

SECRET PRAYER

By H. C. G. MOULE.



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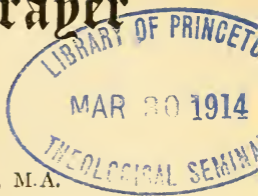
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Moule, H. C. G. 1841-1920.

Secret prayer



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BY
H. C. G. MOULE, M.A.

*Principal of RIDLEY HALL, and formerly Fellow of TRINITY
COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE;*

*Author of "THOUGHTS ON CHRISTIAN SANCTITY," "THOUGHTS
ON UNION WITH CHRIST," "THOUGHTS ON THE SPIRITUAL
LIFE," "OUTLINES OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE," &c.*

"When thou prayest enter into thy closet, and when thou hast
shut thy door pray to thy Father which is in secret."
MATT. vi. 6.

TWENTIETH THOUSAND

LONDON
SEELEY AND CO. LIMITED
ESSEX STREET, STRAND

1891

“OH, how the soul is refreshed with freedom of speech with its beloved Lord! . . . He that is much in prayer shall grow rich in grace. He shall thrive and increase most who is busiest in this, which is our very traffic with heaven, and fetches the most precious commodities thence. He who sends oftenest out these ships of desire, who makes the most voyages to that land of spices and pearls, shall be sure to improve his stock most, and have most of heaven upon earth.”

Archbishop LEIGHTON, *on I Pet.* iv. 7.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	7
CHAPTER I.	
DIFFICULTIES, AND NECESSITY, OF SECRET PRAYER	11
CHAPTER II.	
METHODS AND HELPS	28
CHAPTER III.	
SIMPLICITY AND DETAIL	47
CHAPTER IV.	
CONFESSION OF SIN	64

CHAPTER V.		
	PAGE	
ADORATION		80
CHAPTER VI.		
SELF-CONSECRATION AND CONFESSION		
OF FAITH		95
CHAPTER VII.		
INTERCESSION		110
CHAPTER VIII.		
PRAYER WITHOUT CEASING		126

PREFACE

THE following pages are a reproduction, somewhat extended here and there but otherwise little altered, of a series of addresses delivered at the weekly Devotional Service of the Cambridge University Church Society, in the Lent Term of 1888.

The Subject needs no introduction, and truly no apology. If the writer reads some characteristics of our time at all aright it is a subject not only of permanent but of special and pressing importance, of the highest order, if the spiritual life of the Christian man and the Christian Church is to be maintained indeed under the conditions of the modern world.

As he has endeavoured to point out

in the first chapter, the practice of Secret Prayer suffers peculiar risks at present from even religious quarters, such as those of multiplied work, and highly developed public worship, and the abundant use of social devotion.

Under this last head indeed one exception must be made, and made with sorrow. Is it not true that in the hurry of modern religious life the practice of FAMILY WORSHIP is on the decline? But if it be so, it is time that every thoughtful Christian who can in the least use action or influence in the matter should withstand that decline in his own person. Nothing, as the writer has attempted to show, can take the place of Secret Prayer. But likewise nothing, where there is a family in any sense, can take the place of Family Prayer, in which the head of

the family takes his God-intended position as its pastor and teacher ; instructing it from the Word, leading it in praise and prayer, and pledging himself and his circle by that solemn act to a family life in which the Lord shall be honoured. To the spiritual health of the Parish, of the Church, of the Land, Family Worship is of incalculable value.

These remarks are by the way, and offered only under the pressure of a deep conviction. But they have a true connexion with the subject of these chapters. Secret Prayer and Family Prayer are in many respects beset by like risks, and carry with them like blessings.

The present little book is a small contribution to a modern literature on Secret Prayer which is already considerable. Of that literature the writer

will here mention only one unpretending but precious specimen, a very small book by the late beloved and honoured Rev. Henry Wright, Prebendary of St Paul's and Honorary Secretary of the Church Missionary Society: "*Secret Prayer a great Reality*" (published by Messrs. Bemrose). Within thirty-two short pages that book contains great treasures. The writer has for many years owed much to it, and is glad of this opportunity of a grateful acknowledgment.

May whatever in the following pages is according to the Will and Word of God be used in His mercy for His glory as that glory is intended to be manifested in the life and spirit of His people, who exist that He may employ them for Himself.

