It is a power, I remark first, following the order of the text, *with God*. It is so, not because of any might or worthiness in us, but of his gracious ordination. He has said, “Ask, and ye shall receive.” And this is repeated and reiterated, in a thousand forms and relations, from the beginning of the Bible to its close. Prayer is not only set forth as a privilege, but enjoined as a duty. And it is urged upon us by an infinite variety of motives, now drawn from the sterner attributes of God, and now from the milder. It is so presented, that we must needs take the

simplest view of it. It is in literal truthfulness he speaks, when he calls himself the hearer and answerer of prayer. Otherwise to judge is to make the whole drift of the scriptures, in this relation, a mockery and a lie. We are to come to our Heavenly Father as children to an earthly; we are to ask as they ask, and receive as they receive. To conceive of it as only a spiritual gymnastic, putting the suppliant in a good mood, but having no further issue, is to make it little more than a vain show, and the promises that authorize it a pretentious illusion. Nay, it would be hard, in this view, to save it from contempt. Think of an earthly father directing and encouraging his children to ask favors of him, and then saying, "I bade you ask, with no thought of giving, but only of the good the asking would do you. I deemed it a profitable mental and moral discipline." Under such conditions, how soon would all prayer cease—nay, all reverence.

As to the blessings to be secured, the range is vast. That it includes spiritual mercies, few who believe in prayer at all are disposed to doubt. Some, indeed, limit its efficacy to these—as to the pardon of sin, to the joy of God's salvation, to the cleansing of the heart, to the wisdom we lack, and to the influences of God's Spirit generally. Of these, as subjects and issues of prayer, the Bible makes emphatic mention. But it mentions, also, temporal benefits. There is

scarce a good pertaining to the present life but it particularly names, either as a thing to be prayed for, or which prayer has secured. I need not remind you how the sick have been healed, prison gates have been opened, armies have been put to flight, the heavens have given rain, and even, as in the case of Daniel, the secrets of Providence have been unlocked. Our Heavenly Father has indeed put into the hands of his children, so to speak, a blank petition, to be filled up at their pleasure. "Be careful for nothing; but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." "In everything"—blessed amplitude of grace! We may bring to the mercy-seat our minor as well as our major troubles. Whatever is a burden to us, whether from its own weight, or from our weakness, it is our privilege to cast upon the great Burden-bearer. In this respect as in others, "to him no high, no low, no great, no small." Nor does the thought of God's care for the lesser matters, as for the falling sparrow and for the hairs of our heads, detract at all from his general providence. It was a fine saying of Ralph Waldo Emerson concerning Froude, that he "is able to see and say wholes, and to see and say particulars." There was a certain divinity of his genius in this regard. So, on an infinitely broader scale, God knows how to harmonize, in his providence, wholes with particulars, and particulars with each other. "Providence

is making a great stir for you," it was remarked once, with a slight tinge of sarcasm, to a man who had been devoutly recounting God's gracious orderings of his private affairs. "Yes, for me," the reply was, "but for others as well, and in the self-same events."

" In human works, though labored on with pain,
A thousand movements scarce one purpose gain ;
In God's, one single can its end produce,
Which serves to second, too, some other use."

He can so correlate the diverse and multitudinous facts of earth's history, that the gracious answer to prayer in a single case shall affect not the recipient alone, but thousands of his fellow men—nay, all, it may be. Like the little pebble cast into the lake, it may send circling waves of influence to the farthest shore of being. As in the material world, according to the fancy of some, the vibrations caused by the human voice never cease, so, in a spiritual sense, the atmosphere about us may be stirred, at this very moment, by utterances of supplication from the earliest ages.

We may well pause and ask here, however—especially in view of the recent questionings of science—whether, as touching the power of prayer, there is no qualification or limitation. May we hope to receive, literally and exactly, whatever we ask? An inquiry this of great moment, as it stands related to fanaticism on the one hand, and to skepticism on

the other. Our reply to it will be brief, but frank and exhaustive. We shall contemplate therein not miraculous interferences, such as pertained, for important purposes, to bygone ages, but such answers to prayer as may be looked for now. And we shall take for our guide, as the only final authority, the Word of God.

