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The Golden Gate
Of Prayer

J. R. Miller, D.D.

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The Golden Gate of Prayer

The Golden Gate of Prayer

DEVOTIONAL STUDIES ON
THE LORD'S PRAYER

BY

J. R. MILLER, D.D.

AUTHOR OF "SILENT TIMES," "MAKING THE
MOST OF LIFE," "STRENGTH AND BEAUTY," ETC.

*"The path of prayer thyself hast trod:
Lord, teach us how to pray."*

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THE LORD'S PRAYER

OUR FATHER WHICH ART IN HEAVEN

HALLOWED BE THY NAME

THY KINGDOM COME

THY WILL BE DONE IN EARTH, AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD

AND FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS, AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS

AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION

BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL

FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM, AND THE POWER

AND THE GLORY, FOR EVER

AMEN

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Widener

PREFACE

THE *Lord's Prayer* is short, but every word of it is laden with precious meaning. In its few petitions it covers the whole field of prayer. It is easy to repeat its sentences, for we have been saying them from infancy; but it is hard to say it through as a real prayer, for it means the consecration of our whole life to God, and the submission of will, affections, and service to him.

These chapters are not expositions—they are no more than studies. Their aim is to help in a devotional way by calling attention to the meaning of the several petitions, which too often is lost to our thought because of our familiarity with the sacred words.

J. R. M.

Philadelphia.

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“After this Manner”

*“My inmost soul, O Lord, to thee
Leans like a growing flower
Unto the light. I do not know
The day nor blessed hour
When that deep-rooted, daring growth
We call the heart's desire
Shall burst and blossom to a prayer
Within the sacred fire
Of thy great patience ; grow so pure,
So still, so sweet a thing
As perfect prayer must surely be.”*

CHAPTER FIRST

“After this Manner”



WAY we pray? The question is a very important one. There are some who tell us that we may not, that there is no ear to hear, no one anywhere who cares for us and who could do anything for us if he did care. A great Force at the centre of things cannot hear the cries of human distress on the earth or answer them. If that is the only God there is, prayer is vain and nothing comes from it but mocking echoes.

If, however, we accept the teaching of Jesus Christ concerning God, there is no doubt that we may pray. There is one to hear, and that one is our Father. This is the truest answer to all the perplexities about prayer, to all the questions that arise concerning it. God is our

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Father, and we are his children. If we accept this name as a definition of God and as indicating the relation God bears to us and we bear to him, there need be no further question whatever concerning the privilege or the benefit of prayer.

Jesus gave many teachings regarding prayer. The Lord's Prayer gathers these teachings together into an example in a few great sentences. This prayer seems to us very simple and easy, but like all of our Lord's words its petitions are wide and deep, each one carrying an ocean of meaning.

For one thing, the Lord's Prayer teaches us that we all need to pray. Not to pray is to cut ourselves off altogether from God, the source of all good, of all blessing, of all life. No doubt there are men who do not pray and who yet seem to live on and to receive mercies and blessings from God. He does not cut them off from his love though they pay him no honor, recognize him not as their Father. This tells us how gracious

“After this Manner”

God is. “He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust.” He continues to love even when his love is slighted and rejected. He never shuts the door on his child—it stands open day and night to the last.

Nevertheless he is an infinite loser who does not pray. He is leaving out of his life all the best things. He is gathering the weeds and pebbles that lie at his feet and missing the crowns which hang above him, ready to be taken and worn. He is missing the love, the companionship and the help of God, without which life in the end can be only a poor shrivelled thing, to be cast out to perish. The first thing one begins to do when one comes to one’s self, when one has been born from above, is to pray. The Lord said of Saul, an hour ago a fierce persecutor, now a Christian, “Behold, he prayeth.” That was evidence enough that Saul was no longer a dangerous enemy, that he was now a Christian man.

Christ’s teaching makes prayer very easy. We

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do not have to journey far off to some temple of marble and gold to talk with our Father. We do not have to learn a system of theology in order to be able to pray acceptably. It is not necessary for us to approach God in some august way, with elaborate ceremonial, in order to be heard by him. We are to come in the simplest way.

“After this manner” does not mean saying always even the few words of the form of prayer which our Lord gave to us, but refers rather to the spirit of our praying. We are to pray as children. This makes it easy. It is not hard for a child to tell a loving parent its wants, to open its heart and reveal its inner feelings and desires. The most timid child, who shrinks from strangers, feels no embarrassment in the mother’s presence. Glorious as God is, overwhelming as is the majesty which burns about his throne, his children should never dread drawing near to him. We may come boldly to his throne, for it is a throne of grace and love.

“After this Manner”

*“To stretch my hand and touch him,
Though he be far away;
To raise my eyes and see him
Through darkness as through day;
To lift my voice and call him—
This is to pray !*

*“To feel a hand extended
By One who standeth near ;
To view the love that shineth
In eyes serene and clear ;
To know that he is calling—
This is to hear !”*

The Lord's Prayer tells us what we should pray for. It is very brief, but its petitions are most comprehensive. We should study them in order to learn what we may bring to God in our prayer. We do not know what to pray for as we ought. In nothing else do we need the help of Christ more than in making our requests of God. Ofttimes the things we think we need most sorely are not by any means our deepest, most real needs. A man was brought to Jesus

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to have his paralysis cured. That was the prayer which he and his friends made in coming; it was for this that the four men who carried their helpless burden manifested such earnestness, overcoming so many obstacles and hindrances; they thought that this was the man's most pressing need. Jesus looked into the man's life and saw that he had another need greater than this, and first forgave his sins, afterwards curing his paralysis. Forgiveness is always a sorer need than the healing of any sickness. We come to God continually with cries for the taking away of some trial or the supplying of some want. God looks at us and says, "My child, that is not what you need most to have done." He then gives us, not what we have asked, but what he sees we ought to have asked.

We are apt, in our praying, to give more thought to the things that concern our physical life than to those which concern our higher, spiritual interests. We tell God of our sicknesses, and ask him to heal them. We pray to

“After this Banner”

him for our friends who are ill, and implore him to restore them. We bring to him the matter of our daily bread, especially if our food-supply is short or precarious. It is well that we should take everything to God. Nothing that concerns us is too small to be put into a prayer. God hears even the sparrows when they cry for food. But these temporal things should not have the first place in our asking.

Whatever use our Lord meant us to make of the Lord's Prayer as a form of prayer, the order of its petitions is certainly intended to guide us in our approaches to our Father, telling us what to put first. Thus we are taught what are the most important things. The first three requests are for things that concern the honor of God—the hallowing of his name, the coming of his kingdom, the doing of his will. We are half-way to the end before there is a word about ourself and our personal wants. Then only one of the three petitions which refer to our own needs applies to bodily wants, the other two be-

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ing for forgiveness of sins and deliverance in temptation. We are taught thus that the things of God should come first in our praying, not our own wants; and that among our personal needs the most serious are not things for our body but the taking away of our sins and our delivering from evil.

The same truth is taught in that wonderful summary of duty, in which our Lord says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Our prayers are ever to be for the things of God, and then God himself will look after our earthly needs.

*"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."*

The Lord's Prayer calls us to reality and sincerity when we appear before God. Perhaps there is more unreality in our praying than we think there is. How many of us go over the

“After this Manner”

same petitions every time we pray? Probably we have used the same forms for years, with almost the identical words. Is it possible that our wants never vary from day to day? Can it be that we never have any new needs arising from our new conditions and experiences? Then do we really desire all the things we put into our daily prayers? Or how much of what we say is mere rote, a sort of memoriter and almost unconscious praying? It is worth our while to think seriously of this matter. Words without desires are not prayers.

It would be well if we should sit down always before beginning to pray, and think carefully over our wants. What are our deepest needs, the things we should ask God to give us or do for us just now, to-day? What are our heart's actual desires for others, for our close friends, for our neighbors, for the unsaved, the tempted, the suffering? If we could get a clear and definite answer to these questions before we begin our supplications and intercessions, it would make

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our prayers more real. It would make them shorter than their wont, no doubt, but one sentence burdened with a heart's cry is dearer to God than an hour's memoriter rehearsing of words and phrases, with no deep yearnings and longings in them.

Indeed we have but a narrow and unworthy conception of prayer if our only thought of it is, making requests of God. In human friendship it would be very strange if there were never fellowship save when there were favors to ask, the one of the other. Love's sweetest hours are those in which two hearts commune on themes dear to both, but in which neither has any request to make. The truest, loftiest prayer is one of communion, when we speak to God and he speaks to us. The deepest answer we can have to our praying is not God's gifts, however precious these may be, but God himself, his love, his grace. The prayer that rises highest and is divinest is that in which we lose ourself in God, when God himself is all about us, filling

“After this Banner”

us, inspiring our dull life with his own infinite blessedness.

*“Close-present God ! to me
It seems I could not have a wish
That was not shared by thee ;
It seems I cannot be afraid
To speak my longings out,
So tenderly thy gathering love
Enfolds me round about.”*

The Lord's Prayer has its earnest warning against putting selfish and earthly desires first. We must confess that even into our praying self is apt to creep—not self only, but the lower self. Especially in our secret prayers the tendency is to speak to our Father in the first person singular, our thoughts absorbed altogether in our own wants to the exclusion of the needs of all others. This tendency is rebuked in the phrasing of this form of prayer, where we are taught to approach God as “*Our* Father,” not “*My* Father,” and to plead, “Give *us* our daily bread,” “Forgive *us* our debts,” “Deliver *us*

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from evil." We may not forget others even when we bow alone before God. The last place in the world where we should carry our selfishness is into God's presence when we pray to him.

No doubt, however, there is a sense in which we should pray much for ourself, for the time shutting out every other person. Our fellowship with God must be individual. Yet in this personal part of our praying there is need also of great watchfulness, lest we do not seek for ourself the things that are really best. Our desires are apt to gravitate earthward, and the danger is that we choose lower rather than higher things; that we plead to be saved from costly self-denials rather than to receive the spiritual blessings which are folded up in self-denials; that we ask for worldly prosperity rather than for likeness to Christ.

Perhaps it were better if we should pray less than we do—that is, if ofttimes we should decline to choose at all for ourself, or to make

“After this Manner”

any definite requests, simply pleading with God to bless us, and referring especially all that concerns earthly things to his wisdom and love. A minister sat with a father and mother by the bed of a child, who was hovering between life and death. He was about to pray for the little sufferer, and turning to the parents he asked, “What shall we ask God to do?” After some moments the father answered, with deep emotion: “I would not dare to choose. Leave it to him.”

Would it not be better always in things of earthly interest to leave to God the decision, letting him choose what it is best to do for us or to give to us? We are not in this world to have ease and pleasure, to succeed in business, to do certain things—we are here to grow into strength and beauty of life and character, to accomplish the will of God and to have that will wrought out in our own life. Ofttimes the present must be sacrificed for the future, the earthly given up to gain the heavenly, pain endured

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for the sake of spiritual refining and enriching. If we are willing to let God choose for us and to accept what he gives, we shall never fail to receive the best—perhaps not what earth would call the best, but always God's best. We know not what to pray for as we ought, and we would better leave it to God.

The truest prayer is oftentimes that in which we creep into the bosom of God and rest there in silence. We do not know what to ask, and we dare not say even a word, lest it might be the wrong word, hence we simply wait before God in quietness and confidence. We know that what is best our Father will do, and we trust him to do what he will.

“Our Father”

*“O God, our Father ! unto whom we cry,
We know past doubting, thou indeed art nigh,
By all thy doings ere we saw this light,
By what shall follow when we sleep in night ;
We know, our Father, thou wilt keep the right.*

*“The world is thine, and it can but go
As thou dost utter, ‘ Let it be so.’
But all shall smoothen, in thine own good time, —
The rude, rough clanging turn to Sabbath chime :
There is no ruin in thy plan sublime.”*

CHAPTER SECOND

“Our Father”



THE words “Our Father” stand here as the golden gate of prayer. This is the way we must enter as we approach God. There is no other entrance. It was Christ himself who set up this gate. Not until he came was this way consecrated and thrown open. There were many precious manifestations of God through the prophets, but the divine Fatherhood was not revealed save in the dimmest way in those ancient days. Only a few times in the whole Old Testament is God spoken of as Father, and not once are men taught to pray to him by this name. But when Christ came all things were made new. From the beginning he spoke of God as Father. Indeed he scarcely ever called him by any other name. In the ser-

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mon on the mount alone the name is used seventeen times. All through the gospels we find it. Jesus wanted us to see God in the tenderest aspects of love. He wanted us also to understand his revealing of him, and no other name unlocks such a treasure of love-thoughts as the name Father.

This revelation never could have been made until Jesus came, for no man knew the Father save the Son, and no other one could have made him known. Always men could pray, and God would hear them,—the Old Testament has many an example of prayer and many assurances that God hears prayer,—but it was not until Christ had offered himself on the cross that the way of access was fully opened. It was as he was dying that the veil of the temple was rent in twain from top to bottom—a miracleparable signifying that the way to God was now open to every weary one who would come. There was a reason, therefore, why this gate of prayer could not have been set up before Christ

“Our Father”

came and lived and taught and died. Through him we may call God our Father, and come as children when we would pray.

The name we use for God in prayer is very important. It is not the same whether we call him King, Creator, Judge, or Father. If we think of him as our King, royalty is suggested to us—majesty, splendor, and power; but not tenderness, not ease of access, not love. If we call him Creator, the name carries us back to the beginning, when all things came from the divine hand, and we think of strength, wisdom, goodness, beauty; but he is not brought near to our heart.

Some people begin their prayers by invoking God as the incomprehensible One, a God of majesty and holiness, the Lord of hosts. All these names or titles have their suggestions of attributes or qualities of the divine character and each has its own comfort. But none of them present to us thoughts of God which make approach to him easy. When we speak to

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God, however, as our Father, the vision which arises before us assures us of welcome when we come to him.

In the midst of the splendors of royalty, when men of highest rank are admitted to the king's presence only at the king's pleasure, the children of the king's household always have free access. No court rules shut them away or prescribe any ceremonious manner in which they must approach the throne. The king is their father. To be a child of God is to have assurance of access to him at all times. This golden gate of prayer, "Our Father," opens into the innermost sanctuary, into the very secret place of the Most High; and it is shut neither day nor night to any child of God.

The first word in this form of prayer is important. It is not "My Father," but "Our Father." This does not mean that we should never present our own particular needs in prayer. In a sense each one of us lives his life alone—apart from all others. We are to bring our own wants,

“Our Father”

our own yearnings, our own infirmities and dangers, our own sorrows and trials; but in doing so, even when most engrossed with our own affairs, we may not fail to include others and to think of them. “When thou prayest alone, shut thy door . . . shut out as much as thou canst the sight and notice of others, but shut not out the interest and the good of others.” We should never forget, even in the time when the stress of our own need is greatest, that there are other children of our Father who likewise have their needs, and that these should be remembered by us while we plead for ourself. To live truly is to love. If we love God we will love our brother too. Love puts others alongside ourself, and we must think of them while we tell God of our own wants or troubles.

The word “our” takes in the whole family. None should be left out. It is not easy to use the word, our heart meaning all that is included in it. It is like the word “neighbor,” which the Scriptures wrote in the command-

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ment of love,—“thy neighbor as thyself.” The Jews had an easy way of defining this word. To begin with, they drew a circle which shut out all the world but their own nation. Then among their own people they regarded as neighbors only those of the sect or the set to which they themselves belonged. But when Jesus came, with his larger definitions of the commandment, all these and other narrowing lines were swept away and “neighbor” appeared as including all the world.

So it is with this little word “our.” We may wish to gather into the company for whom we would pray only a small number, including at the most those in whom we are personally interested. There are a few people whom we would be quite willing to take with us into the presence of God. We would take our own family with us. Then there are some dear friends, people we like because they are congenial, or because they are good to us, or because they are tied up with us in a social or religious way,

“Our Father”

whom we would not be unwilling to mention when we speak to God for ourself.

But here again the lines of exclusion are swept away, every fence is torn down, and all the human family are included. All who have a right to call God their Father, come in with us in the word “our,” and this leaves out none of our race. Thus all denominational lines in religion are obliterated; beside us kneel all who love God and even dimly know him and feebly worship him. All national lines are swept away, and we recognize as our brothers the peoples of all the world. All class and social distinctions fade out in the wide charity which is to fill our heart when we say, “Our Father.” Here at the throne of grace there are no distinctions among men; none are to be left out in our intercessions. We cannot begin to pray at all, we cannot ask God for even the smallest things, without in heart and spirit including all others,—people we do not love, those who are opposed to us, those who hate us.

