

end shame and ruin and 'self-contempt bitterer to drink than blood.'

So from the heights of will
Life's parting stream descends,
And, as a moment turns its slender rill,
Each widening torrent bends.

From the same cradle's side,
From the same mother's knee,
One to long darkness and the frozen tide,
One to the peaceful sea.¹

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Prayer in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

BY THE REV. EDWARD SHILLITO, M.A., HAMPSTEAD.

THE specific expression of faith is prayer; all means of grace therefore may be valued according to their influence upon the prayer of the believer. The witness of a Christian life is measured in this way:

'They knelt more to God than they used
That was all.'

Preaching is effective, when it makes the hearer move more freely in the spiritual world, where all movement is prayer; and since the New Testament is, in Dr. Forsyth's phrase, 'a preached word,' its measures also must be found in terms of prayer. Of any book or strand of teaching in the New Testament we may inquire—What difference did this make for those who received it in their understanding of prayer, and in their practice of it? There were other reactions, it is true, varying according to the needs and powers of the readers, but if we seek for the one reaction, common to all,—the one universal and inevitable reaction,—we shall find it in prayer. Thessalonians, or Colossians, or 'Hebrews' prayed differently after they received the messages of truth sent to them; this truth was worked out in their practical experience. It may be helpful to inquire, how this would come about in the little group to which the Epistle to the

Hebrews was addressed. What does it say in answer to the unspoken word of all hearers to all preachers, 'Teach us how to pray'?

The Letter was written to a group of scholarly believers, who were in danger of drawing back from their Christian profession. They must have gone more bravely without the camp, and borne the reproach of Jesus more loyally because of this message from their absent leader. But the demand for this loyalty to the Crucified is linked to a demand for a bolder approach to God. 'Let us therefore go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach' (13¹³); this is the one demand; and the other inseparable from it is to be found in the words, 'Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace.' It is our purpose to discover how the readers of such a letter would translate its vision and its counsel into prayer. What difference did the Letter make to the 'Hebrews' in their approach to God?

The concordance will not carry us all the way. The answer is not to be found in a catena of passages, directly dealing with prayer. Some writers and preachers make few explicit references to prayer, but their readers know that in reality they never deal with anything else. It is especially

true that every fresh and living interpretation of Christ has an impact upon the spiritual life, and prayer is the inevitable response. Every vision of the spiritual universe is a call to a more serious and confident prayer. Prayer is like a delicate instrument which responds to every revelation of God. He who reveals God may not mention 'prayer,' but he makes men pray. Is there in the Letter to the Hebrews any such revelation, any such challenge?

The spiritual situation of the readers is defined as a failure 'to draw near'; this failure is the clue to their weak and perilous state. Scholars differ in their estimate of the peculiar danger which attacked them; but whatever be the date or the occasion, it is clear that they were not availing themselves of the distinctive resources of their Christian faith. They were discouraged; tempted to draw back; lacking in spiritual audacity. Their inward decline must be arrested if they are to resist even unto blood.

This 'drawing near' was no new purpose. In the ritual of Israel they had known the noblest of all sacrificial systems; and it had been in the heart of it a provision by which Israel could approach the Eternal and Holy Lord.

Then will I go unto God,
Unto God my exceeding joy.

The minds of the readers to whom the Letter came had been trained in this stately and inspired ritual; this is no less true if their knowledge were derived, as many believe, only from their study of the sacred books. Whether through their experience of the Temple, or through their imaginative study of the record, they had found in the law their way. They had had the liturgical training, which has certain necessities of its own. They who have found the language of their spiritual life from such a system as that of the Jews will seek *order and science* in their interpretation of the approach to God. If another way is given to them, it must still have something of the same definiteness as the old. The new must not come to destroy. So the wise teacher will not ignore the past discipline of his readers. 'You have always sought to draw near,' he will say, 'and you have been prepared by the great prophecies of the law for the new and living way, which will give you in reality, and no longer in shadow, the approach to God.'

But this same liturgical mind has its dangers of which this wise teacher is conscious. It may fail to relate justly outward forms with their inward and spiritual realities; it may perpetuate a tradition, when it has been superseded; it may evade the personal appeal to the life alone with God; and in its communion with Him it may depend upon representatives, or upon a corporate act. It may lack assurance. It may draw back.