Prayer, to be prevalent, we say, then, in the first place, must be uttered in faith. "He that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Where Christ is known, to say the least, and not to touch on the possibilities of heathendom, he must be believed in; for "he that honoreth not the Son, honoreth not the Father which hath sent him." We must pray, too, in Christ's name—virtually, if not formally; for he is the "one Mediator between God and men." "No man," he says, "cometh unto the Father but by me." Praying thus, we say, in the second place, whatever is particularly and positively promised, we shall surely receive. As, in the case of an earthly father, there may be some requests concerning which he has given unequivocal pre-intimations, so that they may be uttered with no shadow of uncertainty, so is it with our Heavenly Father. He has promised the Holy Spirit to those who ask him; he has promised wisdom, also, and other particular spiritual blessings. He has promised that he will give to his Son the

heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. He has not, indeed, indicated the ways and forms in which these blessings shall come; "the times" and "the seasons" he "hath put in his own power." But that prayer will secure them, he has pledged his word—more abiding than the earth on which we tread, or the heavens that bend over us. As to things not particularly promised, of which the number is vast, we have only to cast ourselves on his general benignity. We may well be encouraged by it, written as it is all over the universe, illustrated as it is on every page of the Bible. Yet "we are but of yesterday, and know nothing." What we ask in our blindness, we might deprecate as granted. Well says the great dramatist:

" We, ignorant of ourselves,
 Beg often our own harms, which the wise powers
 Deny us for our good; so find we profit
 By losing of our prayers."

Where no specific promise guides us, while we have the priceless privilege of spreading all our wants before God, we have only to leave them all with him, saying, with our Great Exemplar, even in the Gethsemanes of our history, "Not my will, but thine be done." To all this I must add, that prayer is a power only as all appropriate means are used. The fable of Hercules and the wagoner does but adumbrate Christian truth. God honors as truly, though not in

precisely the same way, his natural as his moral laws. It is for our weal that the activities required by them should be ever kept in play. Even in the case of miracles, what stress has been laid on human instrumentality. The rod of Moses must be stretched forth; the rock must be smitten; Jericho must be compassed; Elijah must stretch himself upon the dead child. In the wonders wrought by our Lord, though the potency inhered in his mere word, how often is the use of means commended to us. He touches the eyes that are to be opened, or he anoints them with clay. He puts his fingers into the ears that are to be unstopped; he touches the tongue that is to be unloosed, and the leper that is to be cleansed. To complete his cure, the blind man must wash in the pool of Siloam. Much more are means to be used when they are not symbols merely, but veritable second causes. The spirit of prayer is the spirit, also, of accordant action. He who prays only, neglecting appropriate instrumentalities, is either a fanatic, mistaking God's methods, or a pretender, resting in the mere verbiage of supplication.

Keeping in view the qualifications and limitations thus succinctly specified, we are prepared now to aver, that real prayer is always answered in some way. It is, in other words, always a power with God. So is it, as we have said, when we have a specific promise to plead. So, too, when we cast ourselves,

simply, on the divine Fatherhood. If we ask him for bread, he will not give us a stone. It may not be *the* bread, either in substance or in shape, that our fond fancy has conceived; that, he may see, will not be best for us. It may not be, to his all-discerning eye, our fittest soul-food; it would harm, on the whole, instead of helping us. And so he may deny it, that he may give us something better. Just as an earthly father might withhold from his little child the edge-tool that would be perilous, or the viand that would work evil, only that he may show his love by some wiser gift. In this view, we judge, we have a key to all those passages, save only such as relate to miracles, which assure us that faith will secure whatever it asks. Faith never dictates. Faith asks submissively. Faith means always, "This, if it please thee; or something else, if, in thy sight, that is better. Give me, for my seeming needs, if it may be so, the meat which perisheth; but give me, at least, that meat 'which endureth unto everlasting life.'" Faith regards all temporal good as but the shadow of the spiritual and the eternal; and it deems its prayer for the former answered, if, instead thereof, the latter is granted. Even spiritual blessings come to the suppliant often in disguise. They may be as God's good angels about him, while he detects not their footfall or the rustle of their wings. They may be within the heart's portal, when there seems for the moment

to be but loneliness there. Beautifully is this set forth by an oriental poet,—albeit of another faith than ours :

“ Allah ! was all night long the cry of one oppressed with care,
Till softened was his heart, and sweet became his lips with prayer.
Then near the subtle tempter stole, and spake, Fond babbler, cease,
For not one *Here am I* has God e'er sent to give thee peace.
With sorrow sank the suppliant's heart, and all his senses fled ;
But at night's noon, Elias came, and gently spake and said,
What ails thee now, my child, and whence art thou afraid to pray,
And why thy former love dost thou repent? Declare and say.
Ah ! cries he, Never once to me spake God, *Here am I, son !*
Cast off, methinks I am, and warned far from his gracious throne.
To whom Elias, Hear, my son ! the word from God I bear ;
Go tell, he said, yon mourner, sunk in sorrow and despair,
Each *Lord, appear*, thy lips pronounce, contains my *Here am I* ;
A special messenger I send beneath thine every sigh.
Thy love is but a girdle of the love I bear to thee,
And sleeping in thy *Come, O Lord*, there lies *Here, son*, from me.”