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It would be a great deal easier to say "My Father" when we come to God, and not have to think about any one but ourself. It would save us a good deal of self-discipline, the schooling of ourself into readiness to take the world in with us before God. But that is not the way it is in the prayer—it is not the way Jesus teaches us to pray. He demands that all exclusions shall be recalled and ruled out. Indeed the lesson is made still stronger in one of our Lord's special instructions concerning love, in which he says, "Pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you." If we have an enemy, he must have particular mention in our prayers. If we hear that any one to-day has spoken bitterly of us or done us injury in any way, we are not only to take him with us when we enter the golden gate of prayer, but we are to make special supplication for him. We may never go into the presence of our Father for ourself alone, shutting out any other. If we do, we shall miss the blessing.

“Our Father”

When the emperor of Rome was in the field with his army, it was forbidden that any one should approach his tent at night. The penalty was instant death. One night a soldier was seen approaching the tent of the emperor, bearing a paper in his hand. He was promptly arrested and sentenced to die. The emperor, however, within his tent, heard the commotion outside, and asked what it was about. He was told the cause, and gave the decree that if the petition with which the soldier had been approaching the emperor was for himself, he must die, but that if it was for others his life should be spared. It was learned that the petition was not for himself, but for three fellow-soldiers who had been found sleeping at their posts. He was coming to the emperor with the plea that their lives might be spared. So the emperor gave command that because of the nature of the petition the soldier should live, and also that his plea should be granted.

In a dim way, at least, this imperial command

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illustrates the law of prayer. When with our requests for ourself we bring also pleadings for God's other children, our prayers are heard. But when in our approaches to our Father we ask only for what we want for ourself, we find no acceptance. How the spirit of this prayer brings our heart under discipline to the law of Christian love ! We can carry in before God no envyings, no jealousies, no resentments, no grudges, no contempt for any one. We must see in every man a brother and be interested in every one enough to pray for blessing upon him.

Thus it is not easy to say even the first word of this form of prayer. It searches our heart, and not only brings us low before God in reverent adoration, but cleanses us of all unlovingness and all uncharity. For it is not meant to be a barrier to shut us away from God ; rather it is intended to be a school to prepare us for approaching God. Elsewhere Jesus gives this explicit instruction : " If therefore thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there remem-

“Our Father”

berest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.”

Thus the gate of prayer is a gate of love. Nothing unloving can enter it. The bar of heaven's door lifted not when the banished Peri came with earth's precious things, until she had brought a penitent's tear. Then it opened and she was admitted. Whatever other acceptable offerings we may bring to the golden gate of prayer, it will not open to us until in our heart we bring love.

“Which Art in Heaven”

*“Thy glad child
Sheltered and saved, wrapped all about from harm,
Happy to be helpless, — and thy child, —
Can only turn and sleep within the blessed rest,
Can only drop the gifts which thou hast given
Back in thy lavish hand. O wealth
Of fulness! that for life, for love, for heaven,
For thyself, thou shouldst thank thyself
In me; and leave me mute and motionless, — at rest.”*

CHAPTER THIRD

“Which Art in Heaven”



HERE is wondrous uplift in the thought of the glory of the fatherhood to which we are introduced in Christ. Fatherhood itself means love, tender, strong, and faithful ; but when we put divinity back of all the love and goodness—Father in heaven—we make the vision enduring and eternal. Human fatherhood, beautiful as it is and rich in affection, is frail and uncertain. To-morrow it may be gone. God is our Father in heaven's eternal glory. Yet though he is in heaven he never forgets us. Our names are always before him.

“Our Father *which art.*” This is one of the great present tenses of the Bible. God is. He is not a being who merely was in the remote past, and is now only a memory. Nor is he a

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God who is to manifest himself sometime in the future as our Judge. He is. He is the living God. He is our Father and he is evermore our Father. There is never a moment when he is not near us, when his ear will not hear our faintest cry, when his hand is not ready to help.

This truth of the living God who is our Father is wondrously rich in its meaning. In these learned days some men like to talk of the God of the universe as a great mysterious Force, at the centre of things, which in some way keeps all worlds and all things in being. But they deny to this great Power the elements of personality. They scoff the Christian teaching that this God loves us as his children, that he gives personal thought to any individuals of the race, that he knows our needs or concerns himself with any of the perplexities of our life.

But this naming of our God as "Our Father which art" reveals to us a God who is the same yesterday and to-day,—yea, and forever. All

“Which Art in Heaven”

these nineteen centuries his children have been calling him in the same precious way. Moreover, the name Father sweeps away all vague thoughts of God as mere force or power. Father means love, not love merely for a race, but love for his children, a distinct love for each one of them. It means thought and care and providence. Our Father knows us by name and carries each one of us in his heart. This is our Father's world, and wherever we go we are beneath his eye, near to his hand, and within the circle of his love.

It is the part of faith to realize this truth of the living God, “Our Father which art,”—a Father not far off, but close about us always. We never can get away from his presence. He is a very present help in time of trouble. The Scriptures seem to labor to make this truth plain to us. Underneath us are the everlasting arms—again the present tense gives added preciousness to the teaching. The words are spoken directly to every one who reads or hears them.

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We are told that the Lord holds us by the right hand, and we hear his voice saying, "Fear not; for I am with thee." With all the glory of his fatherhood he is personally with every one of his children all the days. Our hope and confidence are in God's ever-nearness. No human friend is so close.

*"For God is never so far off
As even to be near.
He is within. Our spirit is
The home he holds most dear.*

*"To think of him as by our side
Is almost as untrue
As to remove his shrine beyond
Those skies of starry blue.*

*"So all the while I thought myself
Homeless, forlorn, and weary,
Missing my joy, I walked the earth,
Myself God's sanctuary."*

It is our Father *in heaven* to whom we pray.
Thus our thoughts are lifted up above this

“Which Art in Heaven”

earth. The Heidelberg Catechism, in answer to the question why the words “in heaven” are added, says, “In order that there may not be anything earthly in our conception of the heavenly majesty of God.” While the blessed name assures us of all tenderness, affection, and accessibleness, the place of God’s abode suggests to us his glory, greatness, and holiness. He is not like one of us. We bear his image, but he is infinitely above us. All the visions and representations of God in the Scriptures show him to us as dwelling in light to which no man can approach. Thus we are assured, also, of the power of God. He is our Father — infinite in love, but infinite also in strength, omnipotent. We are safe in his hands. No power can harm us if we are sheltered in his strong keeping.

This revelation of the fatherhood of God suggests to us what an exalted privilege prayer is. It is free and open access into the presence of the God of heaven. In our continual ap-

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proaches to God we are in danger of forgetting the stupendous meaning of the act. Moses was bidden to take off his shoes before the burning bush because the ground whereon he stood was holy. Isaiah was awed into deepest reverence as he beheld the vision of God in the temple. Yet these are only glimpses of divine manifestations. Every time we speak God's name in prayer we are in the very presence of a glory greater and more real than that of any theophany which human eye ever saw. It becomes us, therefore, to be reverent, to be sincere, to be true-hearted, when we pray. We may come boldly and with confidence, for it is to our Father we are drawing nigh; but we should come remembering that he is our Father in heaven, the glorious One before whom highest angels veil their faces while they sing.

We need to think deeply of this. We are so assured of our welcome to God's throne and of his love, mercy, and grace, that we are much in danger of forgetting the glory of the pres-

“Which Art in Heaven”

ence into which we come. If for a moment, while we are praying, the veil were withdrawn and we had a glimpse of the stupendous scene, could we ever again pray heedlessly, irreverently?

On the other hand, this revelation of the fatherhood of God assures us of the infinite love that continually surrounds us. There is nothing in the divine majesty and glory that should ever make us afraid if we are truly trusting in Christ and faithfully following him. To some persons the thought of God's presence brings terror. Children are sometimes told that God sees them, as if this should make them afraid. God always sees us—we cannot hide from him for a moment. This should lead us to live ever to please him. Yet it is in love that he watches us. “Thou God seest me” meant mercy and deliverance to Hagar and her child. No truth should bring greater comfort and joy to the Christian than this thought of God's ever-nearness. It means all of a child's privilege in a

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father's house—safety, care, help, satisfying communion, all of love's blessedness.

A story of some little children alone during a thunderstorm relates that each gave a favorite Scripture verse. One of them chose "The Lord of glory thundereth," and when she was asked why she gave these words she said: "Once I heard a great noise when I thought I was all alone in the house, and I was so sorely frightened that I screamed with terror. My father was near and he called, 'Don't be afraid, Margie; it's only father.' Now when it thunders and I begin to be afraid, God seems to say to me, 'Don't be frightened, Margie; it's only Father,' and all my fear vanishes."

Fatherhood assures us of wise and loving discipline. "What son is he whom the Father chasteneth not?" This is true of earthly fathers. Children who are not brought up under restraints, who are not taught nor disciplined, are brought up for sorrow and failure in life. Our heavenly Father does not permit his chil-

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dren to grow up without correction and chastening. He does not give them their own way when their own way would work only their hurt, perhaps their ruin. Sometimes children of God complain at what seem hard things in their experience. They ask, “Can it be that God loves me and yet lets me endure these losses, disappointments, and trials?” Really it is just because he loves them that he deals thus with them—he would save them, train them for spiritual life, teach them higher lessons.

*“The ills we see,
The mysteries of sorrow, deep and long,
The dark enigmas of permitted wrong,
Have all one key :
This strange sad world is but our Father’s school,
All chance and change his love shall grandly overrule.*

*“How sweet to know
The trials which we cannot comprehend
Have each their own divinely purposed end:
He traineth so*

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*For higher learning, ever onward reaching
For fuller knowledge yet, and his own deeper teaching.*

“What though to-day

*Thou canst not trace at all the hidden reason
For his strange dealings through the trial season,*

Trust and obey.

In after life and light all shall be plain and clear.”

This revealing suggests also the true glory of the Christian life. We make too little of this—we fail to recognize the dignity of our calling as God’s children. “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God: and such we are.” There is a picture which shows a man dying in a wretched garret on a bed of straw, amid lowliest surroundings. That is the earth side, what human eyes saw. But a closer inspection reveals a vision of angels waiting to receive the dying man’s spirit into heavenly glory. That is the heaven side of the same picture. That is truly what takes place whenever a Christian

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dies. “Absent from the body,” in a moment more he is “at home with the Lord.” We should think more of our privileges as God’s children in this world, and should walk worthy of our high and holy calling.

The fatherhood of God also implies the brotherhood of all who are God’s children. All are members of one family, who therefore should dwell together in love. It was said of a good man, “He treated every man as if he were a blood relation.” That is true brotherhood. The strong should help the weak. Those who have plenty should share with those who lack. The joyous should sing their songs of gladness in the ears of the sad. The victorious should help those who are still struggling in life’s battles. The world to-day needs nothing more than the realization of the true spirit of brotherhood among men. All social problems would find easy solution if the love which Christ taught were to become indeed the law of life in all human relations. Society would be regenerated.

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Wars would no more devastate this fair earth. Business would be made holy, each man thinking of the good of his brothers as much as of his own. Heaven would be brought down to earth, if the great lesson of the brotherhood of all God's children were only learned and realized in life.

These are but hints of the vast and deep meaning of this wonderful invocation. We have found enough, at least, in it to assure us of welcome whenever we come as children to our Father. We need to strive more and more after the child spirit ; for only when we have it can we find our way to the innermost warmth of divine love.

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*“It is not prayer—
This clamor of our eager wants
That fills the air
With wearying, selfish plaints.*

*“It is true prayer
To seek the Giver more than gift;
God's life to share,
And love—for this our cry to lift.”*

CHAPTER FOUR

The First Note in Prayer



THE order of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer is not accidental, for it was Jesus who said, "After this manner pray ye." We should notice, therefore, what we are to put first when we come to God. It is not a request for anything for ourself. Important and pressing as our personal needs may be, we are to set them all aside, while we ask first for the hallowing of God's name. In the opening words of the prayer we are taught not to pray to God for ourself alone, but always to bring others with us—"Our Father." Here we learn further that God himself must be put first. As the evening star is the brightest star in the heavens, so among all the petitions this shines with the most brilliant lustre, "Hallowed be thy name."

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Yet if we were making a form of prayer we should probably not have anything like this in it. Prayer, we would likely say, is asking God for things that we need or that we think we need. It is pleading with God for favors, for help to get on with our ambitions, for prosperity, for freedom from trouble and trial. For our friends and neighbors, so far as we put them into our prayers at all, we usually ask earthly good things. For the members of our own household, for whom we probably pray at times, if we really ever pray, we are apt to solicit things that will advance them socially or in their work or business. For ourselves, most of us think of prayer only as a way to make life easier, to get what we want, to add to our earthly comforts, to get rid of inconveniences, to escape trials.

It is scarcely likely, therefore, that if we were preparing a form of prayer we would have anything in it about hallowing God's name. We should probably ring a number of changes on

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“Give us this day our daily bread,” amplifying the petition and adding to it requests for a number of other things besides daily bread. But we would not likely rise above the level of earthly things. Almost certainly we would not rise to anything so sublime as a prayer for the hallowing of God’s name.

We would better learn well, however, the lesson taught us by our Lord when he set this petition in the place of highest honor, bidding us begin with it. Really we cannot advance to any petition that comes after it until we have offered this one. It is dishonoring to God, when we go into his presence, to begin to clamor for poor paltry things for ourself, with no thought or aspiration or pleading for the glorifying of God’s name. We pray not as we ought, acceptably to our Father, unless we plead first of all that God himself may be honored.

It is related that a French boy rode up to Napoleon, during one of his battles, and told him that the victory was won. “But you are

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wounded, my boy," said Napoleon. "Killed, sire," said the lad, dropping down dead. The boy thought only of the honor of his general, giving no attention whatever to his own condition. Our Lord, in putting this petition first in the form of prayer he gave to his disciples, teaches us that we should come before God in the same self-forgetful spirit, not telling him of our own sufferings and needs first of all, but pleading for his glory and honor.

Of course we need bread. Our bodies have their hungers, and God is not indifferent to our physical needs. A little later in the prayer we have a petition for bread. But before we come to this, we have three other petitions—for the hallowing of God's name, the coming of his kingdom, the doing of his will. All these great objects are to be put before any request for ourselves, even for bread, or for the forgiveness of our sins.

This teaching applies also to the spirit in which all our prayers should be offered as well as to the order of the petitions. Indeed all our life is

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to be lived with a view to the glorifying of the divine name. God must be first in everything. We are to love him with all our heart, with all our strength, with all our mind. We are to seek first his kingdom and righteousness. We are to aim in all our life to give honor to him. "Whether ye eat, or drink," says St. Paul, "or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." Again, "Whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." We are never to think in our daily and hourly living what will most honor us, what will be the easiest thing, or the most profitable, but what will most honor God. How it would modify human ambitions and change the whole aim of living if this were to become the universal rule, if our question should always be, "What will please God and make his name more glorious?"

Then, in all our praying as well as in our living, the first desire of our heart should be for the hallowing of God's name. And not only is this prayer to be offered as a specific petition

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at the very gate, as we enter the temple, but in all our prayers, to the very close, the first object should be, not the obtaining of our requests for ourself, but the honoring of God. You want something very much. It seems to you to be essential to your happiness. Yet do you know that the granting of this thing so dear would glorify God? You are not sure. Instead, therefore, of pressing your requests for things you would like to have, you would better refer the matter to God, saying: "I dare not decide. I would rather leave it to God, asking that he would grant my requests if to do so would most honor his name."

If we had learned this effacement of self in all our desires, whether in our work or in our praying, if God were always first in our desire, it would lift up our commonest life into a splendor radiant as that in which the angels live; and if we but lived thus altogether for the glory of God, we should have the divine companionship and help in all that we do.

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There is a beautiful legend from the story of the later days of Greece which illustrates this lesson. The religious spirit had waned among the people and the old enthusiastic belief in the gods had almost died out. A prize was offered to the sculptors of the land for the best marble statue of a certain god. A country lad heard of the offer of the prize. He believed in this god with all his heart and in his passionate love desired to make the statue.

Choosing a block of marble, he hewed away manfully. He had in his mind a noble ideal of the grace, majesty, and strength of the god he loved, and wrought with great ardor and earnestness. But he lacked the artist's skill and experience, and though he did his best, his statue, when finished, was crude, lacking beauty and grace.