It is to such a group of liturgically-minded men and women, with the peculiar needs and the peculiar dangers of their training, that this letter came. They had shrunk back, they were bewildered between two worlds, one of which was visibly present,—the other peculiar to their little group, a new and in some respects illusory order as they were tempted to think. What they had known of the access to God along old, well-sanctioned ways they had lost and they had not mastered the new. They had not adjusted their spiritual life to the new range of facts. These Christian facts, which the author assumes, had not done their full work upon the souls of these readers. They had not learned to pray as Christians should pray in the light and power of that range which Christ had made theirs. To such a spiritual situation no wiser counsel could have been given than that which is contained in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Prayer is indeed a treading of the way, whereby man 'draws near,' but the character of the way, the customs and practices of it, the rules of the road depend upon the interpretation of the spiritual world, through which and unto which it leads. This spiritual world is described in several phrases—'the age to come,'—'that which is within the veil,'—'the New Jerusalem'—the 'substance' of which the ritual of the Old Covenant had been the shadow. There is given to the faithful a new background, and a new environment; and to pray now will be to pray in accord with this new world—to be in correspondence with this new environment; for spiritual life, like physical life, must be true to its environment. If prayer is a reflex of a Divine activity, or a response to a Divine stimulus, how can it be strengthened and enlarged? Only by a growing realization of the Divine purpose, and a more complete submission to it. In giving therefore his noble reading of the Divine dealing with men in Christ the writer is providing the perfect way of prayer for his readers. He sets

their feet upon the way, and it is a moving way.

There are three grades in the life of Prayer, implied in the Letter. There is prayer before the Revelation of Christ; in its simplest form it is a response to the belief that God is, and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him (11⁶). Man can pray, when he is sure that there is *a way, and an end to the way, and a welcome at the end*. With these facts understood man drew near. The eleventh chapter of the Epistle is a vindication of the faith which was known before Christ came in the flesh; not yet completed, it was still true; it was not a response to the perfect revelation, but it was not out of harmony with it. The prayer of the mighty dead, who 'apart from' us are not made perfect, was true prayer. The Christian approach is not magnified by a denial of the experiences, aroused within the soul by a revelation, Divine though incomplete. Before Christ came, and before the Levitical ritual was known, such men as Enoch 'drew near' by virtue of a faith, which was itself a response to a revelation of the end of the way, and the welcome of God. There is always in the Letter the reproachful contrast implied or expressed—'if *they* drew near, drawn by *their* knowledge, how much more boldly and surely should *you* draw near!'

But this life of prayer in the days before Christ had known also the searching discipline of the Levitical ritual. That dealt with shadows and prophecies; but it had its place in the preparation for the Christian way. Prayer could never be the same again for anyone who had read or seen the ordinances for the day of Atonement. There would be henceforth no trifling with sin. The very failure of the sacrificial system was part of its divine work. It might be necessary to lose something of the simple confidence in the approach to Him who rewards the diligent seeker, so that the souls of men might understand the achievement of Him, who in blood and tears wrought the way and was Himself the way.

The Hebrews had come to understand more of the conditions of approach through their experience in a system of shadows (10¹). The ritual always pointed to the reality made known in Christ. *The transition to the second grade in prayer came with the knowledge of Christ*. 'Reality at last' was known when men had come

under His grace and power. The world could never be the same again; the unseen had invaded the seen; a large tract, hitherto unexplored, had been thrown into their range. If prayer is our response to the spiritual facts as we know them, it cannot be the same when Christ is seen and trusted.

Prayer becomes different when it is *a response to the life and work of Jesus Christ on this side of the veil*. This is the second grade implied—prayer is correspondence with Jesus during that earthly life which lies between the birth and the crucifixion of the man Christ Jesus. In 5^{7,8} we read—'who in the days of his flesh, having offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and having been heard for his godly fear, though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered.' It was through prayer that 'the obedience of Christ was slowly finished.' The believer then must find in the record of that earthly life and in the method of it the new approach in the making. Christ is still within our sight—on this side of the barrier between the seen and the unseen; and in that life of humiliation, in that incarnation, the secret is found in prayer. The prominence given to it is no accident. This Jesus—in the earthly moment between the eternities—is discovered, tempted, suffering, made perfect, made adequate for each demand as it came—at last crucified, and in all this life He is seen *praying*. Prayer must become something more wonderful when its place in the work of the High Priest is seen. It has a new dignity; it is seen to be central and determinative. If Incarnation and Atonement are inseparable from prayer, it may be that through prayer the believer will know in his own experience what these doctrines mean. This is a changed world for all who have discovered Jesus praying; henceforth prayer must be for them in correspondence with that startling and wonderful fact.

