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used not slavishly, but with the freedom which belongs to the Christian scholar, assured that its excellences far outnumber its defects.

It is to be hoped that the English edition, now in course of publication by T. and T. Clark, Edinburgh, will have a wide circulation in this country, securing for the great exegete, in the hearts of those whom in his introduction he calls "far distant brethren," a place as honored as that he has so long held in the hearts of his countrymen.

NOTE. — For most of the biographical information contained in this Article, the Author is indebted to the *Biographie* which Dr. Gustav Meyer, son of the exegete, published during the past year, as an introduction to the fourth edition of the ninth part of Meyer's Commentary.

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## ARTICLE V.

### THE PHYSICAL VALUE OF PRAYER.

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HAS Prayer a positive physical value? Is it really able under all, or any, circumstances, to invoke effectually a "Power which checks and augments the descent of rain; which changes the force and direction of winds; which affects the growth of corn, and the health of men and cattle?"<sup>1</sup> Is the frail child of earth able thereby to "move the hand that moves the world?" or is he, indeed, notwithstanding all his boasted powers of thought and will, but the creature and the sport of blind, inflexible forces, either self-originated or long since utterly divorced from all control of the Great Intelligence, which, in the mysterious and chaotic foretime of the universe, set them in operation? What other question so momentous, so vitally related to its highest interests, saving alone the one great question of its own immortality, can a human mind propose to itself for solution? Can it be possible that, after the

<sup>1</sup> Prof. Tyndall, in *Contemporary Review*.

lapse of so many centuries, during which generation after generation has lived and acted and suffered, such a problem remains still unsolved? If so, the wonder surely is not that it should become occasionally the subject of earnest discussion in scientific clubs and literary magazines, but rather that the plough is not left in the furrow, the coin on the counter, the chemicals in the crucible, in short, every lesser human pursuit abandoned, while thinking men of all classes concentrate their utmost energies upon this one all-absorbing subject of inquiry. The problem cannot surely be in its nature insoluble. If there is in the universe such an Almighty and universal Sovereign as the praying Christian invokes, and if in his government of this world so wide a sweep and so resistless a potency are allotted to believing prayer as the Christian's Bible certainly claims for it, the facts must, from their very nature, be susceptible of proof,—not necessarily, perhaps, of such proof as would meet the comprehension of the careless, or compel the faith of the insincere inquirer; but proof ample to set at rest the doubts of every earnest seeker for truth. If to such a seeker, diligent, candid, and humble, such evidence is not forthcoming, it can only be because the thing to be proved has no existence in fact. If so divine a power exists within human reach, it can be shown to exist, inasmuch as men cannot wield it without both knowing that they do so, and affording to others the means of knowing it. It would seem almost superfluous to add that the evidence must, as a matter of course, be sought within the bounds of the true nature and lawful exercise of prayer. The application of this remark to some tests which have been seriously proposed will appear in another connection.

Let us suppose the planet Mercury to be inhabited by a race of beings equal or superior to man in the purely intellectual endowments, but entirely free from his persistent tendencies to a belief in supernatural causes, and his aspirations after communion with the spiritual and invisible. Let us suppose them to be acute and indefatigable in their search for knowledge; but, like ourselves, as some of us see ourselves,

possessed of no faculties for gaining it save such as lead them to rely wholly upon facts open to observation and experiment. Or rather, if, as we cannot but suspect, knowledge proper, offspring of generalization, would be wholly unattainable upon such a supposition, let their stock in trade of primary cognitions be of the smallest conceivable dimensions, confined entirely to an intuitive belief in those axioms and first truths which lie at the base of mathematics and the inductive logic. Should the granting of even these original standards of comparison appear to some to be inconsistent with the scientific principles upon which these pure intelligences are to be supposed to act, as introducing into all their conclusions a non-experimental and so non-provable element, we are unable to deny the impeachment, and can only plead in excuse the limitations of our powers of conception. Let those who can dispense if thought with such original elements by all means do so. We are anxious to imagine the nearest possible approach to a class of perfect philosophers of the positive type,—such philosophers as we may all hope to become when the true scientific stage of mental progress shall have been fully reached.

Let us suppose one of these intelligences, trained in his own native sphere to the highest degree of power and accuracy, both in the observation of phenomena and in the process of scientific generalization therefrom, taking up his position somewhere on the confines of our globe, prepared for a thorough course of investigation, in order to learn what may be learned of the nature and habits of the animal *homo*. In the course of his inquiries he reaches the phenomena of what we call prayer. True to the requirements of his system, he devotes ample time to the observation and classification of facts. He is struck, or would be, could emotion be generated in the dry light of his intellect, with the wonderful extent and variety of the strange practice, and its singular hold upon the reason and imagination of the human race. From pagan shrine, from moslem mosque and Hindoo pagoda, from stately cathedral and lowly meeting-house, from ten thousand

fireside altars and ten thousand cloistral chambers, in all the tongues and dialects of earth, he hears the voice of supplication constantly rising heavenward. His unbeckoned vision, let us farther suppose, has the power of readily discriminating between the reality and the form, the substance and the shadow. It instantaneously casts aside the incongruous and the superfluous, and goes directly to the true central type. It pierces the disguise of the hypocrite and the formalist, the accretions of ignorance and superstition and the incrustations of habit and tradition, till its scrutiny is fixed upon the hundreds of thousands of men and women of all classes and ages, high and low, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, wise and simple, famous and obscure, who daily, in the exercise of a genuine faith, stretch forth their hands to an invisible Deity. It penetrates the seclusion of ten thousand bed-chambers and secret groves and bolted closets, where individuals fondly resort to bend the knee where no eye sees them. And as he gazes, the tear-dimmed eye becomes alight with new-born hope, the beclouded face glows with a fresh celestial radiance, the heart that entered struggling in the clutches of an unbelieving despair, goes forth in the strength of an unconquerable resolve and an all-animating trust.

But our model student must not stop here. He must follow these praying men and women from the places of their devotions—church, family circle, or closet—into the out-door, matter-of-fact world, and learn, so far as he may, the effects of their petitions upon the events of their daily lives. He cannot fail soon to discover that many of them are, in the words of Prof. Tyndall, “a part of the very cream of the earth.” They are the peers in intelligence, in mental culture, in common sense, and in truthfulness of any other men and women in their respective classes. Many of them are those in whom a native keenness of perception has been sharpened, by long contact with the world of men and things into great practical shrewdness. Others are men of sound judgment and of studious and reflective habit, trained, it may be, to much patient investigation and sifting and balancing of

testimony. Numbers of them, in short, are as little likely as any other human beings to be the slaves of habit, or the life-long dupes of a baseless superstition, which they have daily opportunities of submitting to crucial practical tests. And yet he finds that in a great majority of cases the observation and experience of a life-time, so far from having in any degree shaken the confidence of these persons in the efficacy of prayer, have actually but served, day by day, to strengthen their faith in its power. They are ready to recount, with all the earnestness of perfect conviction, instance after instance, in their own personal histories, when, as they affirm, "The Lord has listened to the voice of their supplications," and sent unmistakable answers.