Then the legend relates that this god, seeing the lad's endeavor to honor him and worthily represent him before men, helped him, turning his poor failure into perfect success. When the day of trial came and the different statues were

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passed upon, while other competitors were laughing at the crude thing which the boy had shaped with unskilled hand but believing heart, the god himself entered into that pathetic marble failure, glorifying it with his own beauty. Instantly the harsh, uncomely lines flowed into faultless symmetry, the awkward head was lifted in proud dignity, and the whole form of the rudely cut stone glowed with the matchless grace of life.

It is only a heathen legend. No deity of human fancy ever had power to work such a miracle for any of his devotees. But the legend interprets and illustrates what the true God does for all who live for him and with loyal heart and diligent hand faithfully seek to glorify him. "Them that honor me, I will honor," is his promise. Poor indeed may be the work we do, with no beauty in men's eyes; but if it is wrought in pure love and with a sincere desire to do honor to our Lord, he will take the endeavor of our clumsy hands and give it the grace it lacks, transforming it into a loveliness

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which will really honor him whom we so earnestly sought to glorify.

In our praying, too, the same is true. It seems to us that the things we desire for our own comfort or pleasure are the things that will be best for us. Indeed we think we cannot be happy, can scarcely even live, unless we get these things that are so dear. Yet if we press these desires with all human eagerness, thinking only of what we want for ourself, and give no thought to the honoring of God, we are very short-sighted, and, at best, are choosing the lower rather than the higher good. To leave out thought of God in anything we seek is to drag our life in the dust when it ought to soar away into the clear blue of heaven.

If, therefore, we make our prayers always for the hallowing of God's name, first of all, whether the thing we desire be given to us or not, we take our place with God as co-worker, and are lifted up into companionship with him. It may be that the thing we sought so ear-

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nestly may be withheld from us, or that the sorrow or loss against which we pleaded with such intensity of desire, shall come with all its crushing weight; still if our prayer was "Hallowed be thy name, whatever the cost may be to me," we shall find the glory of God shining in the very darkness about us, and the blessing of God in the very bitterness of the grief in which we sit.

Nothing that this world can give us is really good unless it come to us out of our Father's hands, the choice of his wisdom for us, with the benediction of his favor upon it. Though all of earth's joys and possessions be taken from us, leaving us bare of comfort, bereft of human love, broken and suffering, if God has been honored in that we have passed through and in all that has come to us, we are rich with an enriching that shall never lose its lustre or its preciousness.

We should learn well this lesson, therefore, that the very first thing in praying always

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should be the pleading that God's name may be honored though the thing we seek be not given ; that it be not given unless its bestowal would glorify God. When we have learned to pray in this spirit, we shall find ourself exalted into fellowship with Christ himself. It was thus he prayed in the temple that day, in what seems to have been a preliminary Gethsemane agony : "Now is my soul troubled ; and what shall I say ? Father, save me from this hour. But for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name." If we learn to pray thus, our prayers will always be acceptable to God and our life shall show forth his praise.

*"Once it was the blessing,
Now it is the Lord.
Once it was the feeling,
Now it is his word.
Once his gifts I wanted,
Now himself alone.
Once I sought for healing,
Now the Healer own."*

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*Let knowledge grow from more to more,
But more of reverence in us dwell ;
That mind and soul, according well,
May make one music as before,*

*But vaster. We are fools and slight ;
We mock thee when we do not fear ;
But help thy foolish ones to bear ;
Help thy vain worlds to bear thy light.*

Tennyson.

CHAPTER FIFTH

The Hallowed Name



HERE is great need of the lesson of reverence. Men do not seem aware of God. Even in the holiest places of earth there appears to be in most of us a lack of consciousness of the presence and majesty of God. Almost nobody takes off his shoes before the burning bush. "Nobody fears God nowadays," said one distinguished English clergyman to another, with deep pain in his heart. We all need to learn anew the lesson of reverence. This is one of the teachings of this prayer,—“Hallowed be thy name.”

What are we to understand by the name of God? Among the ancient Jews there was one divine name which had peculiar sacredness. It was so holy that they never pronounced it in

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public. When they came to it in reading, they would pass over it in reverent silence, not daring to take it upon their lips. The Mohammedans, also, have a great reverence for the divine name. They will not tread upon a piece of paper, even the smallest torn fragment which they see lying upon the ground, but will reverently pick it up, saying, "It may contain the name of God." In this there may be little more than superstition in the outward honor shown to the divine name. Ofttimes men with wicked heart will treat the written or spoken name of God with seeming reverence, bowing at its every mention, while in their own life they have no true regard for God. It is very evident that more than this is meant in this petition for the hallowing of God's name. We must honor it in our heart and in our life.

In the Bible a name stands for the whole of the character of the person. Many Scripture names have meanings in which are enshrined the qualities which belonged to the man. Even

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among us a name comes to stand for all there is in the person's life and character. A little child is born without a name, and when a name is given to it it means nothing as yet, for the child has no biography, no character, no personality, has done nothing to individualize itself. But as the days and years go on, and the child grows into manhood, everything he does and all that he is are gathered into his name, until by and by the name has a meaning wherever the man is known; is, as it were, a composite photograph made up of all the phases and aspects of his life. Any man's name when spoken in the ears of his friends conveys to them a conception of his personality, his character, his disposition, his whole story; all that he is is enshrined in his name. There are certain names in every community that by reason of the noble life which the persons live, or the great or good things they have done, mean a great deal, standing for honor, for patriotism, for heroism, for philanthropy, for beneficence, for religion.

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So the name of God includes all that God is and all that he has done, that is, all the revelations which have been made to us of him. When we speak his name there arises before our mind a vision which gathers in itself all that we know about God—all our thoughts of him, our impressions of him, our experiences of his goodness, his mercy, his help. When we mention the name of Jesus Christ, the whole story of his life is suggested to us,—his condescension, his beautiful character, his gentleness, his works of power, his teachings—above all, his atoning death, and then his resurrection and ascension. Thus the name of God stands for God himself, all that God is. In this petition we pray, therefore, not merely for the formal honoring of a name, but for the honoring of God himself in the revelations of him which have been made in the world.

Of course we cannot add a particle to the essential glory of God's name. Nothing we could do would make his character any more glori-

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ous. We cannot add to the sun's brightness by lighting candles and lamps on the earth; nor can we, by anything we may say or do, make God any more glorious than he is in his essential character.

What then is meant by the hallowing of God's name? In what sense can we honor God? What is implied in this petition? It is a prayer that God himself shall hallow his own name; also, that he would make its real glory appear before men, and that he would enable us to hallow it in our life. There are several ways in which we may do this.

We may add to the honor in which we hold God's name in our own heart. Some persons live year after year and give little serious thought to the divine character, not studying the Scriptures to discover its glory and its beauty. The more we know about God the more will we revere and honor his name. Every new revealing of him shows us something more that is wonderful in him. In a Russian palace

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there is a gallery in which are hung several hundred portraits of young maidens. These pictures were painted by Count Rotari, for Catharine II. The striking feature in the collection is that those who were familiar with the empress and her habits and tastes could find in each portrait, half concealed, half revealed, something that reminded them of her. In one it was a jewel that she admired ; in another, a flower that was dear to her ; in another, a style of dress that she liked ; in another, some feature of her face ; in another, a scene which had some connection or association with her life. The whole gallery was a glorifying of the empress.

Everything in this world has in it, for a devout mind, some suggestion of God. Every flower that blooms, every plant that grows, every bird that sings, every cloud that flits across the sky, every star that shines, every human face, suggests something about God, the Creator, reveals some feature of his power, his wisdom, his

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goodness. In the Bible there is not a chapter, scarcely a verse, in which the child of God may not find something which speaks to him of his Father. In every true Christian life and character, also, there are revealings of God, qualities in which something of him is reflected. As we thus learn about God, the honor in which we hold him in our heart becomes greater and greater. Every new glimpse of him makes him appear greater and more glorious to our thought and love.

This is a prayer that God would make himself known to us in new ways. "Show me thy glory," was the prayer of Moses, as he pleaded for some visible manifestation. Our prayer here is not, however, for a theophany, but for deeper knowledge of God as our Father, for new experiences of his love, his goodness, his mercy, his faithfulness, for new revealings of his character. "They that know thy name shall put their trust in thee," was the testimony of a devout psalmist. The deeper cry of our heart

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should be to know God better, for then we shall love him more and serve him more devotedly.

We ask in this prayer, also, that God's name may become better known among men. Dear as God may be to us, his children, and highly as we may honor him in our own heart, he is not worthily revered in the world about us. Men do not know him and do not honor him as he ought to be honored. We say of a good man, that he needs only to be known in order to be loved. If we can get men to know God, they will love him. We should pray, therefore, that his name may become better known, that those who pay him no reverence now shall learn of his glory and goodness and shall thus be brought to trust him. What joy it would give to thousands of weary sufferers in this world to-day, if they knew God!

This is one of those prayers that is not finished when we have breathed its words, however sincerely and earnestly, into the ear of our Fa-

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ther. When we ask God to make his name known among men, he says to us, "I have put my name into your keeping—do you make it known. I have given you a knowledge of me—go and tell the people everywhere of my love, my mercy, my holiness, my grace. I have gone to the cross to reveal there the divine heart—do you show now in your life the meaning of the cross, interpreting it not merely in words, but in life, in service, in deeds of self-denial and sacrifice." It is ours to make known to men what God is.

We ask in this petition that we may be enabled to do our part in spreading the knowledge of God in the world. There are many ways in which we may do this. We may scatter the printed word of God, and its pages will be as the leaves of the tree of life for the healing of the nations. We may speak to men everywhere of what God is, what he has done, especially of what he is to us and what he has done for us.

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Another way in which we may hallow God's name among men is in our own life. If a child does well and lives worthily, he honors his parents before the world. If he lives unworthily, he brings reproach, shame, and grief upon them. We, as God's children, by our life bring either honor or dishonor upon the name of our Father. Dr. Christlieb said, "Christians are the world's Bible." The world does not read the written book, but it does read the life of those who profess to be God's children. If our life is to be the interpretation of God's word to the world, we should write nothing in it which would in any way misrepresent or misinterpret God. If we live carelessly, dishonestly, speaking lies, acting deceitfully, doing unloving things, we are dishonoring God. It is important that all those who stand for God in this world shall live in all their common days so that all who see them shall learn something more about God's grace and the beauty of holiness.

Wherever we go our life itself should declare

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God. It should not be necessary for us to tell people that we are Christians ; there should be something in the very temper and spirit and atmosphere of our life that would say to every one that we belong to Christ and have been with him.

It is related of a great artist that he was once wandering in the mountains of Switzerland, when some officials met him and demanded his passport. "I do not have it with me," he replied, "but my name is Doré." "Prove it, if you are," replied the officers, knowing who Doré was, but not believing that this was he. Taking a piece of paper the artist hastily sketched a group of peasants who were standing near, and did it with such grace and skill that the officials exclaimed, "Enough ; you are Doré."

The world cares little for a mere profession. We say we are Christians, and the challenge is, "Prove it." If we are of Christ we must be able to do the works of Christ, to live the life

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of Christ, to show the spirit of Christ. The artist's skilful drawing proved his identity. We must prove that we are the followers of our Master by the love, the grace, the beauty, the holiness of our life.

Religion is not merely a matter of creed and profession, or of church-going and public worship; it is far more a matter of daily life. It is not how we behave on Sundays, nor the kind of creed we hold, nor the devoutness of our worship; it is the way we act at home, in school, in business, in society, in our associations with men. It is vitally important that all who are Christ's in name shall manifest Christ's beauty in life and character. It is not enough to witness for Christ in our words; we are to be witnesses to Christ and for him in ourself. It is not enough to preach the gospel in sermon or exhortation; the gospel that honors Christ truly is the gospel men read in our daily life.

Let us so live that in all our life we shall, in-

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deed, not only with our voice but in our life give honor and praise to him whose name should be hallowed above all other names.

“Therefore, with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify thy glorious name ; evermore praising thee, and saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts ; heaven and earth are full of thy glory ; glory be to thee, O Lord Most High !”

“Thy Kingdom Come”

*“ Lord, we would fain some little palm branch lay
Upon thy way.
If but the foldings of thy garment’s hem
Shall shadow them,
These worthless leaves, which we have brought and strewed
Along thy road,
Shall be raised up and made divinely sweet,
And fit to lie beneath thy feet.”*

CHAPTER SIXTH

“Thy Kingdom Come”



ALREADY we have learned to keep back the thought of our own wants when we enter the gate of prayer, and to pray first for the hallowing of God's name. We are here checked again in our expression of our own eager desires, and bidden to pray instead for the coming of God's kingdom. The things of God must come before our things.

“Thy kingdom come.” What is the kingdom of God for whose coming we are here taught to pray? It is not the rule of God over the material universe. Already the divine sway in this realm is complete. No star ever rebels against the laws ordained for the heavenly bodies. There is nowhere in nature any resistance to the will of God, which is revealed in what we call na-

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ture's laws. There is no need, therefore, to pray for the coming of our Father's kingdom in the natural world.

Nor is this a prayer for the speedy coming of death to the child of God, that he may enter into the joys and felicities of heaven's blessedness,—the full glory of the kingdom of God. Our Lord's own prayer for his disciples was not that they should be taken out of the world, for they have a work to do here, but that they should remain in the world and be kept from its evil.

“Thy kingdom come” is a prayer for the coming of God's moral and spiritual sway over the hearts and lives of men in this world. There is no need to prove that in this realm God's kingdom does not now have unresisted sway. We know well how man is in rebellion against God. It is not necessary to recite here the sad facts of this story of rebellion. It began in Paradise. It is interesting, however, to notice that immediately after man had fallen, God set about

“Thy Kingdom Come”

restoring his kingdom upon the earth. The protevangelium was spoken amid the very words which told of sin's ruin. From that day to this, God has been seeking to reclaim his place as king in the hearts and lives of men. In the fulness of time, Jesus Christ came to declare God's mercy and love, to reveal to man the possibilities of spiritual life, to die for the world, and to set up the kingdom of God in full power on the earth.

We have only to turn to our Lord's teachings to learn the character of this kingdom. It is spiritual ; it seeks to rule over man's conscience, his affections, his whole life. A kingdom is where a king rules ; God would rule in our heart. The kingdom has come in any of us just in the measure in which God governs our thoughts, our will, our desires. The kingdom has failed fully to come in us in so far as we still resist God's will and fail to obey him perfectly, whether it be in act, or word, or wish, or affection, or feeling.

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If we ask "What is the character of this kingdom of God?" we find the first answer in the name of the King. He is our Father. We need not be afraid of this King. The Bible in every chapter declares the goodness of God. The Old Testament shines with revealings of his mercy. Then in Jesus Christ we have the full revelation of the divine character. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," Jesus declared. Every word, act, and disposition of that life of marvellous beauty showed us some new revealing of God. Then on the cross we have the unveiling of the very heart of our Father when he gave his only begotten Son; when Christ, the Son of God, gave himself up to a death of shame for us.

This is our King. He was one of us in his earthly revealing. He was lowly and humble, moving among the people with infinite gentleness. Yet divine love filled his heart and wrought itself out in every touch of his hand, until at last that hand was nailed on the cross.

“ Thy Kingdom Come ”

*“ His hand was rough, and his hand was hard,
For he wrought in wood, in Nazareth town ;
With nought of worship, with no regard,
In the village street he went up and down.*

*“ His hand was rough, but its touch was light,
As it lay on the eyes of him born blind ;
Or strake sick folk in its healing might,
And gave back joy to the hearts that pined.*

*“ His hand was hard, but they spiked it fast
To the splintering wood of the cursed tree ;
And he hung in the sight of the world at last
In his shame. And the blood trickled free.”*

The King desires to reign in us. His name is Love. No reign of the gentlest sovereign on earth was ever so beneficent, so gracious, as the sway of him who desires to be our King, and who craves of us that we submit ourself to him.

When we turn to our Lord's teachings we find many thoughts about this kingdom, revealing to us its character. It “ cometh not with obser-

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vation"; that is, so that its progress can be noted by earthly signs. Earthly kingdoms advance with pomp and noise, in cruel war, crushing enemies before them, and in display of power which awes men. The kingdom of God advances silently. One of its symbols is light—the morning comes noiselessly.