But by the offering of Himself through the Eternal Spirit, this High Priest has entered within the veil. *Christian Prayer is an approach to a spiritual world, where Christ is the Eternal Intercessor, pleading the Eternal and Sufficient sacrifice* (7²⁵ 4¹⁴ 12²²⁻²⁴). This is the third grade and the final achievement of the believer in prayer—to be in correspondence with the High Priest in His life within the veil. For such a believer

the veil is rent; the unseen world is more certain, and more real than the seen; no barrier hides from him the High Priest. His presence and His interest and His intercessions are the cardinal fact to which the soul responds. When the writer said 'God' he could not but think of the spiritual activity of Christ in the very heart of the Godhead. Prayer had always been an approach to God, now it was an approach to *that* God. From Him proceedeth a torrent of redeeming energy; from Him the mighty currents went forth to draw the soul; His was a throne of grace, and that must mean a magnetic throne. For the believer to pray must be to come within those currents; or, to leave figures, to become more and more at one with the mind and will of *that* Lord. Prayer would still be in correspondence with the man Christ Jesus, but it would be also in union with the eternal heart of God in Christ Jesus. 'Let us come confidently to the *Throne of Grace*.'

Prayer is a response to the belief that God is and God welcomes.

Prayer is a response to the revelation and establishment in Christ of a final order and way of life, where its values are perfectly disclosed, and its methods made clear.

Prayer is a conscious fellowship of the redeemed

soul with the eternal energy of the Divine Redeemer.

If when the Letter was read to that group of believers they accepted the message, they would go forth without the camp to bear the reproach of Christ, but before that they would learn to pray with a freshness and a mastery unknown before.

They would recall, when they knelt in prayer, the facts of the strange new world in which they now were set. They would remember Christ in Gethsemane, Christ in the Unseen Holy of Holies; their place—the Throne of Grace; their time—the Age to Come. Sure of their bearings, they would apply to the new way much that had been learned from the old; the Book and the Ritual would have their permanent value; all the old promises would be translated into terms of the new; but the new would not be less ordered and methodical and scientific than the old. They had not exchanged something definite for something vague; they had lost the shadow to win the substance. In prayer henceforth they tasted the powers of the 'age to come'; they trod already the streets of the Heavenly Jerusalem; they were taken into the service of the great interceding High Priest, and they began to reign with Christ.

In the Study.

Virginibus Puerisque.

'On His Majesty's Service.'

BY THE REV. ROBERT HARVIE, M.A., EARLSTON.

'The king's business required haste.'—I S 21⁸.

At the beginning of last week I received a letter which had not, like most letters, a penny stamp on the face of it. It was one to which I was to reply, and the request and instructions were like this: 'Reply by return. Use the enclosed envelope for your answer. Don't trouble even to put on a stamp. The King's business requires haste.'

When *you* come to write letters, you will probably find that when you have finished one, very often you have not an envelope at hand, and you have to go and look for one. Then, a good many people who are busy during the day put off letter-writing till the evening, and it is not an uncommon

thing to discover that you have no stamps left, and the post office is shut, so that unless you can find some one to oblige you, the letter cannot be sent off with the earliest post. All that causes delay and sometimes annoyance, so the instructions are given: 'Reply at once; and in order that no time may be lost, here is an envelope at hand, and in this case there is no need of a stamp. It is the King's business. It requires haste.'

When you write an ordinary letter, you must buy a stamp which bears upon it the image of the King, but on the envelope I received, and on the one I sent off, there was nothing like that. Instead, there was something which showed the kind of letters these were, for on each envelope were printed the words 'On His Majesty's Service.'

That set me thinking in this way. When a letter is part of the King's business, not only does