We shall not venture an assertion as to the extent to which the scientific investigator might be able, by actual comparison of facts and events with antecedent petitions, to verify or disprove this so prevalent faith in the physical efficacy of prayer. No one who has given any good degree of attention to the question can doubt that it would be easy to collect a vast mass of cumulative evidence in the shape of what must be regarded as, at least, very wonderful coincidences. The subject is certainly well worth investigating in this practical way, and a very interesting contribution to both science and religion might be made, would some careful student undertake the task of collecting, examining, and classifying the data afforded by reliable history, and by the experience and observation of a sufficient number of qualified and trustworthy witnesses. The phenomena of human thought and feeling, especially in their relation, real or fancied, to external results, are surely as real in themselves, and as well worth the attention of scientific men as any which pertain to the origin of species or the direction of currents in air and ocean. And we think we may safely add, that if convincing evidence could not thus be furnished to the dispassionate inquirer, there would be little ground for hoping to satisfy him by the result of any test devised especially for the purpose. Religion certainly ought to submit as cheerfully as science to any just

ordeal, though she may possibly have reason for resenting the cool assumption that hitherto her faith in prayer has been a mere figment of the imagination, utterly without verification, and for claiming that the unimpeachable records of past and current history afford the amplest materials for such verification, while free from many difficulties and objections inseparable from any specially devised experiment. In the absence, however, of such a record in such a shape as to command the assent of both parties, we dismiss this phase of the inquiry without strongly insisting upon the evidence of facts as such, apart from all questions of credibility and competency in the witnesses.

Having thus completed the first stage of his inquiry, our philosophic visitor would be in a position to sum up the positive side of the evidence. He would weigh well all the facts collected — the almost universal prevalence of prayer, the sincerity and solemnity of its public and private observance, the unfaltering and harmonious testimony borne in all ages by the faith of innumerable witnesses, many of these amongst the number of those best fitted by nature, education, and habit to judge in such a case. Though his investigations will have been somewhat embarrassed by the fact that a very large proportion of the blessings asked for have been of a purely subjective character, and so beyond the reach of his experimental tests, he will not fail to verify, as carefully as possible, the multitudes of alleged instances, vouched for by those whose veracity, at least, is undoubted, of marked and marvellous coincidence between petitions for definite and tangible events and the occurrence of those self-same events. Can it be doubted that the result of such a preliminary investigation must be to create a strong presumption in favor of the efficacy of prayer? The difficulties in the way of otherwise accounting, on philosophic principles, in the first place, for the origin of such a practice, and in the second, for its perpetuation through all the ages, would seem almost insuperable. Nor would the simple fact that, even in the more enlightened and scientific eras, an exceptional few have always been found

sceptical or disbelieving, militate strongly against such a conclusion. For their evidence, being merely negative, would be entitled to no real weight as against the positive testimony of others equally intelligent and well-informed. The question would always arise, too, as to their freedom from bias, and their having made use of the *right* means and *all* the means of arriving at the truth. And, still farther, the comparative fewness of their number would always form a presumption, more or less strong, against the correctness of their conclusions. Should it be urged, on the other hand, that prayer as believed in and practised by the masses in all ages, being addressed to gods admittedly false, and often prompted by motives demonstrably wrong, was really no prayer in the true sense, and consequently without efficacy in fact, or weight in argument, the seeming force of the objection is greatly lessened, if not wholly destroyed, by two considerations. First, the strength and persistence of the inborn impulse which prompts to prayer is thereby more strikingly illustrated, and the difficulty in accounting for it on sceptical principles proportionately increased. A writer<sup>1</sup> has recently pointed out with much clearness, and established by facts that can hardly be gainsaid, that there is in every creature's life a manifest purpose much deeper than the creature's consciousness — that the animal is constantly led by impulses whose proper meaning it cannot fathom, towards those acts and habits which are needful for the preservation of its race. How can we resist the application of the same reasoning to that ineradicable tendency in man towards dissatisfaction with self and surroundings? That impulse which in his better moments is ever prompting him to aspirations after something higher than ordinary every-day life affords, whether it take shape in cynicism, poetry, or prayer, and which, in the hour of sorrow or danger, sends him, in cringing terror, or chastened trustfulness, to his gods, is a fact beyond contradiction. It indicates a law of his nature. How can it be accounted for on scientific principles? If it exists without

<sup>1</sup> George Doyly Snow, "Natural Theology," in *Contemporary Review*.



any corresponding objective reality, no law of development can account for its origin; no principle of natural selection can explain its survival; no utilitarian theory of morals can account for man's perpetually stumbling into and persistently cherishing a belief utterly without foundation, and a longing that can never be satisfied. And, second, we cannot possibly say how far correct knowledge of the revealed attributes of the true God is essential to efficacious prayer. The possibility of such prayer being granted, it may reasonably be assumed to be subject to fixed laws of its own,—laws whose observance may not be necessarily incompatible with much ignorance of the true nature of the Great Will it invokes.

Let us then, for argument's sake, assume what most thinkers will probably admit, that a *prima facie* case has been made out in favor of prayer as a real power in the physical world. The next step will be to consider fairly the objections urged by those, comparatively few in number, though some of them of deservedly high repute as students and thinkers, who refuse to concede to it any such potency. We say, "comparatively few" advisedly, because we believe these words correctly express the numerical proportion between the classes in question. We cannot without proof, submit to the *odium intellecticum* attempted to be excited against believers in prayer, when Professor Beesly, for instance, in *The Fortnightly Review*, claims the "majority of educated persons," or Professor Tyndall in one of his articles "The great majority of sane persons," as in the ranks of disbelievers.

There is considerable difficulty in classifying the objections we are about to consider, owing to the conflicting views of those who formulate them. Many content themselves with pulling down, without any attempt at building up. Their creed is scepticism, pure and simple. Their choicest mental pabulum is found in negations of positive truth, and their favorite pastime is the search for defects in the arguments in favor of any positive doctrine of religion. They would ruthlessly batter to the ground the only stronghold of the soul which trusts in unseen realities, they would wrench asunder

at every joint its panoply of faith, and then expose it, naked and defenceless, to the assaults of passion and despair. Others, compelled by the logic of science to admit the possible or probable existence of a Great Will in nature, are yet quite unable to harmonize their conceptions of its operation with any view which affords scope for its being moved by any prayers of mortals. Others, again, with true fealty to the Comptian hypothesis, would content themselves with simply relegating all such notions to that vast realm of the unknown which transcends the sphere of legitimate inquiry. Professing to deal simply with phenomena, they actually confine their investigations to phenomena of a certain and somewhat narrow class. Every fact in nature outside that class, or in other words, every one which refuses to submit to the requirements of their system, is summarily and conveniently transported to those illimitable regions which their views have located beyond the Ultima Thule of human philosophy.

The most important of those objections may, we think, be fairly discussed under three general heads :

#### I. THE ALLEGED INFLEXIBILITY OF NATURAL LAW.

A great advantage possessed by our other-world philosopher would be his freedom from all prejudices of sect or school. Whatever might have been the complexion of his scientific or religious creed, as resulting from his investigations in his own sphere, he would be too true a philosopher to import any of them with himself in his advent to this world. He would utterly discard all preconceived opinions. If prevented, on the one hand, by the "positive" structure of his mind from accepting such a doctrine as that of design, and reasoning from the improbability of an instinct so deeply ingrained and so powerful as that which begets prayer, being implanted either to no purpose or only to prove a delusion and a snare to the intellect, he would, on the other, be fettered by no preconceived notions of so-called natural law, or supreme order, or of the non-existence of supernatural forces and influences. In the absence of higher faculties for the purpose,

he would, of course, be quite as incapable as any human student of attaining any absolute knowledge of cause and its mysterious relation to effect—quite as powerless to trace back any physical event to the point beyond the ken of human vision, of its actual origin and issuance from the producing force, much more to fathom the inner nature of that force itself. But the notions of *cause* and *force* he must have, and have as constant factors in all his reasonings, else he can be no judge in questions of human philosophy. Whether he shall conceive of them as physical or spiritual,—i.e. as belonging to and inhering in matter, or as emanating exclusively or in part, from a region of invisible realities and potencies, enfolding all the universe of matter and engendering its phenomena,—he must decide for himself. And his decision must clearly be in favor of the theory which best accounts, or which alone can account, as the case may be, for all the facts. Inflexible and blind necessity working out all the problems great and small of the world of men and things; the immediate presence and constant activity in matter and mind alike of an omniscient and almighty intelligence whose will constitutes the only law and the only force, or any combination of these, or subordination of one to the other, are alike open to the choice of our dispassionate philosopher, whom, for convenience sake, we shall now drop from our discussion, while endeavoring, as far as possible, to conduct it in accordance with principles he might be supposed to recognize as valid.