GREAT MALVERN,

September 19, 1889.

Secret Prayer

CHAPTER I

THE DIFFICULTIES, AND THE NECESSITY, OF SECRET PRAYER

I INVITE my reader's thoughts in the following pages to the subject of SECRET PRAYER, or rather to some particular aspects of that holy and happy subject ; to its necessity and blessing, its difficulties and their remedies, its methods and helps, its constituent elements, and the power in which the work is to be done.

By the words SECRET PRAYER I understand, for the present purpose, our deliberate approaches to God in

Matt. vi. 6. the chamber when the doors are shut. We might of course include much more under the words. We might consider the whole action of the Christian believer's soul in secret divine communion; his ejaculations of heart at common moments, his quick glances anywhere and everywhere into his Master's face, in adoration, confession, request, reliance, alike in the crowd and when he is physically alone. And before we quite close we shall have something to say on all this. But in the main I limit our view on purpose to Secret Prayer in its more stated and regular aspect.

Only let me say, for this thought must go with us all along, that there is a deep, tender, and most vital connexion between the Secret Prayer of set times and that of all times. Below the

surface they are, they must be, one and of a piece. They must, they will, feed and animate each other. The devout, diligent, practice of regular and unhurried Secret Prayer is needed if only to protect and develop the freedom and the truth of habitual secret communion with God. And the momentary acts, anywhere and everywhere, of inmost heart intercourse with the ever present Lord are needed if only to keep burning the soul's altar-fire, that it may glow both more promptly and more brightly when we shut ourselves in with Him at the stated hour.

Surely it is not well with the man if it is otherwise. Are our regular times our practically only times of Secret Prayer, our only conscious daily steps in the path of internal communion? God forbid it. The stated prayer-time will sorely suffer if it is so. Either

it will sink into that lamentable thing, an act of perfunctory devotion, a mere counterfeit. Or half the precious occasion may have to be given to efforts after a preparedness, and recollection, and realization, which should have been delightfully ready in the soul.

But now we turn altogether to consider the secret season of deliberate approach to God. And in this first chapter we will think particularly of some of its DIFFICULTIES, and of its holy NECESSITY, be the difficulties what they may.

May HE be with our spirits, by His Spirit, who trode the path of Secret Prayer before us. In this as in all things He left us an example that we should follow His dear and worshipped steps. By His own practice of Secret Prayer He told us, once and for ever,

that that practice is a vital necessity for the disciple, a necessity which *nothing* can annul, not the life most occupied for Him, not the life most consecrated to Him.

i. What then are the DIFFICULTIES of Secret Prayer, or some of them? Among these we might of course include the difficulties which for us sinners beset all prayer. We might speak of the difficulties of the mind. We might dwell on those minor but real difficulties, the obstinate volatility and vagrancy of thought, which in the very act of adoration can fly to the ends of the earth, even after triviality or folly ; or on those severer difficulties, the mind's struggles over the mystery of prayer, over the *how* and the *why* of its power with God, over the revealed fact that prayer is so very much more than a mere exercise of the soul on

itself, a mere calming and attuning of itself before the Eternal; that it really *asks*, for others as well as for the man's self, asks in order to receive answers and gifts from Him who indeed is "not ourselves."* And we might speak too of the spiritual difficulties of prayer in general. We might talk of the believer's too often faint realization of the Presence, yes sometimes of the very Existence, of the unseen Friend, Master, and King; of our inadequate sense of the sinfulness of sin, in the very act of confession; and of our depth of need, in the act of petition; and of our Lord's blessed glory, in the act of praise. But here again I only touch the subject and

* The writer ventures to refer to a simple discussion of his own on some of these subjects, forming an Introduction to *The Christian's Own Calendar*.

pass on for the present, just remarking meanwhile that for all these difficulties we Christians have a divine antidote laid up in the fulness of our glorious Head. Let us draw on Him for deliverance in the strength of quite simple faith, and we shall find daily in our praying the bright surprise of a rest and power not our own, for both mind and spirit.

What are we to think of then as the special difficulties of *Secret Prayer*?