It is in place here, and will meet the demands of our subject, to glance at the views of one of the most eminent of our modern scientists. I refer to Professor John Tyndall. I utter his name—as it suggests his own remarkable history, and as it stands related to the progress of human knowledge—with a feeling of profound admiration. A man who, with a diligence that never tires, a will that quails not before the most appalling obstacles, a keenness of insight that stops not short of the deepest mysteries of nature, has made his way from obscurity to his present proud position ; a man whose genius has illumined so broad and diversified a field of science, reaching from

the cold glaciers of the Alps, through cloud and rain and river and rivulet, down to the central fires—yea, to the innermost secret of those fires; is worthy to be heard with respectful consideration. Christian charity would fain have for him no scornful words. It would ill comport with his own emphatic utterances to deem him an atheist; we are slow even to pronounce him an infidel. We are willing to believe that he has been too severely judged by many. He discards not prayer; he thinks “not otherwise than solemnly,” he declares, “of the feeling that prompts it.” He denies not even—after the puerile fashion of the Westminster Review and its coadjutors—the possibility of miracles. “There is no inherent unreasonableness,” he says, “in the act of prayer”—in that act, he means, as it respects even the physical sphere. “The theory,” he adds, “that the system of nature is under the control of a Being who changes phenomena in compliance with the prayers of men, is, in my opinion, a perfectly legitimate one.” He only asks that this theory be verified; and it is in relation, almost solely, to the test he proposes, that we take exception to his views.

He errs, we say in the first place, when he represents us as holding that prayer is, in certain relations, “a form of physical energy.” We hold no such thing. We never identify it with a law of nature; we regard it rather as a purely spiritual force, issuing from the

depths of the free spirit in man, and reaching and moving the Infinite Spirit. Mr. Tyndall seems, indeed, to be not quite sure of his own statement; for he adds, "or as the equivalent of such energy." Be it so, in some sense. Admit that in some cases, like results come of both. Are equivalents in this regard always identical? Do they belong to the same category? Are they subject to the same laws? A kind word may soothe as well as an anodyne, but is it framed, therefore, by the pharmacopœia? A sermon may induce sleep as well as the juice of the poppy, but would you test it, therefore, by the chemist's reagents? A physical force is, *ex vi termini, in nature*—part and parcel of it; prayer and the divine power it invokes,—in other words, the power of prayer,—is *without* and *above* nature. Nature is affected by both, but what folly to confound them. Prayer is no more "a form of physical energy" than is the cry of a suffering child, or the pity it awakens in a father's heart.

Erring at this point, it is not strange that he errs as touching the test of prayer. How inept and impossible, clearly, is the verification he proposes. This is evident from the nature and conditions, as we have stated them, of all prevalent supplication. It is to be offered in faith; but in what laboratory of man—by what analysis, either of science or philosophy—is that to be surely detected? The power must be present,

of course, or you have no right to count on the effect. To ordinary prayer for physical benefits, we look in vain, moreover, for specific promises. They are all of a general character. We commit our case, as we have said, to the infinite benignity of our Heavenly Father, and to his unerring wisdom. But who can say, with certainty, what will be best for us, or what he can consistently do? "Who, by searching, can find out God?" That various forms of natural good, such as rain from heaven and the restoration of health, are sometimes granted in answer to our petitions, we have reason, both on experimental and historical grounds, to believe; and what is more, this belief is warranted by the infallible word of God. In that we rest. But that prayer, in particular instances, may be subjected to some crucial test—as if the mere form of words were of itself a power, working like the forces of nature, certainly, constantly, and invariably—is so near to an absurdity, that we cannot but wonder at its finding a lodgment in a brain like Mr. Tyndall's.