This kingdom is not an earthly organization. The church is not the kingdom of God—the church, with its ecclesiastical system, its ritual, simple or elaborate, its membership footed up in statistical tables, its sacraments, its ministrations. "The kingdom of God is within you," said the Master. It sets up its throne in men's hearts. It rules over men's lives. It is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy. Every true Christian is in the kingdom of God, and this kingdom is also in him. But the kingdom of God and the visible church are not identical. There are many lowly friends of God in whom this kingdom has been set up, yet whose names are on no roll of any church; and

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no doubt there are members of the visible church, perhaps some who are prominent and conspicuous in it, in whom the kingdom of God has not found a realm.

Christ himself came and lived and taught and died to make men good, and to bring them into the heavenly kingdom. If we ask what the laws of this kingdom are, we find them plainly revealed in our Lord's teachings. The sermon on the mount is Christ's own exposition of the life of the kingdom of God. This sermon begins with the beatitudes which tell us who are the blessed or happy ones.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they

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shall be called sons of God. Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

At every point in these beatitudes we recognize the difference between earth's ideals of happiness and of proper human pursuit and heaven's. The whole sermon runs upon the same lofty lines. Think what the community would be in which these teachings should be fully realized, lived out, wrought into conduct and character. Yet that is the coming of the kingdom for which we pray in this petition.

Love is the great central law of this kingdom. Christ taught his disciples that they must love each other as he had loved them. They must love not merely the good and the lovable, but the evil and the unlovely as well. The love must be like God's, and he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. St. John, who learned the lesson on the Master's bosom, into whose life the kingdom came with marvellous

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power, transforming him into the very gentleness of Christ, taught that “if we love one another, God abideth in us, and his love is perfected in us. . . . If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar : for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen.”

We have come under the rule and sway of the kingdom of God only in so far as we have learned the lesson of love. The worst heresy is unlovingness. This love must not be a sentiment merely ; it must rule the life, revealing itself in all graces of character, and leading to lowliest service—love always serves. When the disciples once were disputing among themselves as to who was greatest in the kingdom of God, Jesus took a little child and set him in the midst of them, and said to them that they must become like this little child if they would even enter the kingdom. He referred to the absence of ambition, the simplicity and guilelessness, humility and lowliness of heart, in a

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child. True greatness is unconscious of itself. It is not puffed up with a sense of its own importance. It is lowly and simple-hearted. On another occasion, when a like question was being considered, and the disciples asked Jesus who was greatest in the kingdom, he said the greatest was he who served most deeply and unselfishly. The world's idea of greatness is exemption from service; but he is the best Christian who serves others the most humbly and the most helpfully. In Christ himself the kingdom of God had perfect development, and he said of himself, "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." The kingdom of God has come in us just in the measure in which we love and serve.

*"Meek Jesus ! to my soul thy Spirit lending,
Teach me to live like thee in lowly love ;
With humblest service all thy saints befriending,
Until I serve before thy throne above."*

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*“ Bid war and faction cease,
Bring in the reign of peace :
Lord Jesu, come !
Set every captive free ;
Let all men brothers be ;
Heal earth’s long malady :
Lord, quickly come !*

*“ Assert thy right divine ;
O’er all the nations shine :
Lord Jesu, come !
Then earth like heaven shall sing,
With hallelujahs ring,
And hail her rightful King :
Lord, quickly come !”*

CHAPTER SEVENTH

How the Kingdom Comes



HE answers to some prayers come at once. Even while we are speaking to God the thing we ask for is laid in our hands. The answers to other prayers, however, are delayed. Sometimes the delay is for the schooling of the suppliant's faith, or for the discipline of patience. Sometimes the answer is one which in its very nature could not be given at once. If in the early summer, as the first buds are appearing, one kneel in his orchard and pray that his trees may bring forth abundant and luscious fruit, his prayer could not be answered till the later summer or autumn. Fruits must have time to ripen.

Then there are prayers whose answers may begin to come at once, but cannot be granted in

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fulness and completeness at any one time, because the blessings that are sought are progressive and can be given only gradually. The prayer, "Thy kingdom come," belongs to this class. It was not a sudden coming of the heavenly kingdom to earth that was in the mind of Christ when he gave this prayer to his disciples. He did not mean that they should ask for the letting down of the throne of glory from amid the splendors of heaven to some locality on earth.

The petition contemplates the ultimate bringing of all human hearts and lives under the divine sway. But the subjugation is a moral one. It is not such submission to Christ as King as takes place when one nation is conquered by another in war. The conquests of this kingdom are not made by force; they are moral conquests and are made by love. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power," ran the ancient word of hope. Human hearts are sovereign; this is part of the divine image in

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man. Every one is lord of his own life. God is strong enough to destroy the universe. There are no massive gates or doors he could not rend open. But no hand, not even the omnipotent hand of God, will ever force the door of a human heart. The yielding must be voluntary. It must be a yielding of love. Not until men love God can they be in the kingdom of heaven. "If ye love me," said the Master, "keep my commandments."

The coming of the kingdom of God must therefore be gradual. One by one men accept Christ and become his subjects. Then in those who do take his yoke the surrender cannot be made fully and perfectly in a moment, but must be progressive. They go on from strength to strength. The inner man is renewed day by day. Jesus calls us to him to learn of him, and the learning takes all our life.

Thus it is that the prayer, "Thy kingdom come," has been receiving its answer every day since it began to be offered. The spiritual sway

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of Christ in this world has been extending continually. Especially in recent years has its progress been wonderful. The work of Christian missions during the nineteenth century has been stupendous.

No doubt it seems to many even now that the answer to the petition has scarcely begun to come. Still is the world full of violence and strife. The great Christian nations yet resort to war for the settlement of their disputes. Wrong and injustice prevail. The poor are oppressed. The weak are crushed. Foul sins stain the story of daily life even in communities where Christian civilization has done the most for the uplifting of society. When we look abroad and see the evil that still exists, we are apt to ask whether, after all, the world is any better than it was when Jesus taught his disciples to offer this petition. Yet this question is easily set at rest. The prayer has been wondrously answered already.

“If God,” says Maurice, “had not heard this

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prayer, going up from tens of thousands in all ages, the earth would have been a den of robbers." We do not know from what depths of depravity this pleading, offered continually by loyal hearts, has saved the world. Nor do we begin to realize what Christianity has wrought in the world, in the countries where it has had power. If we would know how far this prayer has been answered, in what measure light has conquered darkness, to what extent the kingdom of God has advanced among men, we have but to study the world as it was in Christ's day and compare with this the condition of society in the countries where Christianity has produced its best fruits. Or we need but to contrast, for example, the civilization of England and the United States with the debasement of the worst heathen lands, to see that the world is immeasurably better than it was at the beginning of the Christian era.

Still, however, even the best and holiest parts of the earth are far from the perfect realization

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of the blessing sought in this petition. Everywhere sin still abounds, and wrong, injustice, crime, and cruelty are found among men. Even in the purest church and in the sweetest home the kingdom of God is not yet fully come. The prayer in large measure has yet to be answered, for it will be answered perfectly only when the life of heaven shall rule without hindrance or resistance in the society of earth; when truth, righteousness, and love shall prevail everywhere. Until then we should never cease to breathe to our Father the petition, "Thy kingdom come."

We desire also in this prayer that the kingdom of God may come in our own individual life with more and more power. Indeed this is the sense in which the prayer should be made first of all. The part of the world for whose surrender to God we are immediately responsible is that which is in ourself. Our prayer for the coming of the kingdom in other lives is not sincere and can have no power with God if we do

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not seek to have it come in our own life. Joan of Arc, when asked what was the secret of the victoriousness and unconquerableness of her white banner, answered, "I send it forth against the enemy, and then I follow it myself." When we send out the white banner of such a prayer as this we should be careful to follow it with our own life.

While we ask that the kingdom of God may come in us we should make sure that its coming be not hindered, but in every way promoted, in us. This means that we should leave our sins, our grasping and greed, our jealousy, our resentment, our selfishness and pride, and whatsoever in us is unlovely and unholy, and that we let into our life whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely.

The kingdom of God can have its perfect realization in us only in heaven. But it must begin in us here or we shall never find ourself

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ready for heaven. Jesus said that he that believeth on him *hath* eternal life. The present tense contains a wonderful revealing—that the life of heaven begins in the heart of every follower of Christ the moment he becomes a true Christian. It may begin in a very feeble way—only a desire, a resolve, a decision of surrender, yet it is a germ of the life of Christ; it is a little seed of heaven planted in a heart; it is life, eternal life. “The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till it was all leavened.” This little germ of eternal life, hid in a heart, will work its way through the life till the whole being has been assimilated to itself. The kingdom of heaven is come in us, therefore, only in the measure in which our life has come under the sway of its spirit.

There never is a day, therefore, for any of us when we do not still need to pray this prayer. Who of us has yet let the kingdom of God come in him as it might have come, as it may

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yet come? Who of us is ready now to have this kingdom rule in him absolutely, yielding to God's sway every part of his being, bringing into subjection to Christ every thought, feeling, desire, and affection? That is the way to the highest possibilities of grace. We do not know what God could make of us, what he could accomplish through us, if only we would offer this prayer out of our deepest heart, and then follow it with the complete devotement of our life—body, soul, and spirit—to him.

Whatever there may be disheartening to those who pray this prayer day and night, because of the delay of the answer, we know that ultimately the triumph will be complete, that the kingdom of God will come in full and glorious power, and that all men will yield to its blessed sway, when "the kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ: and he shall reign for ever and ever."

There is a series of parables in which our Lord called his friends to faithfulness in watching

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for his coming. When he will come no one can know. It may be in the morning; it may be at noonday; it may be in the evening. He would have us always ready, that his coming may never surprise us. It is not the watching of idle gazing that will please him, but the watching of diligence and faithfulness in duty. If we but keep ourself in the love of God, and do well our allotted tasks as they come to our hands, we shall do our part in bringing the kingdom of heaven in its power and shall be ready to welcome the King whenever he may come.

“If the Lord should come in the morning

*As I go about my work,
The little things and the quiet things
That a servant cannot shirk,
Though nobody ever sees them,
And only the dear Lord cares
That they always are done in the light of the sun,
Would he take me unawares ?*

“If my Lord should come at noonday,

The time of the dust and heat,

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*When the glare is white and the air is still
And the hoof-beats sound in the street ;
If my dear Lord came at noonday,
And smiled in my tired eyes,
Would it not be sweet his look to meet ?
Would he take me by surprise ?*

*“ If the Lord came hither at evening,
In the fragrant dew and dusk,
When the world drops off its mantle
Of daylight like a husk,
And flowers in wonderful beauty,
And we fold our hands and rest,
Would his touch of my hand, his low command,
Bring me unhoped-for zest ?*

*“ Why do I ask and question ?
He is ever coming to me,
Morning and noon and evening,
If I have but eyes to see.
And the daily load grows lighter,
The daily cares grow sweet,
For the Master is near, the Master is here,
I have only to sit at his feet.”*

“Thy Will be Done”

*"Thy will be done." Not with bowed head alone,
In meek submission, would we say the words ;
Not only in the Garden's agony
May this our prayer be, as it was our Lord's ;*

*But through the smoke and conflict of our life
We catch a glimpse of glory to be won ;
Our Captain calls ; we plunge into the fight,
And shout our battle cry, "Thy will be done."*

William P. Merrill.

CHAPTER EIGHTH

“Thy Will be Done”



THE will of God is perfect in its beauty and its goodness. It is flawless. It shines with the radiance of heaven. It is warm with divine love and tenderness. Being the will of our Father who is in heaven, its direction is always infallible. It makes no mistakes. It never points the wrong way. It never leads into peril. It marks the one straight way home.

Yet many people seem always to dread the will of God. They think of it as something which involves sacrifice and suffering. They always say “Thy will be done,” with quivering lips, as if it meant a sore loss, a bitter disappointment, keen anguish, the giving up of something dear and precious. They have learned to think of God’s will only in connection with their sorrows and trials.

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But this is not a true conception of the will of God. No doubt sometimes it does involve suffering, but a thousand times oftener it leads us in paths of joy and gladness. Primarily the prayer, "Thy will be done," has reference to doing, not to enduring. It is a prayer that we may learn to obey the commandments and do the things that God would have us do. It covers all the life of every day—in the shop and store and school, in the home and the social life, in drudgery and in care, in temptation and in sorrow. It is a prayer for doing, not suffering, God's will. We ask, if we offer it sincerely, that our heart may be so changed that we shall learn to love the will of God, that we shall incline more and more to do it, and that it shall gain fuller and fuller sway over us, until it has become the great dominant force in all our life.

The words "on earth" tell us that it is right here, in our common experiences, that we are to learn to do God's will, and not merely when

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we get to heaven. We are “saved by hope,” but we are to enter upon the blessings of salvation in some measure in this world. We are not to wait till we have reached the celestial country before we begin to do God’s will; we should begin to do it the moment we accept Christ. Too many persons are content to make the doing of this blessed will a dream of what will be when they get into heaven, a happy life which is to be lived beyond the stars. We fall too easily into the feeling that in this world even the best attainments possible are only the merest beginnings of beauty of character and splendor of service, whose full realizations cannot be found until we are inside the gates of pearl. But this is not the gospel. It was not this that Jesus Christ taught his disciples. He came to bring heaven down to earth, to found the kingdom of God in this world. The burden of this prayer is that God’s will may be done on earth as it is in heaven.

This does not mean that every true Christian

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does the will of God perfectly on earth. We start as babies, with everything to learn. We are disciples, scholars, in the school of Christ, and have to learn to do our Father's will. The lessons also are slowly learned. The student in art spoils many a piece of canvas before he can paint his dream in all its beauty. The student in music goes through long, wearisome practice, full of discords and harsh, unmusical efforts, before he is ready to interpret the works of the great masters and win applause.

So it is that we must learn to do God's will. It is a long lesson and not easy. Nature rebels against the new constraint. We like to do our own will, to have our own way. But when we let Christ into our heart the will of God becomes henceforth the law of our life. Moreover the life of Christ becomes a new life in us. It was a wonderful truth which Jesus taught the woman at the well, that the water he gives to one who accepts him becomes in him a well of water, springing up unto eternal life. It may be

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only a feeble beginning, but ultimately it will bring all the life under its power.

One tells of entering a great, crowded church one Sunday morning, while the congregation was singing. A thousand voices joined in the psalm, but it seemed as if no two of them were in accord. But as the visitor listened, he heard one voice which was singing quietly, clearly, distinctly, and sweetly, amid all the confused discords. Soon he noticed that the other voices, one by one, were coming into unison with this one. Before the last verse was reached the whole congregation was singing in perfect harmony. The mass of discordant voices had been dominated by the one true voice and all had been lifted up by it into its own sweet, clear tone.

In some such way does the will of God begin its work in a human heart. Its voice is true and clear and unfaltering. It sings alone, however, in a chorus of harsh, discordant voices. Its work is to bring all these dissonances into harmony,

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to train all these voices of wilfulness and waywardness, all these unmusical feelings and impulses and desires, into quiet unison with itself. When we say that certain persons are growing in grace we mean that the sweet will of God is slowly and gradually bringing their undisciplined powers and tendencies into harmony. The music is growing sweeter. The lessons of patience, meekness, joy, peace, gentleness, thoughtfulness, kindness, charity, are being a little better learned each day.

It is not easy for any life to be thus brought into full accord with the will of God. Much that is in us must be changed. All earthward tendencies must be turned heavenward. Self must die. When Jesus said that he who would follow him must deny himself, he did not mean that he must give up a few things, or many; he meant that self must be effaced as the dominant ruler of the life, and dethroned, and that Christ must be seated in the empty place. No more must the question be, "What is pleasant

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to me? what would I like to do?” but “What is the will of God? what does the voice from the throne command?”

For example, one wrongs us, does us some great unkindness or injustice. Nature counsels resentment, bitterness, the repaying of the evil with evil. But the will of God counsels love, forbearance, patience, forgiveness. As we pray “Thy will be done,” our natural impulse must yield to the divine Spirit and love must prevail. When Enoch Arden came back from the voyage on which it was thought he had perished, and, looking into the window of his old home, found another in his place,—husband to his wife, father to his children,—the poet says:—

*He was not all unhappy. His resolve
Upbore him and firm faith, and evermore
Prayer from a living source within the will,
And beating up through all the bitter world,
Like fountains of sweet water in the sea,
Kept him a living soul.*

This finely illustrates the work of the will of

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God in every Christian heart. It is there as a well of the water of life, a fresh-water spring in the brackish sea, and it beats up through every tide of bitter feeling, sweetening it and subduing it.