I would say first, the peculiar temptation to laxity and indolence in the practice, just because it is secret. In the case of public prayer, and social prayer, the fact of association brings of course a certain aid in this direction. We are constrained by it to keep time with others, at least to some degree, and to behave ourselves as men under the eyes of others. But we may shorten

our time of Secret Prayer, we may thrust it into a corner, we may lie late in the morning, or sit up comfortably late at night, and we are seen by no eye that we can see, and we have no congregation to be offended by our absence, lateness, or carelessness. I am sure my reader knows, or has known, the reality of at least some such temptations. The warm bed when we wake, the bright fire in the late evening, the allurements of book, or conversation, or whatever it is that *must give way* if we are to set ourselves to seek the King's face before we sleep, the specious excuses and palliations of the heart—these things are real, and they are peculiar hindrances to the full exercise of regular Secret Prayer.

We intend to be up betimes, to meet God before we meet man. But perhaps our first meeting with man

will be at family worship in the home, or at the chapel service in the college ; and something whispers that this will do duty instead of the "morning watch" alone. *It will not do so.* We shall see more later of the reasons why it will not do so. But alas it is very easy to think that it will.

Then for some doubtless there is a difficulty in the way of honest weariness. You work hard all day in one labour or another. You feel it in the morning ; you feel it at night ;—a very different thing from the indolent liking for mere unearned comfort. You hardly trust yourself to pray, sometimes. Your head is bent, and almost at once you sleep, to wake doubly weary you know not when.

In another direction, again, lies the difficulty, greater for some than for others doubtless, but felt by most, how

to use with true economy the precious secret season, as a time of deeply reverent yet truly free and personal outpouring of heart before the Lord. The very essence and speciality of Secret Prayer, so it seems to me, is that it should express most freely, whatever else it deals with, the movements of the individual spirit; confessing inmost personal sins, giving praise for personally received mercies, both of providence and grace, worshipping in view of personal insights into the Lord's great glory, supplicating regarding the deepest needs, and the simplest needs, of the individual man, and interceding for individuals in the freest detail and name by name. All this brings with it the question how best to combine and adjust it all in some such reverent order as that in our unwatched secrecy there shall be

no mere idle waste of thought and word.

Akin to this is the question how to secure in that unwatched secrecy the deepest and most recollected reverence of address and even of attitude towards the Holy One who there, as much as anywhere, is Master and King as well as Friend.

How to meet this last difficulty will be our special enquiry in a later chapter. For the present, with regard to all these matters, I would only say that it is well worth while thus to reckon them up, and to look steadily at them, and then on the other hand to remember that for them all a gracious guidance and a loving remedy is to be found in Him who heareth prayer. And whatever they are, they leave untouched the fact that regular and real Secret Prayer is an absolute, a

vital, necessity for the believer's life and walk.

ii. We come to our second point. Secret Prayer is for us a NECESSITY. It may seem a mere truism to say so. But things which seem so are often the very things which need in practice a new and earnest emphasis of thought and purpose. So it certainly is in the case of Secret Prayer, Secret Prayer reverent, regular, unhurried, detailed, confiding, and expectant.

What I have to say in this connexion will be said very briefly.

In two directions, if I am not mistaken, there is always a risk that the earnest Christian may forget the vital necessity of such Secret Prayer. There is a risk in the direction of Christian work. There is a risk in the direction of public Christian worship.

The disciple is busy, as he humbly

believes, with the will of God in active work. Either in direct religious enterprise and effort, or in secular duty done in the remembrance that he is in all things the bondservant of Christ, he spends his full and occupied hours. And something whispers to him those familiar maxims, which indeed have their deep truth, but which yet are most unhappily mistakable, and too often mistaken, *Laborare est orare, He prayeth best who loveth best.* And the man allows himself to abbreviate and to attenuate his deliberate secret exercises of prayer.

Or again, the disciple dearly loves Psal.
xxvi. 8 the habitation of God's house, the place where His honour dwelleth, the holy convocation, the liturgical sacrifice of united praise and prayer, the divine Supper with its kneeling throng and God-given seals of finished re-

demption and abiding union with the Lord. And something suggests to him that these sacred things may largely exonerate him from the efforts, mental and physical, of diligent, unstinted, Secret Prayer.