“An unerring order, which in our experience knows no exception.”<sup>1</sup> This is the great car of science which, in the opinion of many, is destined sooner or later to extinguish beneath its relentless wheels the last pulsations of the throbbing heart of faith. Every advance step in physical science reveals, we are told, more and more of the uniformity of that unvarying order, and the whole weight of the evidence presses us irresistibly towards the induction that the ultimate goal of

<sup>1</sup> Author of “Hints towards a Serious Attempt to Estimate the Value of Prayer for the Sick,” in *Contemporary Review*.

science is a sublime height, from which all nature will stand revealed as one vast realm under the sway of universal, unvarying law — an iron-bound necessity, — forbidding, as impious, the notion of the slightest variation to meet the wishes or whims of man. The argument in its cumulative form is clearly set forth in the following extracts from an article by the author of "Hints towards a Serious Attempt to Estimate the Value of Prayer for the Sick."

"I believe I may safely assume that all will agree that certain events within everybody's knowledge have always happened with such absolute regularity that no one would dream of petitioning heaven for any change in their modes of occurrence; events, the order of which has never been disturbed during the historic period. Let me instance the rising and setting of the sun, the movements of the tide, the decay and death of all organized bodies. Many more will suggest themselves to every mind."

The writer then goes on to adduce reasons, satisfactory to himself, why variations in the order of these great "events" are not made objects of prayer, and thus continues:

"It suffices for our purpose that no sane and moderately intelligent person would dream of praying that the sun may appear on the morrow an hour sooner or later than his appointed time; that the action of the tide may be suspended or reversed, or that decay and consequent death may not take place in any given case. People pray for prolongation of life, or postponement of death; but no one thinks of asking that the event may never arrive. Why is this? And why does the practice of not praying for such things obtain among those who believe in the efficacy of petition for, let us call them, smaller matters? Simply because the person praying has an absolute conviction that the events in question are so fixed, unaltering, and unalterable that they are beyond the scope of prayer. So we see that practically and beyond all dispute the phenomena of the universe are ranged by people who fully believe in the efficacy of petition in two categories; a class, which I shall call number one, respecting which it is

quite useless, if not presumptuous, to pray; and a class, number two, of events which are the legitimate objects of prayer."

The author then observes that "some persons will place a much larger number of subjects in Class I. than others will, and *vice versa*," and proceeds to show, to his own apparent satisfaction, that with the progress of scientific knowledge, "Class I. grows larger day by day, while Class II. diminishes in like proportion;" that "the professed believer in petition must follow, drawn by inexorable power in the wake of advancing science, and after hard resistance, as always,—giving up one post after another, and resigning event after event, to be detached from the once great class of objects to be prayed for, and admitting their title of admission into the great class of settled and ordered events, not to be influenced by human interference,—capitulating with the best grace he may when forced to surrender." Hence follows, as the conclusion of the whole matter, "that what a man will pray for depends precisely on the extent of his intelligent acquaintance with the phenomena around and within him." And he who has the temerity to refuse to follow this reasoning to its obvious conclusion, still claiming a residuum of events for the second category, is "bound to define these categories," and "to say what may be prayed for and what must not be prayed for."

Two or three assumptions, it appears to us, underlie this whole course of reasoning, and determine its validity.

First, the assumption that because certain great phenomena of nature exhibit absolute uniformity, others which seem at first sight to be just as strongly marked by diversity must be found eventually to possess a like uniformity, is wholly gratuitous. The reader will not fail to note in passing, the illogical indefiniteness which applies the same term "event," to a single occurrence and to that which does not properly belong in the same category at all, but is simply the *expression of our conception* of an observed uniformity in certain characteristics of events, as, e.g. "the decay and death of all organized bodies." In this kind of ambiguity,—which, if we mistake

not, will be found characteristic not only of the article in question but of the class of arguments to which it belongs,—is enfolded the germ of many a monstrous fallacy. But, waiving this point, we claim, as we have tried to show in a previous Article,<sup>1</sup> to which the reader is respectfully referred for a fuller discussion of this phase of the subject, that the most striking and obvious fact in natural and psychical phenomena is that, not of uniformity, but of *variety*. Diversity, abounding, infinite, within the circumscribed spheres of certain great principles of uniformity is what manifests itself alike to the ordinary and the scientific eye. The whole vast world of being, so far as it is within reach of our explorations, and in its two great hemispheres of matter and mind, is an aggregation of individualisms. Synthesis, the only ladder by which science mounts to unity, is obliged to leave behind the many peculiarities of the individual while carefully retaining the similarities of the class. Those great threads of uniformity which run through all the works of nature are but the warp upon which she weaves her infinitely variegated patterns—the mighty chords from which the Allwise Musician educes with infinite skill the myriad notes which blend in the world's mysterious harmonies. If the sun has risen and set in rigid conformity with unvarying mathematical laws from the day of his creation until now, never, probably, in all his course have precisely the same effects of light and heat, color and cloud, been produced by two consecutive risings. Are the flux and reflux of tide adduced as examples of events “which have always happened with such absolute regularity that no one would dream of petitioning heaven for a change in their mode of occurrence”? When, we may rejoin, was ever ebb or flood characterized on two occasions by precisely the same degree of roughness or smoothness, the same features of wave and ripple? The power which ordinarily checks or augments the descent of rain, performs its operations in such a manner that the shower which fell yesterday differed in all probability, in quantity, locality, and a dozen other particulars

from any which ever fell before, or will ever fall in the future. Could it be shown that it was in every feature the exact counterpart of one which fell last week or last year, the wonder would be greater, scientific men themselves being judges, than that produced by a thousand variations. In short, as the Duke of Argyll has shown, so manifestly is *variety* a constant aim of the Creator in nature, that even Mr. Darwin himself, who professes to be shocked at so irreverent an idea, has been the very one "to fix upon an innate, universal tendency in all species to vary, as the cardinal fact upon which turns the origin of species, and the whole system on which organic life has been developed from the lowest to the highest forms . . . . And so Mr. Darwin has been led to accumulate a mass of evidence to show that an inherent tendency to variation is a great general law, of fundamental importance in the history of life, and furnishes the only and the sufficient key to the rise and progress of all its complicated structures." <sup>1</sup>