The prayer is that the will of God may be done on earth, that is, all over the earth, by all the millions of the race. Yet while this wide aspect should be kept always in view, while we should pray for the submission of all men to the divine sway, it is for the doing of this blessed will in our own life that we are to pray primarily and particularly.

That is the portion of the earth for which we are specially and personally responsible. It is possible that a man may give much thought and care to other lives and neglect his own. We need to guard against this mistake. Each man's life is his own in a peculiar sense. In the matter of the will no one can act for any other. The mother cannot surrender her child's will to God. She may bring influences to bear upon it

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—reasons, motives, persuasions; but meanwhile the child holds in its own hand the sceptre of its life, and alone can yield up the will in which are folded the destinies of the life.

It is right we should pray that all men may be inclined to yield their will to God's; also, that we should do all we can to lead those about us to make this surrender. But our first responsibility is for the bringing of our own will into subjection to God. This no other one can do for us. In the citadel of our life each one of us is sovereign. Even God, with his omnipotence, will never compel us to love and obey him. We alone can make the surrender and it must be voluntary.

“Our wills are ours, we know not how;

Our wills are ours, to make them thine.”

Then until we have made a surrender of our own will to God we cannot acceptably serve him. It is not enough to devote one-seventh of our time and one-tenth of our income to the Lord. It is not enough to engage in the service

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of Christ and to give our life to ministries of love in behalf of the poor and the troubled. It is possible to do all this and yet have in us an unsundered will. It is not our work, our money, our ministrations, that God wants, but our heart. When the will is truly surrendered all else will follow; but until this consecration has been made nothing else will count. While, therefore, we pray earnestly that God's will may be done in others it should be our first concern to make our own will God's. Until we have done this, we are not truly in the kingdom of God, which is first of all a kingdom of surrendered wills.

One reason why it is hard to learn this lesson is that to our human nature the divine will seems to set for us a severe and rigorous rule of life. It demands holiness and righteousness. It checks self-indulgence, putting a rein upon the appetites and passions, and bringing all wayward impulses and tendencies into subjection to Christ. "Take my yoke upon you" is

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our Lord's first demand of those who would follow him. Our own way must be given up for our Master's way. Whatever duty is presented must be accepted promptly, and done cheerfully, unquestioningly. Whatever is not in accord with the divine will must be put away without reluctance, without reserve. This will demands unselfishness. It bids us love our enemy and pray for those who spitefully use us. It requires us to be patient with all men, to be thoughtful and kind to every one, to love the unlovely, to be ready to serve all.

The divine will would set up its throne in our heart and rule there in unquestioned sway. The natural heart resents such intrusion upon its sovereignty, claiming a right to wield the sceptre over its own realm. It regards as unreasonable in its demands and restraints the life of holiness and obedience to which it is called. Men imagine, too, that a life of self-will, self-indulgence, earthly pleasure, will bring more happiness than a life surrendered to God.

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They think that the will of God would make life hard. But really it calls us to the happiest and most beautiful life possible in this world. It is not unreasonable in its demands, for we were made to be God's children, and the true life of a child is love and obedience to the Father. The indulgences which the divine will calls us to give up, though for the present they may give a kind of pleasure, in the end bring sorrow and bitterness. It is poisoned pleasure which they give at the best. The duties to which it invites us, though now they demand self-denial, in the end yield the sweetest joy and the truest good.

The doing of the will of God leads to blessedness. Every path of providence on which God ever takes us, we may be sure, is a path to something good and beautiful. The life of Jesus, from beginning to end, was in accord with this will. He did always the things that pleased his Father. His obedience was costly, how costly we never can understand, for no human heart

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can comprehend the mystery of the Redeemer's sorrows. Yet never in any other heart was there such joy as he experienced, and the end of his experience was infinite and eternal blessedness. Just in the measure in which we follow Christ in doing the will of God shall we share his joy and his blessedness. Disobedience always works hurt and marring, but he who does the will of God is gathering into his life all that is worthy and good and enduring.

“As it is in Heaven”

*“ ‘ Whatsoever !’ Blessed Lord,
Am I ready for that word ?
Is thy will so dear to mine
That the whispers of thy love—
Heard all other calls above—
Claim me, keep me wholly thine ?
Search me, teach me, hold my heart,
Draw me to thy blessed feet ;
There, in hush or service sweet,
I would live the better part.”*

CHAPTER NINTH

“As it is in Heaven”



OD has a thought for every life he sends into this world. In every case it is something beautiful, for every thought of God is beautiful. If only we could be just the being God had in his vision for us when he made us, how radiant, how lovely, how glorious, we should be! If we do God's will faithfully, patiently, continuously, all our life, we shall work out in ourself the divine thought for us and realize the divine purpose for us.

God's will is the real pillar of cloud and fire to lead us through this world's uncharted wilderness. But how can we know what this will for us is? The people saw the mysterious cloud in those ancient days, but we have no such visible symbol to guide us. The will of God is

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made known to us in many ways. It is revealed in the Holy Scriptures. It speaks to us in conscience. It whispers its counsels in the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit. We learn it oftentimes in the advice of wise human friends, who, far more than we realize, are the interpreters to us of the divine love and wisdom. Then it comes to us continually in the providences of our life, by which doors are opened or closed, duties are brought to our hand, new ways are mapped out for us. If only we truly desire to know the will of God that we may do it, there need never be any real or serious difficulty in ascertaining what it is.

One thing, however, we must always remember,—the will of God is not revealed to us in a volume, but in single pages; the whole journey of our life is not charted for us in one great map, spread before our eyes at the beginning,—only one little stretch is shown to us at a time.

“Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see

The distant scene,—one step enough for me.”

“As it is in Heaven”

We need never be impatient to know our future; it is better that we be content to see just the next step and to take that, to know the next duty and do it. This is the way God makes known his will to us.

Thus it is that the will of God is to be done by us. It is to be the law of our life. All our conduct is to be moulded by it. All our dispositions are to be colored by it. Our character is to be built up by it. And the fabric thus reared is enduring, “For he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.” It marks out our path through the world for us.

All our common task-work is God’s will for us, if we are doing the things God would have us do. We are not to divide our work into two sections, and say that one is God’s will for us—our spiritual exercises, our devotions, our moral choices, our distinctively Christian work,—and that the other is the sphere of our own will—the things which are secular. God’s will covers the whole of our life. It must rule in our

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business, in our home relations, in our social life, in our pleasures and amusements. There is no nook or cranny in our life, no byway, no secret corner, in which this divine will must not hold undisputed sway, if we are truly following Christ. Religion is not something which can be gathered into Sundays and church services, and shut out of week-days and the business and pleasure of one's life. It claims all.

There is another phase of the doing of the will of God. Sometimes when the words of the prayer are uttered they mean submission to pain or suffering. It was so in the life of Christ himself. His words as he came into the world were, "I delight to do thy will, O my God." He went through his years of ministry, doing the Father's will with joy. It was a wonderful ministry. Wherever he went he left benedictions. But at last he came to an hour when the will of God meant suffering and sacrifice for him. Yet he faltered not. Still it was, "Not my will, but thine, be done."

“As it is in Heaven”

In nearly every life there come hours when instead of the active doing of the Father's will, there must be suffering or sorrow. One who has been intensely busy in life, while in the very midst of a brilliant service for God and men is stricken down and laid aside. It brings immeasurable comfort in such a case to believe that the will of God is being done now in the quiet room, with hands folded, just as truly and as acceptably as it used to be done in the days of active duty when the hands were full of tasks and active services. One in such experiences told a friend how it helped her, when in pain at night, to feel that she was still “working away at God's will.” The words spoke of courage, with no repining. She felt that she was as really doing God's will on her bed, in her suffering, by keeping sweet, patient, and trustful, as ever she did when she was in the ways of busy life,—still working away at his will.

All of us come to points some time, somewhere, in life, when for a season, at least, we can no

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longer go on with the things we have been doing with delight, but must turn aside and lie down in seeming idleness. Or we are called to suffer or to endure loss. Or the path on which we must go is steep and rough.

Still, it is always the right way in which this holy will leads us, the way, too, to blessedness. The time is not lost which seems lost to us. Some day we shall know that many of the best things in our life have been wrought for us or by us in the very seasons when, as it seemed to us, we had been interrupted in our usefulness, and were being kept from doing God's will. We shall find, too, that when we thought nothing was being done either for us or by us, the fruits of the Spirit were really coming to their best sweetness and ripeness in our life.

“In every life

There's a pause that is better than onward rush,

Better than hewing or mightiest doing ;

'T is the standing still at sovereign will.

There's a hush that is better than ardent speech,

“As it is in Heaven”

*Better than sighing or wilderness crying ;
'Tis the being still at sovereign will.
The pause and the hush sing a double song,
In unison low and for all time long.
O human soul, God's working plan
Goes on, nor heeds the aid of man !
Stand still, and see !
Be still, and know !”*

One of the most wonderful words in the Bible tells us that Jesus was made perfect through suffering. Even in his sinless human nature there were qualities whose beauty could be brought out in full perfection only in pain. How much more true is it of our sinful nature that only in furnace fires can it be perfected !

God's will is not only holy, it is also good. We may be sure therefore that whenever it leads us into any way of suffering, it is because that is the way of blessing. We need never be afraid to accept God's will, however it may break into our cherished plans and take from us our

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dearest joys ; we may follow our Master confidently, and he will bring us out into the light and the glory.

The standard set in this petition for the doing of God's will on earth is remarkable—"as it is done in heaven." We know that there is no disobedience, even in thought or feeling, in heaven. The will of God is done there perfectly. It is also done cheerfully, without repining, though it be hard. It is done unquestioningly, without any doubt of its goodness and its wisdom. It is done without regard to the quality of the service, as gladly when it is the lowliest task that is assigned, as when it is the highest.

We may learn of Christ himself how to do God's will on earth as it is done in heaven. We know how patient he was. It was not easy for him to live on the earth. Even his truest friends hurt his heart oftentimes by their dulness, or by their unbelief, or by their failure in friendship. But we know how sweetly he kept on his way of love with them. We know with

“As it is in Heaven”

what self-forgetfulness he served others, going at last to a cross for them. We know how quietly he turned away from his active ministry, when the time came, and set his face to go to Jerusalem to die. Christ himself was our great Teacher. He showed us how God's will is done in heaven and how we should try to do it on earth.

*“The hands that do God's work are patient hands,
And quick for toil, though folded oft in prayer :
They do the unseen work they understand
And find—no matter where.*

*“The feet that follow his must be swift feet,
For time is all too short; the way too long ;
Perchance they may be bruised, but falter not,
For love shall make them strong.”*

Our prayer teaches us that the obedience of heaven is the divine ideal for the earthly doing of God's will. Far above us seems this rule of life. We say we never can reach it. The song is too sweet for us ever to sing with our discord-

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ant voice. The life is too holy for us, with our sin-hurt nature, ever to live. Yet we should never think of it as a visionary or an impracticable rule of life. Some day we shall attain it, and we should never cease to strive toward it. God never would ask anything impossible or unreasonable of his children. He would not set for us a rule of life which we cannot follow. When he gives a duty he is ready also to give the grace needed for the doing of it. The Holy Spirit dwells in the heart of every believer, and he will help us to do the will of God.

“Thy will be done” is a prayer to our Father. To offer this petition continually without having made a surrender of our will is to pray insincerely. As fast as the divine will is revealed to us we should seek to obey it or submit to it. Then our prayer is that God, by his Spirit, would incline us to submission; would bring us more and more fully into accord with his way; would make us willing to be made willing; and would help us, whether in active obedience or

“As it is in Heaven”

in patient submission, to do our Father's will
on earth as it is done in heaven.

*“Father, I do not ask
That thou wouldst choose some other task
And make it mine. I pray
But this: Let every day
Be moulded still
By thine own hand; my will
Be only thine, however deep
I have to bend thy hand to keep.
Let me not simply do, but be content,
Sure that the little crosses each are sent;
And no mistake can ever be
With thine own hand to choose for me.”*

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*“ Dear Lord, my will from thine doth run
Too oft a different way;
I cannot say, ‘ Thy will be done’
Through all life’s darkened day.
My heart grows chill to see thy will
Turn all earth’s gold to gray.*

*“ My will is set to gather flowers,
Thine blights them in my hand;
Mine reaches for life’s sunny hours,
Thine leads through shadow-land;
And all my days go on in ways
I cannot understand.”*

CHAPTER TENTH

A Career? or God's Will?



WHAT is success? What is the true aim in life? What should one, setting out to make his way through this world, take as the goal of all his striving? Views of life differ widely.

Many men think they are in this world to make a career for themselves. They set out with some splendid vision of success in their mind, and they devote their life to the realizing of this vision. If they fail in this, they suppose they have failed in life. If they achieve their dream, they consider themselves, and are considered by their fellow-men, successful.

The world has no other standard of success. It may be the amassing of wealth; it may be the winning of power among men in the state or in war; it may be the triumph of skill or of

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genius in art, in literature, in music, in oratory, — whatever the definite object may be, it is purely an earthly ambition. The two elements in the life, according to this view, are, that the career is one which the world honors, and that a man wins worthy distinction in it.

Applying this standard to life, but few men are really successful. Great men are as rare as lofty mountain peaks. Only a few win the high places; the mass remain in the low vales. The percentage of those who succeed in business is small. In the professions, too, in literature, in art, in civil life, in all the callings, it is the same,—only a few win honor, rise into fame, achieve distinction, while the great multitude remain in obscurity or go down in the dust of earthly defeat.

Is this the only standard of success in life? Do all men, save the few who win earth's prizes, really fail? Is there no other kind of success? The world's answer gives no comfort to those who find themselves among the unhonored. But

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there is another sphere, the sphere of the invisible. There is a life whose tokens and tests are not material, but spiritual. One may utterly fail, so far as earthly results are concerned, and yet, in the realm invisible, be a splendid winner in the race.

“Faithfulness in the humblest part

Is better, at least, than proud success ;

And patience and love in a chastened heart

Are pearls more precious than happiness ;

And in the morning when we shall awake

To the springtime freshness of youth again,

All troubles will seem but a flying flake,

And lifelong sorrow a breath on the pane.”

The true test of life is character. All else is extraneous, belonging only to the husk, which shall fall off in the day of ripening ; character is the kernel, the wheat, that which is true and enduring. Nothing is worth while save that which we can carry with us through death into eternity. St. Paul puts it in a sentence when he says, “The things which are

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seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

It is altogether possible that a man may fail of winning any earthly greatness, any distinction among men, anything that will immortalize him in this world's calendars, and yet be richly and nobly successful in moral things, in character, in a ministry of usefulness, in things which shall abide when mountains have crumbled. It is possible for one to fall behind in the race for wealth, for honor, for distinction in art or literature, and yet all the while to be building up in himself a fabric of beauty and strength which angels shall admire.

Here is a man who at mid-life is a physical wreck. He has dropped out of the ranks and fallen far behind those who at the first were his comrades. He is a hopeless invalid. The other day the physician said that he never can be any better. He may live for many years, yet there is nothing before him but pathetic invalidism.

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Shall we say that this man's life is a failure because of his physical condition, which has put a stop to all effort and compels him to sit with folded hands in the shadows, watching busy men at their tasks as they continue to win honor and success? No, his life is not a failure. He has lived nobly all his years. There is not a stain upon his name. He has been building up in himself a character in which the beatitudes shine,—lowliness, meekness, hunger for righteousness, mercifulness, purity of heart, the peace-making spirit. He has won no name in the world's ranks, but he has followed Christ faithfully, and has pleased him. He has lived a life of love, too—love which has expressed itself not merely in word, but in countless ministries of grace to those who have turned to him in faith and expectation for sympathy and help. He has had God and heaven in all his life, and has lived near the heart of Christ.

No doubt there is a mystery about the strange ways of Providence with him, but we may be

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sure that this good man's life is in God's sight no less successful now, when all activity has ceased, than it was in the days when he was busiest, full of energy and toil. Who will say, indeed, that these are not his best days? While the outer man has been perishing, decaying, may not the inner man have been growing in all worthy qualities, in all spiritual graces, in the things which shall endure forever? Ofttimes it is in what the world regards as failure that a man really achieves his noblest and best success. Many a man has found his soul only when he had lost his fortune or his health or his place.