We have doubters, however, respecting the power of prayer, as we intimated at the outset, of a very different character. Their difficulties are of a deeper and broader sort. They plant themselves on the immutability of nature, so far as her essential laws and ongoings are concerned. Law reigns, they tell us, in all the material creation, and law is uniform. It brooks not interference. Its maintenance is essential

to the harmony of the universe—nay, to its stability. If it is liable to be disturbed, at one point and another, by varying modes and measures of spiritual influence, not only may the equilibrium of things be destroyed, the whole system may topple into confusion. Whatever link prayer may strike from the chain of causation, “tenth or ten thousandth, breaks the chain alike.” While confidence in the future is lost, the stimulus to present action is weakened. Nay, as the mind and heart of God are affected, even his immutability is brought into question.

Such, in its length and breadth, is the case against us. We might meet it, if we chose, on the simple ground of faith. If we could frame not the slightest conjecture as to the way in which the reign of law and the prevalence of prayer could be reconciled, the unchangeableness of God and his readiness to hear his children, yet on his testimony we should be sure that they could be reconciled. I would not say with the old divine, “Credo, quia impossibile;” but I would say, I believe because God hath spoken. Like the little child, who paused in his evening devotions, as his eyelids grew heavy with sleep, and faintly murmured, “God knows the rest,” so would I say, at the end of all my own poor wisdom. Yet we are not straitened as to arguments wherewith to vindicate the ways and the utterances of the Most High.

As to the difficulties growing out of the reign of

law, they pertain no more, be it observed, to the material than to the spiritual sphere. For hath not mind its laws as well as matter? The law of liberty in the soul, indeed, or the freedom of the will, would seem to present a special difficulty. The objection in hand, pressed to its full issue, would leave no place for prayer—a result avowedly contemplated by some who urge it. I may say further, that as to the apprehended derangement of nature by the interposition of a divine force, our fears may well be allayed by the fact that we have the analogue of that interposition, as Mr. Tyndall admits, in “the ordinary action of man upon earth.” If his free will may enter harmlessly, and as a distinct but real efficiency, into the complicated tissue of physical causation, why may not God’s? And as to the doctrine of the divine immutability, it is put in no peril. We essay not the metaphysics of God’s nature. That there is to him, as divines have said, “one eternal now,” is doubtless in some sense true. Yet there is a sense, that to which, from the limitations of our being, we must be mainly confined, in which there is succession with him—succession of thoughts, feelings, and deeds. Changeless in his essence and attributes, and so in the principles of his government, he yet varies, as occasions arise, in the application of those principles. Yesterday we sinned, and he frowned upon us; to-day we are penitent, and we share his smile. Yes-

terday we were prayerless, and he withheld priceless blessings; to-day we kneel in suppliance, and from a father's yearning heart those blessings come down. It is only thus he is true to himself, and so, in the best sense, the unchangeable God.

With these preliminary remarks, we pass to the two main theories, by either or both of which, it is believed, the power of prayer may be reconciled with the essential stability of nature. The first has been called the theory of *preëstablished harmony*. It is so called because it recognizes the predetermined concurrence of prayer and the need it meets. A certain exigency, and the cry for help it elicits, are foreseen by God; waiving all speculation about an eternal present, they were foreseen—or foreordained, if you please so to say—before the world was. And the aid implored is also foreordained—not as a miracle, but as the resultant of undisturbed natural forces. A line of causation is established, natural causation, running through the ages, and so timed and adjusted that it brings to the suppliant, in his extremity, just the blessing he asks. At the beginning of Daniel's supplication "the commandment went forth," and the angel Gabriel, "being caused to fly swiftly," touched him before it was ended. At an earlier commandment, in the view we now present, and over a longer track, God's messenger comes, but with a concurrence not less exact and felicitous. Is this harder for God,

think you, than for the cunning weaver so to dispose the threads of his variegated web that they shall cross each other at precisely the right points, each making its contribution to the preconceived figure? There is, according to this theory, no suspension of law, no modification of it. It reigns as ever; and yet God reigns, and graciously answers prayer.

It happened, not long ago, that on one of the railroads of New England, a road with a single track, two trains had started in opposite directions; and they had started at such times, the superintendent learned, that unless they were arrested a collision was inevitable. But there was no way of arresting them. They had both left the only telegraph stations available. As the sole remaining resource, the superintendent telegraphed to one of those stations, directing that a swift car be dispatched immediately—a car which he was assured would reach the point of collision at just the time when, under the pressure of the foreseen calamity, the cry for help would be heard. In this predetermined concurrence, we have an imperfect illustration of what we may conceive to be God's way of answering prayer.