"But," it may be asked, "Should the truth and force of these remarks be admitted, whither are they carrying us? Are we to be landed in the belief that the world of men and things is *not* governed by law or predetermined necessity; but that, on the contrary, all events are determined singly by the will, or caprice, of an all-powerful being whose determinations have reference simply to the individual and the moment"? We reply we are not establishing a theory but examining one. We are simply asking whether those wondrous diversities which are, after all, the most conspicuous "outcome" of "the forces that exist," may not afford ample scope and conditions for the granting of all that the creature can ask or need. What, then, if the believer, — while, no less than the physicist, recognizing the existence of great underlying principles and unvarying laws in physical and moral spheres alike, — should, instead of regarding them as the blind agents of a blind necessity, ready to aid and to crush without discrimination, choose to regard them as the all-

<sup>1</sup> *Variety as an Aim in Nature, in Contemporary Review.*

flexible instruments in the hand of an Omniscient Father, so wielded as to enable him to accomplish with unerring precision, every right petition of his trusting child? The question is, whether, in view of existing facts, the one hypothesis is not at least as good, and as much in harmony with the evidence, as the other. May not the son who knows it would be equally useless and impious to ask his earthly parent to violate, for his pleasure, one of the commandments of the Decalogue, yet with perfect consistency and assurance petition him for bread to satisfy his hunger, or a helping hand to save him from impending danger? And yet, as we shall have occasion to show presently, the same course of reasoning which is used to show the impossibility of effectual prayer being addressed to an Infinite Will, is surely equally valid against any appeal to any will whatever.

But, assumption second, we are told that those who refuse to admit that Class I. is all-embracing, are bound to "define these categories," and "to say what may be prayed for, and what may not be prayed for." Bound, are they, to draw mathematical lines in moral planes,—to map out those etherial regions which embrace and bound the inner and higher life of the spirit in semicircles and quadrangles, that may be measured by chain and theodolite? The men of science are fond of dealing with questions of sociology, and are doubtless doing much good by calling attention to the proximate causes of many moral and social ills. They will all agree, I presume, that there is such a thing as "culpable luxury," and that a reasonable limitation of the hours of toil of the laboring masses is much to be desired. May we not safely undertake to define the categories in question, as soon as sociologists shall have distinctly drawn and demonstrated the lines which separate between justifiable and culpable luxury, or between a day of reasonable and one of excessive toil.

But it may be said that this kind of retort, though it may silence an adversary, never explains a difficulty. To a certain extent it does. To meet one difficulty by placing beside it



others of the same class may savor too much of the *tu quoque* to satisfy an earnest inquirer after truth ; but, limited and conditioned as are our highest faculties for gaining knowledge, we are often obliged to rest satisfied with such a mode of explanation. The prince of analogical reasoners has long since made it clear, that to show that the difficulties connected with a certain alleged fact are precisely of the same kind as those characteristic of many other facts which are admittedly matters of experience, is to create a strong presumption in its favor. And is this not in close accord with our boasted scientific methods? Who doubts the benefits of scientific classification, or the reality of the knowledge it conveys? And yet, what better in the way of explanation does it afford than the simple arranging of one phenomenon, whose real cause is not understood, side by side with a thousand others equally incomprehensible? It has often seemed to us surprising that so many writers should fall so readily into the trap set for their judgments by such arguments *ad ignorantiam* as that with which we are dealing. One, for instance, is quoted as saying, "Of course it would be useless to pray for recovery in the case of hydrophobia." Dr. Knight notably goes farther when he claims for prayer efficacy only in the sphere of spiritual, not in that of physical causation, though utterly failing, as has been pointed out by his critics, to show how it is possible to draw, even in thought, such a line between two spheres of influence, each of which is brought to consciousness only through the other, and cannot possibly be known to us at all, save through its relationship to, and interaction with, the other. Nor is the position very much improved, so far as we can see, when the formula is simply changed, as has been suggested by others, from "the Almighty cannot," to "the Immutable will not," vary his order and modes of operation.

But let us go farther. Let us look at the question from yet another point of view, though still without committing ourselves to any theory as to the true *rationale* of effectual prayer, but simply endeavoring to show from various con-

siderations the inconclusiveness of the arguments under discussion. We decline to admit as proved that there is *any* category of events beyond the possibility of being affected by petition. In such a classification there is involved, assumption third, that "the professed believer in prayer must hold to a distinction between *ordinary or physical forces* and *spiritual or supernatural ones*, which can by no means be proved." Such a distinction is no necessary element or background of the faith of the believer. If we mistake not, it is in ill-considered or indefinite language upon this point that many a difficulty and many a fallacy originate. What do we mean by such terms as "physical law" and "physical force?" Nothing short of a misty and incomprehensible materialism can suppose that matter—dead, inert matter—possesses in itself any active power by which it is able to operate either upon other matter, or upon mind. "Oh, of course," the more cautious and clear-sighted students of physical science will tell us, "these are merely convenient terms to denote uniformity of observed sequences, and are not intended to imply any hypothesis as to the nature of the unknown cause of the phenomena, or perhaps any notion of causation at all." But the trouble is—perhaps it inheres in the very nature of the operating mind—that they are pretty sure to go on presently to speak of "law" and "force" as if they were actual, though non-intelligent energies, imprisoned and perpetually active in material objects, as such, and to assume that will-power and spiritual energy, if any such exist, must belong to a totally different sphere, and either be incapable of affecting matter at all, or of affecting it only in some exceptional and extraordinary fashion. For instance, Professor Tyndall, as already quoted, speaks of prayer as invoking "a Power which, when appealed to under pressing circumstances, produces the precise effects *caused by physical energy* in the ordinary course of things." What is here meant by "physical energy?" "Energy," we find defined as "inherent power," active or potential. But it is exceedingly desirable in such questions to define, not only our terms, but the conceptions which govern their

applications. Does Professor Tyndall conceive of material substances as possessing and exerting a power *inherent in themselves* of producing certain effects? Is it not contradictory to every legitimate notion of energy to conceive of it as exerted by, rather than *through*, inanimate matter, organic or inorganic? And if so, may not the intelligent believer retort that in prayer he does but invoke the *same* Power and the *only* Power, which produces all effects, is the source of all causation? Some of the ablest minds, even amongst the most enthusiastic students of physical science, have clearly pointed out the fallacy under consideration. Dr. Carpenter, in a recent Article,<sup>1</sup> has uttered an energetic protest against the idea that there is even an agency, of any kind whatever, *intervening* between the First Cause and the phenomena of nature." He reiterates with emphasis and forcible argument a previously expressed opinion that science "*points to the origination of all power in mind.*" It can scarcely be denied that our first, our clearest, some would say, our only, conceptions of force or energy are derived from the testimony of consciousness to the exertion of will-power. As Dr. Carpenter further observes, "When we have once arrived at that conception of force as an expression of will, which we derive from our own experience of its production, the universal and constantly sustaining agency of the Deity is recognized in every phenomenon of the external universe, and we are thus led to feel that in the material creation itself we have the same distinct evidence of his personal existence and ceaseless activity, as we have of the agency of intelligent minds in the creations of artistic genius, or in the elaborate contrivances of mechanical skill, or in those written records of thought which arouse our physical nature into kindred activity."