*“ God lets us go our way alone,
Till we are homesick and distressed,
And humbly, then, come back to own
His way is best.*

*“ He lets us thirst by Horeb's rock,
And hunger in the wilderness ;
Yet, at our feeblest, faintest knock,
He waits to bless.*

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*“ He lets us faint in far-off lands,
And feed on husks, and feel the smart,
Till we come home with empty hands,
And swelling heart.*

*“ But then for us the robe and ring,
The Father's welcome and the feast,
While over us the angels sing,—
Though last and least.”*

We are not accustomed to thank God for our disappointments, for the blighting of our earthly hopes and expectations, for the failure of our plans, but we might safely do so, oftentimes; for it is in such experiences as these that we are led to the sources of truest blessedness and most enduring honor.

*“ Thank God for failure, shattered hopes, lost aims,
And ungained garlands, for he knoweth best.
' They also serve who only stand and wait ' ;
Perchance they also win who seem to fail ;
God's eye sees clearer than our earth-dimmed sight.”*

What is the standard of success in the sphere

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of the unseen and the spiritual? It is the doing of the will of God. He who does the will of God makes his life radiant and beautiful, though in the world's scale he is rated as having altogether failed in the battle. He who is true, just, right, and pure, pleasing God and living unselfishly, is the man who succeeds while all others fail.

Really, there is no other final and infallible standard of living. One who writes his name highest in earth's lists, and yet has not done God's will, meanwhile, has failed, as the angels look at his career. God had a purpose in our creation and redemption, and we succeed only when our life carries out this purpose. The most radiant career, as it appears to men, means nothing if it is not that for which God made us. We fail in life if we do not realize God's will for us.

In one of Browning's poems is the beautiful story of a boy working at his poor trade and praising God morn, noon, and night. But one

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whispered in the boy's ear a word which left in his mind a feeling of discontent with his lowly place and work, and started in his heart a desire for something great and conspicuous. He craved now to praise God in the pope's great and splendid way in St. Peter's dome. He left his poor trade and became a priest. Meanwhile Gabriel took up the boy's tasks and played the craftsman well, praising God in his place. At last Theocrite realized his early dream—he was pope now in St. Peter's. But Gabriel appeared to him, saying:—

I did not well when I took thee from thy craftsman's cell and set thee here.

Go back to thy cell and thy poor employ;

Resume the craftsman and the boy.

He seemed to be serving God now in a far grander way than when he was working at his trade in his lowly place. But really he pleased God better in those early days than now, amid splendor and pomp. God had missed the boy's song all the years—his place had been really

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vacant since he left it. Only when he went back to his poor employ was he fulfilling the divine plan for his life.

We live worthily only when we do what God sent us here to do. A splendid career in the sight of men has no splendor in heaven's sight if it be but the prompting of human ambition, if it be not God's thought for the life. The praise that pleases God best is that which is sung in the place where our life belongs. Heaven misses in the chorus the sweet voice strayed from the lowly place where it should be heard, and singing now in some sphere of honor to which it was never assigned.

Not the making of a fine career, therefore, but the simple doing of God's will is the one true aim in living. Thus only can we achieve real success. If we do this, though we fail in the earthly race, we shall not fail in God's sight. We may make no name among men, may rear for ourself no monument of earthly glory, but if we please God by a life of obedience and

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lowly service, and build up within us a character in which divine qualities shine, we shall have attained abiding success.

The only way, therefore, to make our life nobly and truly successful is to devote ourself to the doing of God's will. It is not the things we want to do that are the best, but the things God would have us do. Ofttimes these may be things which to our thought it is scarcely worth while to do, and the turning aside from our fine schemes and conspicuous efforts to attend to these trivialities may appear to be a wasting of talent and time. But always God's will is the grandest thing we can find to do in all the world, though it be in men's eyes the lowliest task our hands can do.

An autobiographical passage in the life of Norman McLeod illustrates this. "My life," he says, "is not what I would have chosen. I often long for quiet, for reading, and for thought. It seems to me to be a very paradise to be able to read, to think, go deep into things, to gather

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the glorious riches of intellectual culture. . . . God has forbidden it to me in his providence. I must spend hours in receiving people who wish to speak to me about all manner of trifles; must reply to letters about nothing; must engage in public work on everything; must employ my life on what seems uncongenial, vanishing, temporary, waste. Yet God knows me better than I know myself. He knows my gifts, my powers, my failings, and my weakness; what I can do, and what not do. So I desire to be led, and not to lead; to follow him. I am quite sure he has thus enabled me to do a great deal more in ways which seemed to me almost a waste of life, in advancing his kingdom, than I would have done any other way."

The most successful life is the one which falls in the most cheerfully and the most completely with the will of God. It will not be an indolent life, nor will it be aimless and purposeless. It is the will of God that every power of our being shall be brought out, trained, and dis-

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ciplined to its highest possibility, and devoted to the noblest and worthiest service. But the dominant influence in our life should always be the will of God and not any ambition of our own. Then shall we fulfil the purpose God had in his thought for us, when he made us and sent us into the world. And this will be the noblest career possible for us.

The Daily Bread

*"Give us this day our daily bread."
Back of the loaf is the snowy flour,
And back of the flour the mill;
And back of the mill is the wheat, and the shower,
And the sun, and the Father's will.*

Maltbie D. Babcock.

CHAPTER ELEVENTH

The Daily Bread



WE are half-way through the Lord's Prayer and come now to the first request for anything for ourself. We have learned that God must always be put first, and that the honoring of his name, the coming of his kingdom, and the doing of his will are always to be thought about and sought for before any matter of our own.

Yet it is a great comfort to know that we may bring our bodily wants to God in prayer. Throughout the Scriptures we are taught that nothing which concerns our life in any way is too small to be of interest to our Father. While the definite prayer here is for bread, all our physical needs are included. In an exquisite passage in the same sermon of Jesus in which the

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Lord's Prayer is given, we are taught that our Father cares for the birds and provides for them, and clothes the flowers in their gorgeous beauty which lasts for only a day. Then we are taught that the same love which thus provides for the birds and the lilies will much more care for us. Nothing necessary for our life is too small or too earthly to put into the heart of a prayer.

This petition for daily bread, like all the sayings of Christ, is full of deep meaning. Every word has its rich suggestions.

We ask God to give us bread. We thus recognize our dependence on him for it. It is not easy to offer this petition with real meaning when we have plenty in our hands and no fear of want. We can conceive of the very poor, with no bread, on the verge of starving, uttering the prayer and putting their whole heart into it. The bitter sense of need makes the cry a real one for them. But for those who have never felt a pang of actual hunger, and have never been without a store from which to draw for

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to-morrow's provision, it is not easy to realize the sense of dependence which the petition implies. This is one of the words of Christ whose full meaning only experience can teach.

Yet it is true that whatever abundance may be ours, we are actually dependent upon God for each day's bread. The story of the forty years of the miracle of manna in the wilderness is but a parable of another miracle immeasurably greater—the providing of bread for all earth's millions all the days of all the centuries. What we call the laws of nature are but our Father's ordinary ways of working. The regularity of these laws is but the proof of divine faithfulness. Suppose that for a single year, or but for a week, God's miracle of bread should cease from the earth, what would be the consequences? The unbroken continuity of God's mercy of bread hinders our appreciation of its greatness and its meaning to us.

This prayer implies, also, that all the bread of the world is God's. "The earth is the Lord's,

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and the fulness thereof." The bread belongs to him, and what we need can become ours only through his gift to us. We may take it and use it without asking him for it, but, if we do, we take that to which we have no right. Even if the food be on our table, ready to be eaten, it is not yet ours until we have asked God for it. Those who pray not, nor even think of God, seem to be fed, as well as the righteous,—sometimes more bountifully. God "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust." But there is a difference. Those who ask God for their bread get it as his gift and with his blessing upon it, while those who take it without asking for it, get it, and may be fed, but they miss the blessing, and it is the blessing of God that maketh rich, that giveth value to anything we have. This suggests the true meaning and the fitness of the Christian custom—is it waning now?—of asking a blessing or "saying grace" before a meal.

The Daily Bread

The form of the prayer teaches the lesson of unselfishness. It is not "Give me" but "Give us." We cannot come to God for ourself alone. We must ask bread for others, for all—even for our enemies, if we have enemies. Especially must we think of the needy, the destitute, asking God to give them bread. If we are sincere we must be ready also, so far as we have opportunity and so far as we are able, to help to answer our own prayer for others by sharing our plenty with those who lack. "Whoso hath the world's goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him?"

One of the most beautiful commentaries on this teaching is in the account of the way the people of the first church lived together. After the day of Pentecost, in the glow of the new-born love of the disciples, those who had abundance gave to those who were poor, so that none lacked. Only thus can any follower of Christ carry out the teaching of the Master. We must

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be ready to share our bread with our brother who lacks.

*“Bow thy head and pray
That while thy brother starves to-day
Thou mayest not eat thy bread at ease ;
Pray that no health or wealth or peace
May lull thy soul while the world lies
Suffering, and claims thy sacrifice.”*

There is a limitation in this petition. “Give us this day our daily bread.” In the other form of the prayer, in Luke, the words vary somewhat, “Give us day by day our daily bread.” In Matthew it is a prayer only for the one day, with no thought of to-morrow ; in Luke it takes in other days, but only as they come, one day at a time. In both forms we are taught to pray for only the bread of one day. There is a deep lesson in this teaching. Life is not given to us by the year or the month, but by single days. Night is the horizon which bounds our vision ; we see not the morrow, and we are to confine our thought to the little space included between

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the rising and the setting of the sun. This does not forbid forethought—the Bible encourages wise and proper care for the future. But all we are authorized to ask God to give us at any time is simply enough for the present day. Even if in the evening our last crust be eaten and there be nothing in store for to-morrow, we need not be afraid, nor think that God has forgotten. When the morrow comes we may ask for the morrow's own bread and know that God will hear us and answer our prayer in the right way.

Here again we are taught that wonderful lesson of living a day at a time—a lesson which runs through all the Bible. It would save us an immense amount of worry and anxiety if we could really learn this lesson. It is trying to carry to-morrow's burden besides to-day's that breaks people down. Anybody can do one day's tasks in a day, or endure one day's struggle; but that is enough for any one, all God intends one to carry.

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*“ One day at a time ! That’s all it can be :
No faster than that is the hardest fate ;
And days have their limits, however we
Begin them too early and stretch them late.*

*“ One day at a time !
It’s a wholesome rhyme—
A good one to live by :
A day at a time.*

*“ One day at a time ! A burden too great
To be borne for two can be borne for one ;
Who knows what will enter to-morrow’s gate ?
While yet we are speaking all may be done.*

*“ One day at a time !
It’s a wholesome rhyme—
A good one to live by :
A day at a time.*

*“ One day at a time ! But a single day,
Whatever its load, whatever its length ;
And there’s a bit of precious Scripture to say
That according to each shall be our strength.*

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*“ A day at a time !
It’s a wholesome rhyme—
A good one to live by :
A day at a time.”*

There is a special suggestiveness in the word “our”—“Give us our bread.” It is God’s bread first; it becomes ours through God’s gift to us. But there is something else also implied—the bread must be earned by us before it is properly ours. It is clearly taught in the Scriptures that every one must work for his own bread. This was the law of the unfallen state in Eden, and it is no less the law in the kingdom of redemption. Of course this does not apply to little children who are too young to work, to the old who are too feeble, or to the sick who are incapacitated for work—all such come under God’s special care and will not be forgotten. But all who are able to work must do so, or the bread they eat is not rightfully their own. “If any will not work,” says the Apostle Paul, “neither let him eat.”

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The bread must be earned also in ways which have the divine approval. If a man steals his daily bread it is not his—he has robbed God and robbed his fellow-man, and there is a curse on what he eats. Money got in fraudulent transactions, or by any dishonest means, has not been righteously earned, and God's blessing cannot be invoked upon it by any form of prayer. Imagine a gambler, for example, living on the fruits of his sin, asking God to give him, with a blessing, the bread on his table! Imagine a saloon-keeper, who has earned his bread by selling strong drinks which have brought ruin upon lives and homes, asking God to bless his daily bread! God's bread can become ours with a blessing only when it is earned in honest ways. While, therefore, we toil to earn our bread we must keep ourself unspotted from the world.

*“ I watched the sparrows flitting here and there,
In quest of food about the miry street :
Such nameless fare as seems to sparrows sweet
They sought with greedy clamor everywhere.*

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*" Yet 'mid their strife I noted with what care
They held upraised their fluttering pinions fleet.
They trod the mire with soiled and grimy feet,
But kept their wings unsullied in the air.*

*" I, too, like thee, O sparrow, toil to gain
My scanty portion from life's sordid ways.
Like thee, too, often hungry, I am fain
To strive with greed and envy all my days.
Would that I, too, like thee, might learn the grace
To keep my soul's uplifted wings from stain !"*

There is yet another limitation in the petition, in the word "daily." It means enough for the day—seasonable provision. It is not a prayer, therefore, for a large supply. We are not authorized to ask for luxuries. We need not infer that it is wrong for us to have more than our actual need for the day requires; but this is all that is promised. St. Paul says, "My God shall fulfil every need of yours, according to his riches in glory." This assures us of a very abundant provision. Our Father does everything generously. He is never niggardly or mean in caring

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for his children. Ofttimes he supplies their wants most abundantly, giving them far more than they need. But we are taught to ask only for enough, and we cannot claim the promise for more.

The prayer would seem also to forbid extravagance. God's bread never should be wasted. There is a story of Carlyle that one day he was seen going into the middle of the street to pick up a crust of bread which he saw lying there in the dust. Taking it in his hand gently, as if it had been something very valuable, he brushed off the clay and then carried it to the curb and laid it down, saying: "I was taught by my mother never to waste anything, least of all bread, the most precious of all God's gifts. This crust of bread may feed a hungry dog or a little sparrow." Our Lord himself taught the same lesson, when, after working his great miracle of the loaves, and feeding thousands, he directed that all the fragments be gathered up, that nothing should be lost. The bread we get

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as God's gift is sacred, and not a crumb of it should be wasted, either recklessly or in useless extravagance.

We are taught to limit our wants, but we are to ask with confidence for all we may need for the day. Days differ. Some bring their heavy burdens, their great wants, their keen sorrows, their crosses. Others have fewer needs. God knows our days, and he is better able than we are to measure our real wants for each day. We may safely, therefore, ask for daily bread, and let him choose what to give us. He will never give too little.

“ If a ‘ to-morrow,’ who can tell ?

To sleep, or wake ?

To work, or rest ?

What he deems best,

God gives, we take,

Knowing ‘ he doeth all things well ! ’ ”

It is surely a great comfort to know that in this world each one of us is thought about and cared for by our Father, who loves us with an

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infinite and everlasting love. He does not think of us merely as a vast, uncounted family, but as individuals. "He telleth the number of the stars ; he giveth them all their names." If one star should go out, God would miss its shining. He knows the birds and misses the one that drops from the flock.

*" No moment passes but he knows
How many there should be.
One buildeth high, another low,
With just a bird's light care ;
If only one, perchance, doth fall,
God knoweth when and where."*

More surely and with more loving thought does he know his own children. He knows our names. Each one of us is personally dear to him. The very hairs of our head are all numbered. Not one of us is ever forgotten in heaven for a moment. We can be in no place or condition in which our circumstances are not well known to God. "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him."

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This teaching makes the law of life very simple. We are not to live to get food, but are to live, first and last, as God's, and for God. We have nothing to do directly with the supplying of our own wants; that is God's matter, not ours. There are but two things we need to concern ourself about. First, we should do our duty—the will of God, as it is made known to us day by day. Then we should trust God for the supply of our bodily and temporal wants.

Those who have learned to live thus have found the way of peace. Over-anxiety is sin. It dishonors God, for it is bred of doubt; it hurts our own life, hindering our spiritual growth, marring the beauty of our character and blurring our witness for God to others. If we faithfully do God's will, as revealed to us, and then trust God perfectly, the peace of God will guard our hearts and thoughts in Christ Jesus.

“Forgive us our Debts”

•

*“ God loveth thee, but not thy sin ;
He would thou shouldst be pure and clean ;
That which defileth, cast away ;
Thy steps direct in wisdom’s way.
Give him thy heart and soul and be
His own, because God loveth thee.”*

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CHAPTER TWELFTH

“Forgive us our Debts”



N this petition we come to the first sad note in the Lord's Prayer. The first three petitions, it has been said, angels and saints in heaven could offer. The fourth could have been used in Eden, for in innocency our first parents received their daily bread from God. But the fifth is only for sinners of our fallen race. It is a cry out of the depths; a cry, however, which every mortal needs to make. Not to make it is to stay in one's sins. The path of penitence is the only path that leads toward the gates of heaven.