There is a second theory, however, which owes its most brilliant exposition to the genius of Chalmers. I may call it the theory of *occult influence*. It embraces no miracle, in the proper sense of the term; for a miracle is not only "an effect in nature above

nature," it is a *sensible* effect. It is something which, perceived, becomes a *wonder*. Nor does it contemplate, strictly speaking, a suspension of the physical forces—not even an apprehensible counteraction or modification of them. "Prayer," says Chalmers, "may obtain its fulfilment without any visible reversal of the constancies of nature, provided its first effect is upon some latent and interior spring of the mechanism, and not among its palpable evolutions. Let but the touch of communication between the Deity and his works, when he goes forth to meet the desire of any of his creatures, be behind or underneath that surface which marks and measures off the farthest verge of man's possible discovery—and then may there be many a special request which receives as special an accomplishment, yet without disturbance to those wonted successions which either the eye of man or his nicest instruments of observation shall enable him to ascertain." And he goes on to illustrate this view with reference to prayer for a prosperous voyage or for an abundant harvest, answered, possibly, by some divine touch, far down in the unsounded and unsoundable depths of meteorology; and to prayer for the recovery of health, responded to, not by any derangement of the visible ongoing of nature, but by some occult influence in the unexplored recesses of the animal economy. "It is thence," he says, "God may answer prayer; and however proud science shall despise the

affirmation, there is nought in all the laws and sequences that she has ever ascertained, by which she can disprove it."

I met lately with an illustration of this view—given as such by an eminent divine—drawn from a familiar department of human mechanism. In one of the inland cities of New York, beside the river on which it is built, there is a steam engine in a small building, by means of which, as it is kept going day and night, the inhabitants are supplied with water. The machinery is so arranged that the demand of the town acts ordinarily as a governor, the engine moving with greater or less rapidity, according as the water is taken off in greater or less measure. But there is a special provision, a reserved force, for a special exigency. When a fire occurs, by means of wires accessible from without, an alarm bell rings in the engine-room; and the engineer, unseen by the people of the imperilled city, and by methods which they, probably, would but imperfectly understand, gears on some curious extra machinery, by means of which the mains are charged to their fullest capacity, and such an amount of pressure is brought to bear upon them, that the water is sent to the tops of the loftiest buildings. We have here, in the leading particulars—we say not in all—a shadowing forth of the theory in hand. In the ordinary machinery—in the larger and smaller pipes, in faucet and hose, and in the maintenance of the gen-

eral law, supply answering to demand—we have an illustration of the visible constancies and regularities of nature. In the tinkling of the bell, as, rung by some faithful watcher, it falls on a single ear, we have the voice of prayer. In the heart and the hand that respond, and the interposing force, unseen but effective, we have the Infinite Architect and Engineer answering, out of the veiled recesses of the physical sphere, the cry of the earnest suppliant.

What is so clearly possible in the material world is even more conceivable in the world of mind. By facts, experienced or observed, its likelihood, to say the least, is often suggested. It is related of an eminent naval officer, that, as the vessel he commanded was once crossing the ocean, its course brought him in sight of the Island of Ascension, an island at that time uninhabited, and seldom visited by any ship. It met his eye but as a speck on the horizon; yet, strange to say, he was seized with a strong desire to move towards it. He knew how singular such a wish would appear to his crew, and he struggled against it; but it grew more and more intense, and, as they were fast leaving the island behind them, he ordered his lieutenant to prepare to “put about ship” and steer for Ascension. The lieutenant ventured respectfully to remonstrate. He urged the loss of time a change in their course would occasion; and, as the men were just then engaged,

he pleaded for, at least, a little delay. His arguments, however, availed nothing; they rather increased the desire that had mastered the captain, and he gave, at once, the word of command. Though in the faces of all the officers there was an expression of wonder and even of blame, the order was obeyed, and the prow was turned towards the uninteresting little island. All eyes and glasses were immediately fixed upon it, and soon something of an unusual sort was perceived upon the shore. "It is white—it is a flag—it must be a signal!" were the cries which broke at intervals from the excited crew. As they neared the land, a touching spectacle met their view. They found that sixteen men, wrecked on that coast many days before, and suffering the extremity of hunger, had set up the observed signal, though almost without hope of relief. They were taken on board, and the ship that had come thus as God's ministering angel, went on its way.