It is probably true that this distinguished physiologist, even in the application of the formula "Government *according to* Laws" which he would substitute for the objectionable "Government *by* Laws," would fall into what we cannot but regard as the prevalent error of those whose studies are

<sup>1</sup> On Mind and Will in Nature, in Contemporary Review.

largely or exclusively confined to the tracing of method and the elaboration of system in any department of physical science. As he distrusts "all arguments based on those *individual* instances of adaptation of means to ends, on which Paley and his school built up their proofs of 'design,'" so, very likely he would, overlooking the ever-present individual variations and peculiarities in the events of human life, refuse to admit the existence of scope for any degree of *providential* — the literal meaning of the term is suggestive to one holding his views of the infinite foreknowledge and plan of Deity — adjustment and inter-adaptation. Still, admitting the irresistible tendency of the human mind, in its quest of truth, towards *unity*, the inquiry is, in itself, most important, whether it is more rational to seek that unity — referring it, as we instinctively do, to the underlying causes rather than to the observed effects — in some incomprehensible force imprisoned or inherent in single or combined particles of matter, or in the self-conditioned operation of an Infinite Mind, which

"Lives through all life, extends through all extent,  
Spreads undivided, operates unspent."

But admit, as most minds will be impelled to do, that, in the words in which Martineau sums up the general inference, "science — abolishing her own plurality of natural powers and, as her latest act, delivering the universe to the disposal of One alone, various in its phases, but in its essence homogeneous," — admits as probable "that the distinction of forces into various kinds, is only apparent, not real; depending on the medium of their manifestation, not upon anything in their intrinsic nature; that all the force behind the changes of the world is *One*, whether it assumes the mask of this or that order of phenomena;"<sup>1</sup> and what follows? The praying Christian "invoking a Power which checks and augments the descent of rain," etc., is no longer invoking a different Power from that which ordinarily produces the same effects. The distinction, as commonly understood, between natural and supernatural causes vanishes. The course of events in each

<sup>1</sup> God in Nature, by James Martineau, in *Old and New*, August, 1872.

and all cases is shaped by one all determining cause. If that cause be intelligent and benevolent, who can show that appeal is not ever open and legitimate?

That the foregoing is the ordinary conception of the believer in prayer need not be claimed. The Christian is not necessarily a philosopher. The physical, as well as the moral, value of prayer is dependent upon conditions quite distinct from the views—necessarily very inadequate at the best—he may entertain of the *modus operandi* by which prayer is answered. “Is there, then,” it may be repeated, “no class of events which have always happened with such absolute regularity that no sane man would think of petitioning for a change in their modes of occurrence?” Our reply is, we object emphatically to the *principle* of such a classification. Prayer, considered as a means of producing or influencing physical results, *has*, undoubtedly, its conditions and limitations so infallibly defined as to prevent all possibility of any such catastrophes as those hinted at. What those limitations and conditions are, may be considered presently. They must evidently be sought for in the nature of the Power itself, and not in any assumed inflexibility in the operations of forces, which, if not figments of the scientific imagination, must at least operate on a lower plane, and so occupy a subordinate place in the economy of the universe. We pass to the consideration of

## II. THE ALLEGED ABSURDITY OF SUPPOSING THAT THE DEITY CAN BE INFLUENCED BY THE SUGGESTION OR PERSUASION OF A CREATURE.

The author of the somewhat famous “prayer test,” in the *Contemporary Review*, expresses his conviction in the strongest terms. “I cannot express my repugnance at the notion that Supreme Intelligence can be influenced by the suggestion of any human mind, however great.” This is but the bold, bald statement of a view which we find continually outcropping, in more guarded language, in the writings of many of those advanced thinkers of the day, who, having out-

grown the swaddling bands of orthodoxy, yet retain some shadowy notion of a Supreme Intelligence. The first question which occurs to one, and which we would put in no offensive form, is, who is the "I" that speaks thus oracularly, and with such implied contempt, of the views and intuitions of the wise and good in all ages? One involuntarily accepts the implied appeal to authority, and a long train of the Platos, Lockes, Newtons, Hamiltons, Agassizs, of a score of centuries, pass in review before him. But then we are reminded that were the question one of authority, it could easily be answered in the words of one whose opinions would perhaps be entitled to great weight in the mind of the Author of Hints, etc. Professor Tyndall, under the wing of whose reputation he himself was brought before the public, says, in the very letter accompanying that in which the above expression is found :

"The theory that the system of nature is under the control of a Being who changes phenomena in compliance with the prayers of men, is, in my opinion, a perfectly legitimate one. It may, of course, be rendered futile by being associated with conceptions which contradict it, but such conceptions form no necessary part of the theory. It is a matter of experience that an earthly father, who is at the same time both wise and tender, listens to the requests of his children, and, if they do not ask amiss, takes pleasure in granting those requests. We also know that this compliance extends to the alteration, within certain limits, of the current of events on earth. With this suggestion offered by our experience, it is no departure from scientific method to place behind natural phenomena a Universal Father, who, in answer to the prayers of his children, alters the currents of those phenomena. Thus far theology and science go hand in hand. The conception of an ether, for instance, trembling with the waves of light, is suggested by the ordinary phenomena of wave-motion in water and in air; and in like manner the conception of personal volition in nature is suggested by the ordinary action of man upon earth. I therefore argue no impossibilities," etc.

In any sense in which these admirable remarks do not

urnish a complete answer, the argument is one with which the scientific writer, as such, has manifestly nothing to do; nay, further, one to which he is bound in consistency to attach no weight whatever. It removes the subject entirely from the low plane of experimental philosophy into a higher region and a different atmosphere. It involves an appeal from the decision of a jury of experts, whose decision must be based wholly upon the results of a kind of mechanical balancing of series of partially comprehended physical facts, to that of a bench of judges, skilled in the analysis of moral questions, trained to a subtle power of sifting evidence, and a keen insight into the mysterious workings of the human soul, with its instincts, affections, and aspirations. We could cheerfully grant the transfer. The believers in prayer would unhesitatingly submit the question to the intuitions of those best fitted by nature and habit to judge as to which is the loftier conception, and the one which finds readiest response in intellect and heart alike,—that which represents the "All Supreme" as simply an "unerring order, which in all our experience knows no exception," though, for aught that appears, the inflexible march of that order may ever and anon crush the virtuous, torture the innocent, and exalt the vicious to luxury and honor; or that which places behind the phenomena of the world a Universal Father, ever ready to hear the cry of his feeblest child, and able to wield all the machinery of nature, human wills included, with so "perfect a mastery of all possible contingencies," and so absolute a comprehension of the details of each individual case, as renders any miscarriage of absolute justice, any failure of perfect beneficence, any sacrifice of the one to the many, or the individual to the order, utterly and forever impossible. Of course such a test would, after all, be refused, and the tendency of weak humanity to anthropomorphism bewailed. As if the testimony of the human consciousness to the laws and modes of working of the mental organism, with its swift intuitions, its sense of will-power, and its irresistible tendency to moral judgments, did not afford at least as worthy a basis for an estimate of the

character and operations of the Supreme, as the testimony of sense to the forms, motions, and changes of material objects.