Or again, he greatly delights in the social meeting for non-liturgical prayer and praise. He is often with devoted and loving friends, thus gathered in the prayer-meeting, in the consecration-meeting, before God. And good it is to be there, while the presence of the holy and beloved Master, King of Love, but always King, is remembered, and self forgotten. And the insinuation presents itself that such exercises, so spiritual, so unconventional, may take in some degree the place of the solitary prayer within the shut doors.

But indeed, indeed, such hints and

whispers are not from above. Not one of these good things, holy work, persistent doing of duty, public worship, sacramental blessing, private or informal fellowship, can at all *take the place* of Secret Prayer. They leave Secret Prayer still a vital necessity.

And why? Why specially and above all? Because it is the occasion of all others for cultivating a deep individual insight into yourself and your personal needs, and into the Lord Jesus Christ, into God in Christ, in all His glory and grace *for you*. It is not the only occasion for this, but it is the special occasion. Other means of grace, very largely, give you the materials which are to be thoroughly worked out, and worked in, in the hour alone with God. Put "labouring" into the place of such "praying," and you will surely find, if you will

look, a degeneracy in the spiritual quality of your labouring. It will surely shew somehow that you are in less full and sensitive contact with your Saviour and Master, for your own soul's blessing, than you were. Put public, or social, worship in the place of Secret Prayer, and you will find, I venture to say, that your individual insight into sin, and righteousness, and judgment, on the one hand, and into Christ your righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, on the other, is waning, and growing dim, and as it were generalizing itself away into mist and cold. You will find in short that you as an individual sinner, an individual believer, cannot minimize your solitary, secret, individual seasons of confession, petition, and praise, without the results that are to be expected. Your spiritual life-

Joh. xvi.
8.

1 Cor. i.
30.

pulse will be feebler. Your whole renewed nature and its work will suffer from the centre.

So shall it not be with us, by the grace of God.

Abba Father, my Father which seest in secret, Thy face will I there seek, and Thou shalt reward me openly, in the gift of Thy peace in my busy life, always and everywhere; in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

“ Oh, the pure delight of a single hour
That before Thy throne I spend,
When I kneel in prayer, and with Thee,
my God,
I commune as friend with Friend !”

CHAPTER II

METHODS AND HELPS

WE have thought a little of the special Difficulties of the work of Secret Prayer, and then, all the more earnestly and steadily, of the absolute Necessity that we should indeed pray in secret, if we would grow and prosper spiritually, and be truly “meet for the Master’s use.” Now, that we may be as practical as possible in our studies, let us come at once to enquire a little about METHODS and HELPS in the holy exercise.

² Tim. ii.
21.

We may consider first Methods, and then Helps ; not with any attempt to divide them very rigidly, for they run

often naturally into one another. But a certain free division will aid the enquiry.

i. METHODS.—The word suggests of itself a remark by way of caution. If Secret Prayer is to do its distinctive work, that work on which we dwelt in the previous chapter, the work of confession, petition, and praise with closest reference to the individual, no methodization of it must ever be such as to override and injure its individuality, its personal freedom and speciality, of address to God. If by method we mean anything which really hinders and crosses our “boldness,” our humble outspokenness, with Him, our statement to Him of precisely the now present thought of the soul, the now present burthen of confession, prayer, and praise, then our method is a mistake.

Heb. iv.
16.

I would not willingly exaggerate. Not for a moment do I mean that formulated prayer, prayer other than extemporaneous, is necessarily a check upon such outspokenness. It may, and often it will, express exactly our individual need and thought in perfect words. But I mean that it must never be allowed such use in the secret hour as would really cramp the freest personal communication with God. When we use it, it must always leave exactly as much room as the man's spirit needs for quite unformulated petitions. If we would give full development to that holy, worshipping, personal intimacy with God in Christ to which the believing soul is called, we must not let anything, not even the noblest of historic liturgies, at all imprison, so to speak, the secret outpouring of the recesses of the individual heart before Him.

With this word of caution, we recognize all the while a manifest call for method in Secret Prayer.