That cries to heaven for help had risen from some of those shipwrecked men, is, to say the least, highly probable, and that prayers had been offered for them by devout friends at home. Is it irrational to say that those prayers were answered? It may have been in the first of the methods we have indicated. There may have been only the operation of natural causes, the chain thereof reaching down from the eternal purpose to the moment

of need. That remarkable desire of the captain may have come of the normal workings of mind and heart; the reign of law in both may have been unbroken, unmodified, unsupplemented. We know too little of the mysteries of thought and feeling to aver the contrary. Yet this very ignorance favors rather than forbids the theory we are now considering. How very possible is it—according to the seeming of the case, as it would strike most minds—that, far down in the arcana of the soul, there was some special pressure of the divine finger, reaching we know not what cell of memory, stirring we say not what wing of fancy, thrilling we aver not what chords of association, opening we affirm not what founts of feeling,—yet giving such ultimate direction to the will, as wrought salvation for the perishing ones. God is not straitened as touching his access to the mind, or his secret operations there. He has glorious options as to his way of working. And apart from all arrogant and presumptuous dogmatism, and without discarding the great stabilities of nature, it is not difficult to show how, as touching both the physical and the spiritual, prayer may be a power with him.

We pass now, in the second place, to contemplate prayer, according to the suggestion of the text, as *a power with men*. In view of what has been said under the first head, no amplitude of argument or illustra-

tion is needed here. That which moves the hand that moves the universe must needs have power in inferior directions. It gives to the suppliant, we may say, first, *power with other men*. This, both as it exerts a certain direct influence, and as it secures, in various forms, divine aid. It has been beautifully said, "The nearest way to any human heart is round by heaven." So was it in the case of Jacob. There was an influence from above, we may presume, upon the mind of his exasperated brother—"harder to be won," it had seemed, "than the bars of a castle." There was a wisdom of precaution and of conciliation on the patriarch's part—there was a power of suasion in word and look—born, we cannot doubt, of that night of wrestling. You remember the famous saying of Queen Mary, that she feared the prayers of John Knox more than a host of armed men. She had many reasons for fearing. Not only is God with a praying man, his omniscience and omnipotence working for him,—he is himself a power. He is Virgil's good man before the "ignobile vulgus," only on a higher plane and a broader scale. His face shines as did that of Moses. Like Stephen's, it is as "the face of an angel;" and his words come to men with more than angelic authority—it is as if God were working and speaking through him.

There is involved in all this, moreover, what may be called the reflex influence of prayer. If it be real

prayer, from a believing heart and an earnest purpose, it is mightily retroactive; it is *a power with the suppliant's own soul*, and so, as has been intimated, a greater outgoing force. Here, as in other relations, we "give out ourselves, ourselves take back again." Nay, we take back with an increment. There are potent echoes of our supplication; it resounds from the heavenly hills, with a sweet and sanctifying influence, through the innermost recesses of our being. We draw near to God; we commune with infinite excellence; and so, by a law of our spiritual nature, we receive a transforming and elevating influence. We grow into the likeness of the object we contemplate. Even the intellectual being is exalted. "An hour of solitude," says Mr. Coleridge, "passed in sincere and earnest prayer, or the conflict with and conquest over a single passion, or 'subtle bosom sin,' will teach us more of thought, will more effectually awaken the faculty and form the habit of reflection, than a year's study in the schools without them." Hence the old maxim, "Bene orasse, est bene studuisse." It is related of a student here, in years long gone by—a man as distinguished for diligence and success in scholarly pursuits as for fidelity in his religious duties, that he was observed, one morning, to make a strangely imperfect recitation. "Pray, how did it happen?" said a friend. "To tell you the truth," was his answer, "I had neglected my morning devotions." There was a

sound philosophy in that reply. There is not a mental faculty to which prayer gives not a quickening touch. For it is the voice of faith, as we have seen ; and it is well said by the profound writer just quoted, "Never yet did there exist a full faith in the Divine Word, (by whom *light*, as well as immortality, was brought into the world,) which did not expand the intellect while it purified the heart ; which did not multiply the aims and objects of the understanding, while it fixed and simplified those of the desires and passions." Prayer helps the memory even. It gives keenness to perception, and balance to the judgment, and a loftier flight to the imagination. It imparts a serene and commanding self-possession. And, what is more, there is not a Christian grace, be it love, joy, peace, gentleness, meekness, or holy boldness, over which the breath of supplication comes not as that of spring over the nascent buds and flowers :

" Lord, what a change within us one short hour
Spent in thy presence will avail to make!
What heavy burdens from our bosoms take!
What parched grounds refresh as with a shower!
We kneel, and all around us seems to lower ;
We rise, and all, the distant and the near,
Stands forth in sunny outline, brave and clear ;
We kneel, how weak! We rise, how full of power!"