But, coming to more positive ground, we cannot fail to remark upon one marked and, as it appears to us, fallacious characteristic of all that class of reasonings of which the objection we are discussing is one specimen — the tendency to sink the *individual* in the mass. As the largest conceivable number in mathematics is but an aggregation of units, so the great sum total of human happiness or human misery is but the aggregation of the happiness and misery of individual men and women. Where one man of the keenest susceptibilities has enjoyed or suffered all of which his nature is capable, the acme of human bliss or human woe has been reached. Multiply the unit by millions, and you add nothing to the reality or the intensity of the joy or the pain. You but increase, so to speak, its arithmetical bulk. Now if there be at the roots of phenomena an Intelligent and Omnipotent Will, as is postulated by the view we are just now discussing, that Will must be under the influence of motive. We cannot otherwise conceive it. And its motives must manifestly have their origin in, or at least be closely related to, the creatures he has called into being. Even the attempt to evolve them all from the depths of his own infinite nature, thus resolving them, as has been irreverently said, into “infinite selfishness,” must signally fail, inasmuch as the moment they take objective shape, in products of creative energy of whatever kind, they become inextricably involved with the character and development of those products. Unless, indeed, we can conceive of the gratification sought as exhausted in the very act of creation, irrespective of the nature and fate of the thing created, and believe the latter instantaneously abandoned. But while we instinctively revolt from the impiety of such a conception, it is also self-contradictory, inasmuch as it at once destroys all possibility of proof that any such Will at present exists. And whence can motives worthy of influencing such a Will, whose infinite benevolence will be granted to be as susceptible of proof as its existence, be derived, if not from



the happiness or misery of intelligent creatures? But, taking up again the thread of our argument, it is clear that if the claim of *one* sensitive, suffering creature upon the benevolence or love of the Supreme is *zero*, then by no process of addition or multiplication can a positive value be assigned to that of myriads. "The greatest good of the greatest number," may be the wisest and best motto in human government; but it is the formula of imperfection and impotence. When the Creator and Governor of the universe has failed to secure the rights of one of his intelligent creatures, when he has failed to ward off undeserved or purposeless suffering from the feeblest child of humanity, he stands confessed a fallible ruler. The foundation of faith sinks beneath our feet; the light of hope flickers in our bosoms, and a night of horror and despair broods over our spirits. Either the Great Will in which we trusted is no longer supreme, or that prescience which we fondly called infinite has been miserably baffled. The mighty forces, of which we and all things are the outcome, are no longer under the control of intelligence,<sup>1</sup> but are rushing madly on, like the sun steeds in the hands of the child Phaethon, threatening universal rack and ruin. Grant even that the resistless sweep of these forces may be so guided as to be productive of wise and beneficial results on the whole. Can that console me so long as I am constantly and reasonably apprehensive that I, or those dear to me, may at any moment be crushed or swept into oblivion? Am I to lose sight of all personal and selfish thoughts in the "inexpressible sense of admiration which fills me," and in the act of tracing "the operation of a Supreme Intelligence," and "the symbols of originating mind in the happily untranslatable text which occupies the patient and humble seeker after fact?" If "to do my work unquestioningly and unsuggestingly," in the presence of such facts and possibilities, is my proper sphere, why, alas! did not the Author of that wondrous order fit me for my work by making me a simple intelligence. Why endow me with this will to be thwarted,

<sup>1</sup> *Vis consilii expers mole ruit sua.* — Horace, Odes III. 4.

these nerves to be tortured, this heart to be lacerated, this soul to writhe in the agonies of baseless hopes and aspirations never to be satisfied? And then, what standard have I by which to judge or recognize the general good, or good at all, save that which I find in my own individual breast?

If we might venture upon a slight digression, we should suggest that there is danger of this tendency to deify the mass welded into a kind of unity, and belittle the individual, extending beyond the domain of natural into that of social science. Its baneful influence pervades to some extent the trades-union and international labor movements. The strength gained by union and concerted action, legitimate as it is in itself, and beneficent as it might be made in its results to the working man, is in danger of being counteracted by the paralyzing influence of an inert communism. In so far as the unions become merely mechanical, merging the man in the society, crushing out individuality by narrowing the scope for, and weakening the stimulus to, individual excellence, and unequally yoking energy and talent with sloth and mediocrity, the issues can be only harmful. The levellings will inevitably be downwards instead of upwards. The *one* chained down to the low level of the *mass* can use his energies for raising it much less effectively, than if permitted to use from above the lever of an elevating and stimulating example, while the dead weight of the mass may easily prevent his own rise. The serried ranks of the Macedonian phalanx or Roman testudo might, by dint of inertia, give an increase of resisting power, but for skilful manoeuvre and energetic advance, commend us to the modern battalion, in which every soldier is an intelligent unit, joined to the body by an intellectual, rather than a mechanical, bond. So, undoubtedly, the system which secures the fullest development of individual talent and energy will, in the long run, accomplish most for the social, intellectual, and moral progress of a class or people.

But, to return to the point of connection with our theme, all such forced uniformities, whether in workshop or school or social life, are contrary to nature, whose modes of working

ever afford the best hints and the safest models. Her rewards, her punishments, all her motives, primarily regard the individual. Her modes of operation are ever demonstrating to his reason what her voice is ever whispering to his conscience, that he has a being, a duty, and a destiny peculiarly his own, distinct from those of every other being in the universe; that upon him are thrown responsibilities of self-development, and to him entrusted elements of power and influence, which he can share with no other, and that upon his being true to himself hang tremendous and everlasting issues. The fact that this being, duty, and destiny are interwoven by ten thousand living fibres with those of hundreds of his fellow-men,—that they constitute in fact one link in the eternal chain of causation which runs through the centuries, and so forbid him, by all that is sacred or terrible, to allow self-love to degenerate into selfishness, and urge him, by all the loftier impulses of his nature, towards the fulfilment of the great sum of the second moiety of the moral law, — does but multiply to infinity the motives which bind him to make the most of himself. Is it, then, presumptuous to suppose that such a being, so endowed, and so related, and at the same time every moment conscious of a power within him to change or modify his own future, and so the whole order of events with which he is connected, however unable he may be to reconcile the fact with his own *ab extra* conceptions of the invariability of that order, — is it presumptuous to suppose that such a being should be afforded access to the Great Superintending Will; and have some appreciable weight in determining its motives? If, indeed, that will is either constantly determining, or has once for all predetermined, the eternal order of events, and if, as cannot be denied, the individual events in this eternal order, are so related that a divergence in the whole course for all time, may be brought about by the volition of one human unit in the train, how *can* the Omniscient Disposer disregard the slightest movement of that unit? This, however, suggests a few thoughts which can be more appropriately presented in

treating of the third objection to the physical value of prayer, arising from a view of

### III. THE ALLEGED INEVITABLE CONTRADICTIONS WHICH MUST SPRING FROM THE CONFLICTING VIEWS, FEELINGS, AND WISHES OF SHORT-SIGHTED MEN.

Admit, it is in effect urged, the existence within the reach of frail and selfish man of a power by which he is enabled to lay hold upon the hand of Omnipotence, and bring about changes, or modifications, in the operation of existing forces, and you pave the way to endless confusion in the courses of natural phenomena. Farmer A., on the hillside, will be praying for rain, while his neighbour B., in the valley beneath, is intensely crying out for sunshine. C. will ask favorable winds for his outward-bound ship, and thus contravene the petitions of D. for prosperous gales for his on her homeward voyage. Two armies are facing one another on the eve of a great battle, and from hundreds of the pious in each, fervent supplications for victory are ascending to the Lord of Hosts. "Now," argue those who ply the objection under consideration, "it will not be claimed that even the Almighty can perform contradictories at one and the same moment." Thus is the "*reductio ad absurdum*" mercilessly applied.

First of all, let us here again protest against a misconception of the true bearings of the question. We quoted at the outset a part of a sentence from an article by Professor Tyndall, as a fair statement of that which must be claimed for prayer by believers in its efficacy in the physical sphere. Only, however, by omitting the closing portion of that sentence can it be so accepted. When the writer adds, "A Power, in short, which, when appealed to under pressing circumstances, produces the precise effects caused by physical energy in the ordinary course of things," he vitiates, unintentionally no doubt, the fairness of his statements by an explanation which can be accepted, we submit, by no intelligent defender of prayer as a power in the physical world. The views we have attempted to exhibit will be seen to sweep

away every shadow of foundation for any such distinction between the power which prayer invokes, and that which ordinarily produces the effects under consideration. There can be but *one* source of the energy which, in various forms of manifestation, and in countless modes of operation, produces the phenomena of nature. The great question, then, is as to the possibility of these correlated forms and modes being affected through the instrumentality of prayer, as they demonstrably are affected by other agencies within the reach of man.