The word "and" in this petition is suggestive and important. We need food, and we pray to our Father, asking him to give us what we need day by day. But though the wants of our

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body are supplied most abundantly, we should still perish forever if that were all we received from heaven. God's most bountiful gifts are not enough; with these we must obtain also God's mercy. The prayer which pleads "Father, give," must cry also "Father, forgive." It is an essential link, therefore, which binds together as in one the two petitions, "Give us this day our daily bread, *and* forgive us our debts." We must never rend them apart, but must always offer them in the same breath.

One of the most wonderful beatitudes in the Bible is that for the forgiven man, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." If we had written that beatitude, we would have put it, "Blessed is he who never has sinned, whose life is spotless and pure." But then it would have excluded all of our race, for there is no one who has not sinned. Only one Man in all the roll of the ages could have come under the bright white wings of the beatitude. As it reads, however, there is no

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one, however stained his life may be, who cannot claim and receive the benediction: “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.”

“Father, forgive us our debts.” In Luke the petition reads, “Forgive us our sins.” The word for sin means missing the mark. The mark is perfect obedience and we all miss it. Sin misses another mark, too,—the blessedness of eternal life. God made us to live with himself, but through our failure we all come short of the divine glory. Sin brings ruin. “Thou hast destroyed thyself.”

The word for sins used in Matthew’s form of the Lord’s Prayer is “debts.” Our sins are debts. A debt is something we owe to another. Debt is a fearful burden which brings untold misery upon those who find themselves in its power. But worst of all debts are our sins.

To whom do we owe these debts? Are they debts to ourself? In a sense they are. Whenever we sin we rob ourself, take something

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from our own life which leaves us poorer. Sin always harms the sinner. It wounds and scars his soul. It stains his life. "He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul." Shall we then say, in excuse for our sinning, that our life is our own and that we may do with it as we will? But our life is not our own. It is God's gift to us and it still belongs to God. We shall have to account for it when we stand before the judgment-seat.

Nothing is taught more clearly in the Scriptures than that our life, with all its powers and talents, is something of God's, intrusted to us to be guarded by us and then brought back to God at the last. If it be faithfully kept and used, and returned at last without hurt or marring, its possibilities developed, we shall receive a reward. But if it be hurt, or if it be kept wrapped up in a napkin, an unused gift, we shall have a sad and fearful accounting when we stand before Christ. Our life is not our own to do with as we please. We may not harm it

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or destroy it and think that we shall escape accounting for the ruin we have wrought. It is God's property we are wasting and he will ask us for it.

Nor can we say that our sins are debts to ourselves and that therefore we can forgive ourselves, can remit them, absolve ourselves from paying them. God only can forgive any sin. Any effort of ours to free ourselves from our debts only binds the awful burden more firmly upon us. We are quite ready to try to forgive ourselves, excusing our sins, offering apologies and palliations for them, but we only add to our guilt and to our harming. Our sins are not merely debts owing to ourselves.

Then, are they debts to other people, to those against whom we commit them? Again, in a sense they are. We are bound up with people in inextricable bonds. We owe duties to every one. The divine law requires us to love our neighbor as ourselves. This indicates the nature and extent of our obligations to others, what we owe

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to them. St. Paul, among the many wholesome counsels which shine in the pages of his epistles, gives this one, "Owe no man anything." He had seen how the curse of debt had wrought its ruin in many lives, and he besought his friends to avoid it. But there was one debt he excluded. "Owe no man anything, save to love." Love is a debt we never can altogether pay off. Even if, at the close of a day, we could say that we had met every obligation of love to every individual in the world, we would rise next morning to find the debts all waiting for us, and we should have to begin anew to pay them. Elsewhere St. Paul said that he was debtor to every man. He did not mean that he owed money to everybody, but that he owed love—not only to the refined Greek but also to the uncouth and unlovable barbarian. We all have a like debt to pay; we owe love to every one.

Have we been paying all these debts? One of the bitterest ingredients in the cup of sorrow

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ofttimes is the remembrance of failure in fulfilling love's duties. We stand by the coffins of our friends and recall, perhaps not unkindnesses, but neglect to show kindnesses, courtesies omitted, to those who are now beyond our reach. It is this class of sins which the word “debts” specially suggests — duties which we owed and did not pay. In the case of refined, cultivated people, there may well be no acts of cruelty, injustice, or wrong, committed against others, but there are few days in which the gentlest do not leave undone many things they ought to have done, neglecting duties of encouragement, of comfort, of kindness, and of thoughtful help.

But is it only to our fellow-men that we owe these debts? Would their forgiveness of us, when we have failed in love's duty to them, set us free from the obligation? No, we must look back of the persons we injure or neglect. All our sins against others are against God. Even a cruelty to a dumb animal is a sin against God

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and God alone can forgive it. It is with God we have to do in every thought or word or act. It is God's law we violate when we fail to love our neighbor as ourself. The calls of need that come to us are not merely human voices—they are the echoes of the divine voice. "Behind the injured, neglected brother, God stands, the guardian of that brother's rights; behind the neglected work God stands, the real Employer who has trusted us with talents and powers. Behind the misused or unused talents, stands the Giver of them, and demands his own." Our unpaid debts of love to others are really debts to God. We may wrong our friends and neighbors, but we can sin only against God, and God only can forgive us.

David had wrecked a home, caused the death of a faithful soldier, and brought dishonor upon a nation, but he said truly, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned." Jesus made it plain that our unpaid debts of love to men are debts to God. In the judgment, those who

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have neglected to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, and care for the sick, are said to have failed in these duties to the Judge himself. He who sins against another sins against God.

The word “our” is suggestive. Our sins are our own. Each one lives his own life apart. In the Fifty-first Psalm David speaks continually of “my sin,” “my transgression,” “mine iniquity.” He could blame his sins on no other. He could transfer his guilt to no other. No matter who tempted us, our sin is still our own. No one can compel us to sin. Temptation is not sin—the sin begins when we yield to it. “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you,” say the Scriptures. Every man’s soul is his castle, and no other, no evil spirit, no hosts of wicked powers, can force an entrance. Hence our sins are our own and we never can lay the blame on any other. “Nothing,” said Augustine, “is so much our own as our sins.” The most loving friend could not take our sin and free us from it. Da-

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vid would have died for Absalom, but his love was powerless to do so. Every one must give account of himself unto God.

What shall we do? Here is the only answer: "Father, forgive us our debts." Can sin be forgiven? We are told that nature knows no forgiveness. You cannot get back the health lost in sinful indulgence. You cannot recall the bitter word which flew yesterday from your lips into a loving heart. You cannot undo the evil which caused an innocent person to fall. Yet from the beginning of the Bible to its close we are assured that God is a God of mercy, and that however great our sins against him may be he will forgive us. He loves to forgive. He is slow to wrath but swift in mercy.

Confession is necessary. David tells us that while he kept silence his bones waxed old through his roaring all the day long. He found no peace. Unconfessed sin is unforgiven sin and is a fire within the breast. If we cover our sins we cannot prosper, but when we confess them

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and forsake them we shall find mercy. God runs to meet the prodigal who returns with penitence. An old writer says:—

*If one draw near
Unto God, with praise and prayer,
Half a cubit, God will go
Twenty leagues to meet him so :
He who walketh unto God,
God will run upon the road,
All the quicker to forgive
One who learns at last to live.*

What is God's forgiveness? Is it simply the remission of the penalty? Does God merely save us from punishment, and nothing more? Would that satisfy us and give us peace? It is not the dread of the consequences of sin that is its most fearful element. It is the burden upon the soul, the sense of guilt, the anguish of remorse—this is what makes sin so terrible. Would then the lifting away of the penalty, while all the bitterness of sin itself stays in the heart, be a forgiveness that would bring joy? Would

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heaven make us happy if we could be taken into its glory, with all this woe within?

No; the forgiveness that will bring blessing must not only remit the penalty, but must also include the taking away of the sin itself, the undoing of the terrible ruin which sin has wrought in us, the new creating of our life in the divine image, and the making of us as though we had not sinned at all. Here it is that the work of Christ's redemption comes in. Salvation means more than the removal of guilt. The old legend says that a dove nestled on the cross when Jesus was dying. The suggestion is that the power of the Holy Spirit was necessary to complete the work of grace in the life cleansed by the blood of Christ. The Lamb of God taketh away—not the penalty only of sin, but the sin itself.

There is another little word here which must not be overlooked: "Forgive *us*." Throughout all this prayer we have been taught not to speak to God for ourself alone. We approach the gates of prayer, crying, not, "My Father," but

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“Our Father.” Self must be effaced and selfishness must die as we fall on our knees. In asking for bread, we are taught to think of others’ needs as well as our own. So here, when we cry for forgiveness, we must include others.

There is a sense in which we must bring our own sins, alone, to God. They are our own and no one but ourself can get them forgiven. We must confess our own sins and repent of our own sins. The Pharisee in the parable was free in confessing the publican’s sins, but said not a word about his own. The publican’s confession was the true one. He troubled himself only with his own personal unworthiness. “God be merciful to me, a sinner.”

Yet, while we must pray for the forgiveness of our own personal sins, our prayer is not complete if we do not reach out and ask that others too may be forgiven. We are to love our neighbor as ourself. We are therefore to be concerned about our neighbor’s sins as much as we are about our own. But are we? We may find it easy to see our

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neighbor's faults and to blame him for his follies or shortcomings; but is that really being grieved for his sins? Do we not sometimes almost rejoice at learning that a neighbor has slipped or fallen? Yet if we have the mind that was in Christ Jesus we will feel toward the sins of others as he did, and he wept over Jerusalem because the people would not repent.

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*“ ‘Forgive us our debts, as we forgive.’
Ah, who, dear Lord, can pray that prayer?
The rest with ready zeal is said,
But, self-accused, we falter there.”*



*“If in my heart has been
An unforgiving thought, or word, or look,
Though deep the malice which I scarce could brook,
Wash me from the dark sin.”*

CHAPTER THIRTEENTH

“As we forgive”



WRITER says of another, “His heart was as great as the world, but there was no room in it to hold the memory of a wrong.” This is the true ideal for every Christian heart. We have it in the prayer which we are taught to offer for forgiveness. While we ask God to forgive us, we declare to him that we have forgiven those who are indebted to us, those who have trespassed against us. We say to God that there is no bitterness, no spirit of unforgiveness, in our heart.

The language is very strong. In Matthew, according to the Revised Version, the petition reads, “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” In Luke it is “And forgive us our sins; for we ourselves also for-

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give every one that is indebted to us." We cannot use the first part of the petition, asking our Father to forgive us, and not follow with the other in which we declare that we will show to others the same forgiveness which we ask for ourself.

*"We pray for mercy,
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy."*

The great importance of this duty of forgiving appears when we remember how repeatedly it is brought before us. When our Lord had gone through the form of prayer, he called the particular attention of his disciples to this petition, in the words, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." On another occasion, when speaking of prayer and the power we may exercise through prayer—"All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye have received

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them, and ye shall have them,” Jesus added, “And whosoever ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any one; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.” Whenever we appear before God, and before we begin to speak to him, we should look into our own heart, and if we find there any bitterness, any feeling of unforgiveness, we should seek instantly to put it away. Indeed we must put it away before we can proceed with our prayer.

In one of our Lord’s parables we have the same lesson taught again in most emphatic way. Our debt to God is represented by ten thousand talents, a vast sum, while our neighbor’s debt to us is only a hundred pence—less than one millionth part of the ten thousand talents, a proportion so small as to be almost inappreciable. We fret and chafe over the wrongs and injuries done to us by others, as if they were really enormous. This view of the greatness of our sins against God in comparison with the

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evil our neighbor has done to us, should make us ashamed of our bitterness. God forgives our vast debt, our ten thousand talents, freely and fully. The behavior of the servant who had been forgiven by his lord, toward his fellow-servant whose debt to him was so small in comparison, is too often repeated by those who claim to have received God's forgiveness and then go out to exact of others the last farthing. The closing words of the parable we should never forget. The old debt to God once remitted comes back with all its crushing weight: "So shall also my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not every one his brother from your hearts."

A lesson which is taught so plainly by our Lord and emphasized by so many repetitions must be a most important one. The duty of forgiving others is not merely one of the refinements of Christian culture, something which adds to the beauty of a Christian character, though not essential to it; rather it is a vital

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element in every true Christian life. Unless we have forgiven those who have wronged us, or are ready to do so from the heart, we cannot ask God to forgive us. Luther uses strong language: “When thou sayest, ‘I will not forgive,’ and standest before God with thy precious pater noster, and mumblest with thy mouth, ‘Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,’ what is that but saying: ‘I do not forgive him, and so do not thou forgive me. Thou hast told me to forgive, and rather than obey I will renounce thee, and thy heaven, and all, and be the devil’s for evermore?’”

We look to our Lord’s life for the exemplification of all his teachings. It is easy to find many illustrations of this lesson of forgiveness in the gospel story. The patience of Jesus under wrong and injustice was wonderful. Indeed the more his heart was hurt the more of gentleness and love did it give out. There are certain fragrant trees which bathe in perfume the axe that cuts into their wood. So was it with the life of Jesus.

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Wrong or injury done to him only drew out more tenderness, sweeter love. We have a remarkable example of this in the very moment of crucifixion. It was when the nails were being driven through his hands and feet that he prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

We pray to be made like Christ, that his image may be impressed upon us; but we cannot be like Christ unless we have the spirit of forgiveness. Too many people who call themselves Christians seem to give little thought to this phase of the Christian life. They may seek to be honest, truthful, just, and upright, but they pass over the duties of love. There is a great lack of tenderness in many lives. Yet we cannot read the New Testament without finding the lesson of gentleness on every page. In the culture of our Christian life we are exhorted to put away every trace of bitterness, and to gather into our character everything that is kindly and loving. "Be ye angry, and sin not:

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let not the sun go down upon your wrath.”
“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and railing, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you.” “Put on therefore, . . . a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving each other, if any man have a complaint against any; even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye.”

These quotations show the tone of the whole New Testament. But how close to these teachings is the church of Christ living? Are we not all disposed to be too keenly alive to anything in others which appears to touch us unkindly? We praise love, but do we live it? We want other people to practise forgiveness, but when one has wronged us, we are slow to practise it ourself.

The lesson is not an easy one to learn. It is against nature. Only the grace of God in us

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will enable us to forgive. The spirit of forgiveness is really the shedding abroad in us of the love of God by the Holy Spirit. When we know that we are forgiven we are born anew, born from above; heaven has come down into our heart. We receive God's forgiveness, when we receive it truly, not as something to keep only for ourself, but as a blessing which we are to spread abroad, whose grace we are to manifest and extend to others. It is thus that all God's gifts are to be received. He gives us comfort in our sorrow, not for ourself alone, but that we may dispense it, comforting others with the comfort wherewith we ourself have been comforted of God. He delivers us in temptation, that we may strengthen our brothers in their temptation. He gives us his own joy, not to hoard for ourself, but that we may become the bearer of joy to others. He puts his love into us, that our heart may become a fountain of love in this world. So when God forgives us, he would have us represent him among men, show-

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ing in our own disposition and conduct what the divine forgiveness is. If we are revengeful, resentful, unforgiving, how can the world learn from us the sweetness, the freeness, and the fulness, of the divine forgiveness?

The Koran says that two angels guard every man on the earth, one watching on either side of him; and when at night he sleeps, they fly up to heaven with a written report of all his words and actions during the day. Every good thing he has done is recorded at once and repeated ten times, lest some item may be lost or omitted from the account. But when they come to a sinful thing, the angel on the right says to the other, “Forbear to record that for seven hours; peradventure, as he wakes and thinks in the quiet hours, he may be sorry for it, and repent and pray and obtain forgiveness.”

It is thus, indeed, that God deals with us. He is slow to see our sins or to write them down against us. He delights in mercy. The father ran to meet the returning prodigal. We should

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have the same spirit toward those who do any wrong to us. We should be slow to record the evil that they do and swift to set down every kindness we receive from them. Is it not too often just the reverse of this with us? Are we not quick to believe evil, to take offence, to feel hurt, to charge against our neighbor wrong motives or intentions? And are we not slow to find love in what he does, to apologize for what seems to be unkindness, to spread the veil of charity over his failures in courtesy, and his neglects of the duties of affection?