It is through the channel of prayer, above all others, that the soul is "filled with all the fulness of God."

Such is prayer as a power—as a power with God, with our fellow-men, and with ourselves. How do its achievements, as seen in the light of our subject, dwarf all others. We speak of the marvels of modern science, and we render due praise to its successful votaries. But what greater wonders are here. Prayer is the telegraphic wire that stretches beyond the stars. It is the spectroscopic power, unfolding to us the mysteries of the Sun of Righteousness. It is the mighty solvent, that melts away the great mountains of difficulty. It is the divine alchemy, that turns the baser metals of earthly toil and care and sorrow into heaven's own gold. What an ineffable dignity does it impart. How far above the mere kings of men are those who, in this exalted service, are “kings and priests unto God.” No loftier plaudit ever fell upon the ears of a mortal than that which Jacob heard, as the day was breaking upon him—that plaudit which heaven grant it may be ours to hear—“As a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.”

YOUNG GENTLEMEN OF THE GRADUATING CLASS :

As we meet you in these Sabbath solemnities for the last time, very pleasant to us are the memories of your college course. I speak not for myself alone, but for the whole circle of your teachers. And very deep is the interest with which we contemplate your

future. As you stand now on the verge of the great field of action, you have a new sense of its responsibilities, and of the importance of ample preparation for them. You will need for the work before you a various equipment. The highest mental discipline will be called for, and the largest possible acquisition. You will welcome, too, all fitting opportunities, facilities, and helps. But our chief solicitude is, that you may have the best spiritual endowments; that under whatever name you may choose to serve God—a matter, you will bear us witness, which we have ever held as of comparatively little moment—you may all be men of prayer. So, in the highest sense, as to all the great interests, both of time and eternity, you shall be men of power.

There are tender recollections awakened by the scenes of to-day, which specially commend to you this high attainment. There are graves which, to your open ear, are eloquent of it. You think of HUNTLEY, and RICHARDSON, and SMITH, and FOSTER, and CLARK—beloved classmates, with you but as yesterday, with hearts as buoyant and promise as fair as yours—now numbered with the dead! I seem to hear their voices from the spirit land, saying, “Whatever else ye fail of, be men of prayer.” While yet the dew of youth is upon you, you may need, as they did, that only key to the pearly gate. Should long life be yours, yet as cares accumulate, as bur-

dens press upon you, as fierce conflicts arise, as sorrows are multiplied, as temptations cluster about you, you will need, to your latest breath, this divine resource. You will need it in whatever lowly walk, and on whatever shining height. I thank God, as I speak, for the example of one—that honored son of Dartmouth, mourned of late by the whole nation—whose life was a noteworthy illustration of the theme before us. The late Chief Justice CHASE, I joy to believe, was a man of prayer. He bowed the knee, we are told, at the family altar. He communed with God, we doubt not, in the secret place. And the normal issue of that communion was his whole grand career. It is pleasant to remember, that it was in these classic halls, as we have reason to believe, he began his life of devotion. I was affected by the statement, as I lately read it, that, for many hours of the week preceding his decease, he employed his colored servant in reading to him from the recently published sermons of his own College President, the late Dr. BENNET TYLER. How, as page after page was turned, was he carried back, doubtless, to the scenes of his undergraduate life. He was a boy again. He was within these walls as of old. His classmates were about him. The preacher's noble form was before him; and the living voice, so especially persuasive then, as tradition has it, to a life of faith and prayer, was sounding again in his ears and thrilling

his heart. What fitness was there and what suggestiveness—what a memento of the power he had wielded—in the presence and the ministry of that representative of the down-trodden race for whom it had been his joy to dare and to do. And how are we pointed to the chief source of that power, as his life of prayer comes thus to its natural and beautiful close. What a lesson have we in this elder brother, for these younger sons of Dartmouth. Be ye “followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” Be ye men of prayer;—and so, when the last of earth shall come to you, you shall leave blessed memories behind you, and the voice of supplication shall pass into heaven’s anthem of praise.