And first, we must use method as regards TIME. Very earnestly would I advise the dedication to Secret Prayer of a strictly regular time ; a punctual beginning, and, especially in the morning, a measured and liberal allotment. I certainly do not mean a mere mechanical regularity, as if we watched the clock for the moment when to close. But I do mean a time at least as punctual and at least as free from hurry as that which we habitually give to our meals ; and this, I repeat, especially in the morning. If I plead less earnestly for a large allowance of time at night I do it with hesitation and reserve, and only because a conscientious Christian, who is doing the will of God through the day, is likely

to be physically tired at night in a way in which he will not be, certainly in his youth, in the morning. And our Master knows our frame. But, ah, blessed and richly fruitful is the time really devoted to adoring communion with that beloved Master before we lie down. How can I even suggest an abbreviation of it? In any case, let us be sure that nothing abbreviates it for us that is not the plain will of God.

Let me add that, where the duties of life admit of it, and they almost always will, a methodical giving of even the briefest time to Secret Prayer about midday will prove fruitful of blessing. Five minutes or even less given then to an act of faith, of surrender, of dedication, of prayer, of praise, may be a gift bringing a rich return of "joy, strength, and willingness." The im-

portant point is not the length of time so much as the absence of hurry.

But I return to my main point, the all-importance of the early morning hour alone with the Lord, where it is at all possible. There exists a widespread association of Christians, pledged to one another and to God to observe day by day the MORNING WATCH; that is, pledged to spend if possible never less than some time specified in their written engagement alone with God *before meeting man*.* Those who really make this their practice, whether or no they have joined the association, find that they can never again forego it without sure and manifest spiritual loss. Under God, immensely much depends on

* The founder and secretary of the association is the Rev. J. T. Wrenford, Vicar of St Paul's, Newport, Monmouthshire.

that watch-time, and its exercises of confession, faith, love, prayer, and praise. Its tendency is to open as it were the soul's window skyward for the day ; to make the continuous acts of surrender and faith for that whole day quite different from what they would be otherwise, in their readiness and happiness.

It is then that we lay special hold upon that wonderful promise, so significant in its every word, so precious to the heart which longs for a non-intermittent flow of the peace and strength of faith,—the promise that, to them that wait for Him, He, the Lord, will be “THEIR ARM EVERY MORNING.”

Isa.
xxxiii. 2.

Then there is a need of method not only in punctuality, but in use and distribution of the precious time ; a distribution elastic, yet real and

regulating. Here the three great elements of worship come in to help us—Confession, Prayer, and Praise; all bound together with the double bond of “surrender meek and reverent faith.” Time will commonly be better used, when we know where each of these three elements comes in habitually in our secret worship. Our dear Liturgy suggests to us one order; giving us first confession, then a clear reassurance of our acceptance, and of our spiritual power, in Christ, then adoring praise, and then petitions in detail. Meanwhile our Lord’s own Prayer presents an order in which pure adoration and absolute surrender come first, then petition and confession interlaced together, and renewed adoration and ascription last.

To speak briefly, in passing, on **Method** in secret confession and secret

intercession :--it may be useful to suggest that confession, springing from a true and watchful self-examination, should be a special exercise of the *evening* hour with God. And the work of intercession, a work which is surely meant to be a most real one for those in true union with the great Intercessor, may be methodized while not restricted by a distribution of its objects, personal or otherwise, between different days of the week, or times of the day.

Perhaps under the head of Method I may place the question of utterance, and of attitude, in Secret Prayer. Here of course I would not for a moment narrowly define or prescribe. No man can quite direct another, or even with *à priori* certainty advise another, in these inmost matters. But I may venture to mention a fact or

two of my own experience as what may possibly be of some service.

As regards *utterance*, then, I rarely allow myself to pray quite silently in secret. For myself, I find the wanderings of the mind very much limited and controlled by even the faintest audible utterance of thought. And as regards *attitude* I very seldom venture to kneel at prayer in secret. At night it leads almost invariably, and very speedily, to sleeping on my knees, and even in the morning hour, I know not how, recollectedness and concentration of heart and mind are usually quickened in my case by a reverent standing attitude as before the visible Master and Lord, or by walking up and down, either indoors or, as I love to do when possible, in the open air. A garden may prove a very truly hallowed oratory. Such details of

personal usage, learnt by long necessity, may quite fail to meet my reader's case. But I give them for what they are worth ; they may serve a few.