We have already insisted, in effect, that the difficulty of reconciling the notion of effectual prayer with the alleged invariability of natural law, is not different in kind from that of reconciling the constant agency of human will, in a hundred other forms of exertion, with this same notion of invariability. Thus, as we have said, the abstract objection urged against the possible efficacy of any appeal to a Supreme Will is equally valid, and may be applied, *a fortiori*, against any appeal to any will whatever. Remove, if you please, the First and Intelligent Cause as far away as the most enthusiastic apostle of evolution could desire; confine his operations to the simple production of the original world-stuff, and the impressing upon it in chaos of those properties by virtue of which the grand unfolding has gone on from that day to this; attempt to explain, on any principle consistent with the presence in the development of either a *definite design* or an *unvarying order*, the constant activity of one, or of a billion of *free agents*,—agents not only capable of modifying, obstructing, or accelerating the movements of the machinery, but constituting, by nature and necessity, an important and vital part of it, and able at the same time to launch at any moment a consciously independent, if not absolutely new, force into the sphere,—and you are brought face to face with the theological problem of all the ages. We try the theory of the dominion of blind, inexorable forces. But shall we, or shall we not, attempt to leave any scope for true freedom to those intelligent agents? If not,—if they too, in all their volitions, energies,

and activities are but the inevitable "outcome of the forces that exist,"—then how absurd to discuss at all such questions as that under debate. How inconsistent of the physicist holding such a view, to make use of argument, or any other motive, with a view to effecting any change in that unvarying order, which must include, in its infinite sweep, every shape and shade of individual opinion? Who can resist necessity? The thinker's thoughts, the writer's words, the philosopher's reasonings and speculations, all alike must fall into rank amongst the other inevitable products, and can neither have nor need any other justification than that contained in the formula, "So wrought the forces." If my will is irresistibly determined to petition, then petition I must, and my petitioning becomes a part of the order, and so a real and necessary power in the determination of the event. But if, on the other hand, we claim that there is a real freedom, and hence an unpredictable element in the thoughts and volitions of these human agents, how can we escape the other horn of the dilemma? An unknown quantity, of incalculable value, is at once brought into the problem, and the ever-recurring paradox stares us in the face,—a paradox of which the theory in question affords no possible explanation.

It is interesting to find one of the broadest and clearest thinkers of the scientific school driven, by sheer stress of irresistible logic, to take refuge in a philosophical haven which bears a striking resemblance to that ancient one so clearly outlined in the theological charts of Paul and David. He finds, what most who revolve deeply the great problems must find, that we cannot interpret the facts of nature and human life otherwise than that not only the great general outlines of the history of matter and mind, but the motions of every atom and the events and impulses of every life, are in strict accordance with the most definite forecast, the most absolute determination. The universe is inconceivable else. A cosmos without a plan is as inconceivable as a creation without a Creator. Perfection absolute is necessary to any conception of Deity. While perfect wisdom implies perfect fore-

sight and precludes possible change, perfect justice forbids possible failure in details or possible sacrifice of the one to the many. But such a conception is in the most pronounced antithesis to the notion of an inexorable order, incapable of beneficent regard to individual persons and events. The most unlimited predetermination is simply the outcome of an infinite prescience, which only by voluntarily closing its eyes could fail to see the end from the beginning. And thus we find Dr. Carpenter, in the Article before quoted, discoursing of a Great Will whose "direct and immediate operation in the phenomena of the universe makes itself only known to us through the uniformities which we recognize in those phenomena, *our own expression of which*, so far as they have been discovered by us, we call the 'laws of nature,'—uniformities which are simply unchangeable, because, as they were originally devised by infinite wisdom, any change would be for the worse." This "idea of constancy and invariability in the Creator's plan," which simply *antedates* the exercise of his discerning love "by referring *all* those provisions for man's benefit which he has placed before us, either in possession or in prospect, to the period when this present system of things had a beginning," and which is consequently quite in harmony with the teachings of that book which declares "known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world," however it fail, as fail it does and must, to enable us to understand *how* every movement of a free will can be foreknown, certainly removes one moiety of the whole sum total of difficulties, by giving us the *fact* that they are actually foreknown as a starting-point. The great paradox behind this—a paradox as clearly stated and as strongly insisted upon in scripture as it can possibly be in science, we make no attempt to resolve. Our aim is simply to show that we have given two series of facts—for the motions of these wills are certainly *facts* as familiar and as patent to observation and experiment as those of light or electricity,—and that in our most patient efforts to explain and reconcile these facts we are driven by the very logic of

science itself to the theory which best accords with the biblical one in question. For the whole class of difficulties we are now discussing, arising out of the supposed irreconcilability of human wants and wishes, as unfolded in prayer, manifestly resolves itself in the last analysis into the larger problem of the mysteries of the will. If the majestic plan of that discerning love which foresaw the end from the beginning, and which—we would say, “with a perfect mastery of all possible contingencies,” were not the word contingency as heterodox in science as in theology—arranged the minutest operation of all secondary causes, *human wills included*, was able to effect that all human volitions, all the apparent cross-purposes of finite beings, should contribute to the harmonious development of that plan, then the difficulties of the scheme are in no wise increased by assigning to the prayer of the creature a place and power. The intelligent thinker will no more feel bound to restrain prayer from a sense of its presumption or powerlessness than to forego the exercise of any other energy under the control of his volition. Instead of “submitting without suggesting limits or a definition to the plan he could never have devised and cannot compass, too glad to believe that all such order is not to be influenced by human interference,” he will, on the other hand, be doubly glad to believe and prove by happy experience that in that infinite and beneficent order there is a place and a value for his devout petitions.

One might suppose that the student of science would be the last to urge such an objection as that under review, especially when he has before him the recent discoveries in regard to the correlation of physical forces. Accustomed to experiment with that mysterious energy which, drawing constant supplies from the great “father of lights” and centre of the system, keeps the wondrous mechanism of the world in motion, and gaining every day new evidences of how indestructible in its nature, and how easily transmuted from one form to another, is the wondrous agent of whose operations he knows so much, and of whose nature so little, he must at



times have been ready to dread the direst consequences from man's ability to manipulate it and change its manifold forms. But as he proceeded and became more familiar with the constant round of distribution and assimilation, of repair and reproduction and counterbalancing, he must have lost all dread of catastrophe in a sense of admiration at the perfection of adjustment and the inexhaustibleness of supply. Coming from such a school to the study of the higher questions involved in the correlations of spiritual energies and their common subordination to and dependence upon the Father of spirits, he would not, one might suppose, be slow to conceive of the existence of some counterbalancing and re-adjusting agency by which infinite wisdom could direct the operations and preserve the equilibrium of spiritual or will forces.