It will help us in learning this lesson of forgiveness to remember that it is not our prerogative to sit in judgment on the conduct of others. Judgment belongs to God alone. Our duty is, when wronged, to bear it patiently, praying for those who despitefully use us, committing our case to God. "Avenge not yourselves, beloved, but give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance belongeth unto me; I will recompense, saith the Lord. But if thine

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enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him to drink : for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head.”

Thus the lesson comes to us, written out in plainest words. We should seek to learn it, for it concerns our most sacred interests. To refuse to forgive others is to shut the door on our own hope of forgiveness.

Shrinking from Temptation

*“ Carried in’ Him and for Him, can they harm
Or press thee sore, or prove a weary weight ?
Nay, nay ; into thy life his blessed calm
Shall drop, and thou no more be desolate.*

*“ No more with downcast eyes go faltering on,
Alone and sick at heart, and closely pressed.
Thy chains shall break, thy heavy heart be gone,
For He who calls thee, He will ‘ give thee rest.’ ”*

CHAPTER FOURTEENTH

Shrinking from Temptation



FORGIVENESS of sins does not take us into heaven. We must stay yet longer in this world, because our work here is not finished. We must be tempted again. But we should seek, while we walk through earth's dusty ways, to keep the cleansed garments clean and white. Very fitting, then, is this prayer after we have found forgiveness, "Bring us not into temptation."

Yet the form of the petition is surprising. It is a prayer to our Father, and we plead, "Bring us not into temptation." Surely God would not bring his children into temptation. He is good and loving, and his will for us is never our endangering or our harming, but always the keeping of our life unspotted from the world. We

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are sure that God never inclines us to do evil. St. James says, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempteth no man."

Yet it is St. James who says also, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he hath been approved, he shall receive the crown of life." Again the same apostle says, "Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into manifold temptations; knowing that the proof of your faith worketh patience." It is clear, therefore, that good may come out of temptation. It is not said that it is blessed to be tempted—the beatitude is for him who endureth temptation. We are not told to count it joy merely when we fall into manifold temptations, but when we have gathered the fruit of the proving in new patience.

It will help us to understand the spirit of the prayer to remember that the word "temptation" does not mean primarily to allure to sin.

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To tempt is to try, to test, to prove. New ships are proved before they are intrusted with lives or treasure upon the sea. Anchors are tested before they are allowed to become the only hope of a vessel in the peril of a storm. God proved Abraham, putting his faith and obedience to the test. After the trial the angel said to him, "Now I know that thou fearest God." Abraham had stood the test. Jesus was tempted before he began his public ministry, that he might be a proved deliverer.

The temptations to which we are exposed continually are primarily provings, testings, to see whether we will be true to God or not. Indeed there is no experience that we meet in life which is not in a sense a testing. Every moment we are required to make a choice, and our choices prove us. Here is a duty; shall we do it or not? Here is a call to service; shall we accept it, or decline it? Here is an impulse to something worthy; shall we yield to it, or repress it? We have money; shall we use it for God, or shall

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we clutch it for ourself? Sickness tries us; shall we bear it patiently, and take from it the gifts of God it brings us, or shall we chafe and repine, and leave our sick-room harmed by the experience?

Even sweet and pure human love tests us; many are held back by it from self-sacrificing duty. Thus Peter, in love for his Lord, sought to keep him from going to his cross. "Get thee behind me, Satan," was our Lord's answer. Many others in the warmth and tenderness of their affection, have become the tempters of their friends, and oftentimes have kept them back from costly duties or perilous service to which God had called them.

Thus testing always implies the possibility of failure. There is no experience in which we may not sin. There is a wrong alternative in every call to that which is right. Instead of doing the duty, we may neglect it. Instead of making the self-denial or sacrifice, we may decline it. Instead of resisting the sin, we may

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yield to it. Temptation always brings an opportunity to overcome, to grow stronger. But if we fail to use the opportunity we sin. Robert Browning puts it thus : —

*Why comes temptation but for man to meet
And master and make crouch beneath his foot,
And so be pedestalled in triumph ? Pray
“ Lead us into no such temptations, Lord ! ”
Yea, but, O thou whose servants are the bold,
Lead such temptations by the hand and hair,
Reluctant dragons, up to who dares fight,
That so he may do battle and have praise.*

Looking at temptation in this broader way gives a new meaning to the prayer, “ Bring us not into temptation.” Part of Christian faith is the committing of the life to God’s guidance. We sing : —

*“ Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead thou me on.”*

We put our hand into God’s in the morning, and we ask him to lead us through the day. We know not what experiences may come to

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us and we ask him not to bring us into sore testings. The prayer is a request that in the doing of God's will for the day we may not be brought into places where it will be hard for us to be faithful.

Some tell us that it is cowardly to offer such a prayer. A soldier should not shrink from battle, for this is the very business of his life, that to which he is called, that for which he enlisted. Only in battle can he test the qualities of his heroism or train himself for the service to which he has devoted himself. A soldier who has never been in an engagement may be brave, but no one can be sure of it—he cannot yet be sure of it himself; his courage has not been tested. An untempted virtue is only a possible virtue; it is not certain yet that it will stand the test. We must meet temptation, and win the crowns which are only for the overcomers.

Is it not cowardly, then, to plead with God any morning not to be brought that day into places where we must fight? Are we to wish to

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be soldiers who shall miss conflict, danger, and hardship? Is that the kind of heroism Christ would teach his followers? He himself did not seek such a life. He shrank from no conflict and sought to be spared from no hard battle; and would he have us plead not to be brought into trial?

There is a sense in which this view is correct. If we are following Christ fully we will not hesitate to go with him into any experience, however perilous it may be. "He that saveth his life shall lose it." Yet so much is involved in temptation, such possibilities of defeat and failure are dependent on the issue, that we dare not desire to enter into it. It is presumptuous to clamor to be led into the conflict. More than once Jesus warned his disciples to watch, that they might not enter into temptation. He knew how inadequate their courage and strength would prove in battle with the evil one, how their faith would fail in the moment of assault. We read of soldiers sick of

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camp, and chafing to be led against the enemy, but the Christian who is impatient to be tempted is very foolish. Temptation is too terrible an experience to be rushed into, unled by God.

It is right, therefore, for us to shrink from sore testing, not to be disobedient to any call of God, but even to ask to be spared the experiences, knowing something of the fearful peril there is for us in them. If Peter had gone to Gethsemane that night, praying this prayer, "Bring me not into temptation," instead of boasting that it was not possible for him to fall, he would not have fallen.

May we not say, indeed, that our Lord's own prayer in the Garden was precisely in the spirit of what he taught his disciples in this petition to ask? He pleaded there that he might not be brought into the terrible trial on whose dark edge he was then kneeling. Yet he did not plead rebelliously. He did not decline to accept the cup if it was not possible for it

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to be taken away. He only prayed that if possible, if it were in accordance with his Father's will, he might not be led into the terrible trial.

Our prayer should be in the same spirit. While we ask that we may not be brought into sore testing, we still express our readiness to accept God's will for us, though it be that we go right on into the heart of the struggle. The petition certainly teaches that it would be presumptuous for us to seek temptation, to ask to be led into it, or to rush into it unbidden of God. If we do this we court peril and we have no promise of divine protection. When God leads us anywhere we go under his sheltering care and need not fear, but when, without his guidance, we go of our own will into places of danger, we take our life into our own hands. Soldiers led by their commander into battle are doing their duty; their place is in the danger. If they fall they fall at their post, they fall under the divine shelter. But if one

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not a soldier, having no call to enter the battle, no duty on the field, presses forward among the fighting ranks, he is without promise of divine keeping, and if he falls he has thrown his life away.

The same is true of all who in any way expose themselves to peril. The mother, the nurse, the physician, whose duty it is to be with the child sick with diphtheria are not to think of the danger. God brought them into the place of peril because their duty was there, and they may leave to him the matter of their keeping. But any one who, uncalled by duty, exposes himself to contagion in the sick-room is tempting God and cannot claim the divine protection. If he contracts the disease he cannot speak of his illness as providential, resigning himself to it as something God has sent to him. God did not send it to him. He went where he had no divine call to go, into danger when he had no duty there, and he can claim no promise of help.

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We should never shrink from any experience of testing into which duty brings us. If it is the will of God that we should stand where our principles or our character must be tested, we need not hesitate to meet the trial, for we shall have the divine protection.

*“ Just where you stand in the conflict,
There is your place !*

Gird on your armor ! be faithful

At toil or rest,

Whiche'er it be, never doubting

God's way is best.

Out in the fight or on picket,

Stand firm and true :

That is the work which your Master

Gives you to do.”

But if we venture into places of temptation when duty does not lead us there, we put ourself outside the divine shelter. One of our Lord's temptations was that he should cast himself down from the pinnacle of the temple,

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trusting to the promise of God to give the angels charge concerning him. But to this suggestion our Lord's reply was, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." This answer implies that the promise of angel protection avails only when we are walking in the way of divine guidance.

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*“ The day is long, and the day is hard,
We are tired of the march and of keeping guard ;
Tired of the sense of a fight to be won,
Of days to live through and of work to be done ;
Tired of ourselves and of being alone.*

*“ And all the while, did we only see,
We walk in the Lord's own company ;
We fight, but 't is he who nerves our arm ;
He turns the arrows which else might harm,
And out of the storm he brings a calm.”*

CHAPTER FIFTEENTH

From the Evil



WE may not always be spared from testing. Though we pray "Bring us not into temptation," our path will oftentimes lead into the field of conflict.

To be kept altogether out of struggles would be to be kept forever children, without strength. Without the discipline of temptation we should be of small use; we could carry no burdens, conquer no difficulties, attain no sublime heights. Nor could we ever become helpers of others in any real sense.

It is an interesting fact that temptation had a large place in the preparation of Jesus Christ for his work as the world's Redeemer. It is because he was tempted in all points like as we are, that now in glory he can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and can succor

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those who on the earth are tempted. If we would be a strength to others in their times of struggle, we must endure struggle ourself, so as to know what it means and to be able to give cheer and help to those we find in any sore stress. If we would be an influence for good to others, if we would give courage to those who are fainting, we must first be conqueror ourself.

There is a story of a young officer in his first battle. He said that when the fighting fairly began his first impulse was to run out of it as fast as he could. He looked up, however, and saw that that was exactly what his men were preparing to do. If he failed in courage they would fail, too. So he instantly rallied himself and then exhorted them to stand firm and be true. We can lead others only by being brave and strong ourself. It is needful, therefore, for others' sake as well as our own, that we meet temptations.

Then the prayer is that when we are in temp-

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tation we may not be hurt by it, that we may be kept from its evil. This is the great problem of true and worthy living. There is possible evil in every experience—not alone in direct temptations, in actual allurements to sin, but even in the good things of life. A happy home by the very sweetness of its love, and by the rich satisfying which its affections give to the heart, may crowd out God and heaven, and thus do harm to the life. Pleasure is not an evil in itself, but possible evil lurks in its cup from which oftentimes men and women drink poison and not nourishment.

We do not put prosperity down among the evil things. In Old Testament days it was regarded as a mark of God's special favor. It is indeed and always a blessing from God, from whose hands every good gift comes. No one dreads prosperity. In our church services we make prayers for those who are in any trouble, for the sick, for the poor, for the widow and the orphan, but we do not usually offer supplica-

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tions for the prosperous, for those who have abounding health, for the happy, for those who have no trouble. Yet these conditions have their own perils. Many men lose their soul in their prosperity. While enjoying the good things of this world—never more than when receiving the largest measure of these good things—we need to pray continually to be kept from the evil that is in them.

On the other hand, there is an impression, especially among Christian people, that trouble always works good. Affliction is sometimes said to be the blessing of the New Testament as prosperity was of the Old. Those who are in sorrow are assured of the comfort of God and have many promises of good and of eternal reward, if they meet their trials patiently and with faith and joy. One of our Master's beatitudes is for those who mourn. No doubt every affliction has in it possibilities of blessing. But here again there are possibilities also of hurt and harming. Sorrow is full of danger. While

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those who meet it with faith and love and joy find in it stores of heavenly good and are enriched thereby, many lose their life's beauty and power in it. When we enter a trial we need also to pray to be kept from its evil.

Thus in every phase of life there is possible harm for us. Whether we shall receive hurt, or shall pass through our experiences without injury, depends upon the way we relate ourself to them. One man moves through life—its joy and sorrow, its pleasure and pain, its prosperity and adversity—and receives no stain, no marring, no wounding. Another passes through similar experiences, and at every point is harmed in his inner life. The secret is within us and we need to pray without ceasing that we may be kept from the evil which is always close to us.

*“ From the self that stains and stings,
Soils and hurts all holier things,
Weighing down the soul's white wings,
Set us free, good Lord.*

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*“ From the inward foes that reign
O'er unwilling heart and brain,
From the tyranny of pain,
Set us free, good Lord.”*

Our request in this petition is that we may be delivered from evil. Our Lord, in his great intercessory prayer for his disciples, just before he left them, asked for them, not that they should be taken out of the world, but that they should be kept from the evil. It is not the will of our Master for us that we should flee away from the world of men, or of business, or of pleasure, or of love, to live in solitude. We could not get away from the evil by such a flight, for we would carry with us that which, wherever we may be, is the real secret of our peril—our own evil self.

*“ If I could once lay down myself,
And start, self-purged, upon the race
That all must run !”*

Our Master wishes us to remain in the world, but desires for us that we be kept from the evil.

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Sometimes people say they cannot possibly live a good, true, and holy life in the place where they have to dwell. But wherever it is our duty to stay, though it be in the worst spot on the face of the earth, God is able to keep us unspotted and blameless.

The palm tree, the Arabs say, stands with its feet in salt water and its head in the sun. Oftentimes they cannot drink the water found in the oasis where the palm grows, it is so brackish. Then they tap the tree and drink the sweet palm wine which flows out. "The tree by the magic of its inner life, so changes the elements found in the unkindly soil around it, that they minister to its growth and strength and fruit-bearing." It takes the evil of its environment and transmutes it into good.

This is a parable of spiritual life. It is possible for us to live as it were with our feet in the mire of sin's bitterness, our life smitten meanwhile by fierce temptations, and yet yield the fruits of love and holiness. If we have Christ

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in us there is a magic power in our life which rejects the evil and assimilates the good, which takes the evil and transforms it. The world has no power to harm us if our life be hid with Christ in God. There is a wonderful promise which says that there is One who is able to guard us from stumbling and to set us before the presence of his glory, without blemish, in exceeding joy.

Terrible is the power of temptation. What countless lives have been ruined by it! Yet it is possible to be so safely kept in the very midst of the world's worst temptations that not a taint or trace of evil shall be left on the life. St. Paul has a wonderful verse about the Christian's relation to temptation. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it." Every word here is full of meaning. We cannot

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escape temptation. But no temptation comes to any one but such as man can bear. It is not necessary, therefore, that any one should fall before the tempter. God is faithful and his eye is never off his child. He will not permit the strain to be greater than we can bear. When it is not possible for us longer to endure, he brings relief and makes the way to escape.

The whole gospel for temptation is in these words. We need never yield to any power of evil. Yet, as in all spiritual life, we have our part in our own keeping. It is ours to resist the evil. We are so made that no power in the universe can force the door of the castle in which we live. The door has no knob or latch outside. It can be opened only from within. Even the omnipotent God himself will never enter our life save as we open the door and let him in. Nor can all the power of the world's evil force its way into the sanctuary in which we dwell. Thus we have only to refuse to yield, and temptation has no power to harm us. It can

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only assault us from without, while we remain secure and unharmed within. It is no sin to be tempted — Jesus was tempted; sin begins only when we open the door and let the tempter in, when we yield to the sinful solicitation and do the evil thing.

The only absolute safety in this world of evil is to have Christ in us. We cannot keep the door of our own life. There are traitors within, who, at some moment of peril, will admit the enemy. We cannot keep ourself. Thousands of times men have thought themselves safe and have boasted of their security. But in their very confidence lay their danger, because it was self-confidence. But if Christ be in us, he will keep the door and no enemy can deceive him or triumph over him.

*“When the world seems full of evil,
Lurking near on every hand;
When I find my strength too feeble
Its temptations to withstand,
Then thy strength becomes sufficient,
As to thee my weak faith clings,
And I'm kept in perfect safety
'Neath the shadow of thy wings.”*