Such a re-adjusting agency the enlightened student of scripture will not fail to discern in the very nature of prayer, in the dispositions of heart which underlie, beget, and permeate every genuine exercise of faith, and transmute into a harmonious unity the deepest breathings of apparently diverse petitions. Prayer—the prayer of faith, which alone has power—is not “always petition, and beyond petition nothing”; but it must of necessity begin with petition, and continue with much of petition. It originates necessarily just where the entrance into the kingdom originates,—in a sense of need, a genuine poverty of spirit. For its true character and scope we must ever look to the great model. Its twofold burden, the Creator's glory and the creature's good, is therein set forth by Him who alone fully realized its power and who proved it omnipotent, even amongst the lesser forces of nature and within the precincts of the king of terrors. Taught in such a school and inspired by such an example, the believer fears not to come reverently into the presence chamber of the I AM, and utter his petitions. He can see no reason why the Being who has made provision in his all-comprehensive scheme for the fullest play of the wills and energies of his intelligent creatures amongst and upon the forces of the physical world may not also have made a similar provision in the region of

spiritual forces. He is taught by experience that he may, without presumption, use effective means to intercept the lightning or refract the sunbeam for human amusement or behoof. Why should he doubt the possibility, or dread the presumption, of using another means to divert or collect other rays of blessing from the flood which is ever streaming earthward from the great Sun and Centre of the spiritual universe? He will hesitate to dogmatize about the *hows*, of whose inner nature he knows, at the best, so little. But he may be constrained by the instinct of faith to go even farther, and lay hold upon that same great generalization to which we have referred as possibly destined to prove the goal of dispassionate scientific inquiry, and refuse to recognize any but an artificial distinction between the two spheres of force. To him the will of the Father is the energy which moves matter and spirit alike. If the Great Will that sways the universe is the will of his Father, whence, he reverently asks, are motives to influence that Will more likely to be derived than from the finite wills and real necessities of children created, in some sense, in his own likeness? From what other possible source can they be derived? Are they inherent in his own nature; or are they the offspring of caprice? From the latter supposition we instinctively revolt, as utterly inconceivable as well as unworthy. And the former, which is also a scriptural one, involves, as we have before shown, the first, inasmuch as it is as impossible, in the case of a being perfect in all his attributes, to separate between the manifestation of those attributes in creation and the good of the creature as to draw a mathematical line between consciousness and the mental modification to which it testifies. The outcome of the Infinite Love is the happiness of its finite offspring. It is impossible, then, to conceive of the Infinite Mind, save as *related to* and *influenced by* the mind it has created. And if the manifestations of this Infinite Mind in nature are in accordance with general principles of uniformity which we may trace and generalize into what we call "laws," why should not also its manifestations in the world of mind

be capable of being similarly defined and expressed? And who can say, never having faithfully made the experiment, in the face, too, of the testimony of thousands who claim to have made it, that the doctrine of *believing prayer* may not be the very embodiment of the principle, the concise expression of the law, in accordance with which the Infinite Mind suffers itself to be acted upon by the finite, and reflects that action upon the movements of the physical and moral worlds?

Where, then, is the dividing line between the two categories before spoken of? It exists nowhere; or rather it is variable as the magnetic needle, yet, like it, ever tending to the pole, while shifting with the conditions of the case; i.e. with the spiritual state of the suppliant. If at any sublime crisis in the history of the world the two great ends of prayer could best be subserved by the staying of the sun in its course, or—its equivalent to us—some variation in the rotatory motion of the earth, who can say that the Great Mind may not have foreseen and provided for the emergency, just as it must have foreseen and provided for ten thousand times ten thousand variations of every-day occurrence, different only in degree?

But the “limitation” and the “self-adjusting agency” are there, no doubt, and in perfection, were our analysis but keen enough. We shall close this paper by rather hinting at than defining the direction in which they are to be sought. They inhere in the very nature of prayer:

1. *In the motives which prompt it.*—It may often and legitimately lay the wants, even the physical wants, of the individual at the foot of the throne. But a *merely* worldly, or *merely* selfish aim, true prayer can never have. In the fullest sense it must ever be prescribed and circumscribed by the two great precepts of the law of God. To love God with all the powers of the soul and one's neighbor as himself, must certainly put a most effectual check upon all those conflicting petitions which loom so large in some imaginations, by drying up the only sources from which they could spring,—the appetites and passions of unregulated selfishness. Suppose, as is clearly possible, the devout petitioner, through ignorance,

to utter a prayer whose literal answer would involve some contradiction to one or the other of those great principles — working, we will say, injury to a neighbor. Is it not evident that the *spirit* of the petition would be thwarted by its literal answer and subverted by refusal? This suggests the second grand limitation of prayer in,

2. *The faith which is its invariable condition.*—This, indeed, includes in itself all other limitations, though, for convenience sake, we may dissociate some of its elements. That faith which alone can render prayer effectual — without which there is no true prayer — has its basis in such conceptions of the perfect wisdom and goodness and love of the Supreme, as bring an unfaltering conviction that his will is always the highest good of all his creatures, the petitioner included. Its broad, unbounded loyalty conditions, in effect, every petition upon its harmony with the manifestation of those divine attributes. Within these limits true prayer is omnipotent. And from these it necessarily results that, in the words of the “Author of Hints,” etc., “The realization and final consummation of all prayer, all even of petition — last arrived at in man’s course — culmination of all natural piety, is expressed in the memorable ejaculation, ‘Thy will be done.’” If it be still asked: Where, then, is the place or the need for the creature’s *petition* at all? we think some hints, at least, at the true answer will be found in different places in the foregoing discussion. We shall not stay to argue farther that prayer has a justification because man is prompted to it by one of the deepest impulses of his nature, or because he is hampered in this by no greater paradox than that which encompasses *every exertion of his will* to shape or modify events that must have been predetermined ages before he had a beginning. We shall content ourselves with a remark which may convey an additional hint towards such solution as is possible to us of this and the many cognate mysteries of life. The culmination of all prayer in “Thy will be done,” reminds us of what we shall call its third limitation, as found in,

3. *Its divine origin.*—The spirit of true prayer must be

begotten from above. No breathing of desire can ascend to Heaven save that which first came down from Heaven. The scriptures teach expressly, in many forms, that the Spirit of God must prompt and direct all effectual prayer, just as it is manifest that if Deity carries out a plan, or predetermines issues, he must in some way or other, and on some righteous principle, to us inscrutable, rule and use and harmonize all subordinate wills and purposes. If then, when we know not what we should rightly pray for, the Spirit of wisdom is ready to teach us, and its teachings are necessary to give the prayer its true character as such, — what need to inquire farther how the catastrophes incident to the answering of conflicting petitions are to be averted. If these principles would seem likely to deprive of its distinctive claim to the title much that is called prayer, we can only refer every one for himself to the authoritative text-book to see whether it or the writer is responsible for the *criteria*. If, on the other hand, they should be held obnoxious to the ever ready objection that they strike at the root of real human freedom in prayer, as in every other act, we can only reply, as heretofore, that they can no more do so than any one class of established *facts* can have power to annihilate any other class of *facts* equally indisputable, simply because of our inability to trace the two seeming parallels to that point in the depths of infinite thought, where they must infallibly blend in eternal unity. And, coinciding to the fullest extent with the view of those who think so important a question should be capable of submission to some practical and crucial test, we venture, in closing, to propose one which has the advantage of being free from the necessity for any exact collation of facts by a plurality of observers, or any elaborate agreement of individuals upon a scheme full of inherent difficulties. It is a test which can be applied only by the individual, and *may* be applied by every individual so disposed. Above all, it has the sanction, and may be reverently characterized as the universal challenge, of the great Teacher of prayer: "If any man *will* do his will he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God."