At all costs, however, let us avoid an easy-going, indolent attitude in Secret Prayer. It is a good thing to meditate on our bed in the night-watches, when the over-tired eyes are kept waking, or when our portion is pain or weakness ; for then our lying down is in the way of the will of God. It is a very different thing to get over a slovenly and half-dreaming prayer in bed when it is His plain will that we should be up.

There is a powerful interaction in these matters between the body and the spirit. There is a moral impossibility, surely, in the attempt to hold adoring and loving communication with the King Eternal while we act the

sluggard or the loungee with our limbs.

Before leaving the subject of Method, I may touch on a quite different point of it. I spoke in the previous chapter of the loss our Secret Prayers suffer when we come to them without an underlying and continual habit of remembrance of the Lord, and heart-communion with Him, at common times. We ought not to need, when the prayer time comes, to do all the work of preparation then. But on the other hand, when the time does come, we shall always gain by a first earnest and concentrating act of recollection, by a "sisting ourselves," to use the old phrase, in the Lord's presence; by a solemn re-stating to ourselves of WHO He is to whom we are about to speak, of what He is to us and we to Him. Of this latter point, this repeating as

it were our creed of spiritual life in secret, I shall speak later at more length ; but I allude to it now only as it may be done solemnly but briefly on the threshold of our time of prayer.

Not very many years ago it was a common thing, in pious households, as the hour of evening family prayer approached, for each person to retire apart for a short season of private recollection. Let our souls so retire, and so recollect, before we enter the immediate precincts of the secret Throne of Grace.

ii. I come now to say a few words on HELPS. Pre-eminent, supreme, among the helps to Secret Prayer I place of course the secret study of the holy written Word of God. Christian, who would indeed speak to God, you must indeed listen to

the words of God, to the voice of God. Oh read the Bible, *learn* the Bible, with a view not merely to sermon, or to class, or again with a view to the mere doing of a religious duty, but now especially with a view to Secret Prayer. Read it on your knees, at least on the knees of your spirit. Read it to reassure, to feed, to regulate, to kindle, to give to your Secret Prayer at once body and soul. Read it that you may hold faster your certainty of being heard. Read it that you may know with blessed definiteness WHOM you have believed, and what you have in Him, and how He is able to keep your deposit safe. Read it in the attitude of mind in which the Apostles read it, in which the Lord read it. Read it, not seldom, to turn it at once into prayer. Open the twenty-fifth Psalm, or the hundred and

² Tim.
i. 12.

nineteenth, or the Saviour's own High Priestly Prayer; and transmit petition after petition through your own soul to the Throne. Martyn says that he found in such a use of Psalm cxix. one of his surest ways of escape and bright renewal in seasons of spiritual drought within.

Yes, read the Holy Bible, "the Divine Scriptures," as the early Christian writers loved to call them. Let nothing take their place. Let not good books, be they what they may, oust the Book. Let not books of devotion usurp the place, in our secret hours, of the Oracles of God.

I scarcely need dwell on the rich treasury of helps for Secret Prayer which we possess in our English Prayer Book, where there lie in one wonderful collection, organized and full of life and truth, chosen specimens of the

prayers and praises and confessions of more than a thousand years. "All that the Church of England needs," said the late Dr Marsh, "to make her the glory of all churches, is the spirit of her own services." I am not here thinking of a secret daily use of the full order of Morning and Evening Prayer. I am well aware of the passage in the Preface to the Prayer Book on that subject, and bear it in reverent remembrance as a clergyman, and aim earnestly to follow it out in spirit. But the actual words of the passage in question make the clergyman his own "Ordinary," in the letter of the matter, so far as I can see. What I mean here is that in isolated fragments of that dear Book we may continually find utterances of our immediate need, and longing, and ascription, and confession, perfect in form, and whose

depth and fulness of application seems always to develop with use. I might instance a multitude of Collects for Sundays and Festivals. Let me add to them, as what are very special treasures to my own soul, the Collects for Peace and Grace at Morning Prayer, "the Second Collect at Evening Prayer," and that all-but inspired act of thanksgiving, surrender, and believing supplication, the first alternative Prayer (following the Lord's Prayer) after the reception of the Elements in the Communion.

Another and most valuable occasional help in Secret Prayer—such at least I have for long years found it to be—is the use of Hymns. As the immortal sentences of our Liturgy, so the dear remembered hymn may often serve as a true and delightful expression of our own secret and special

thoughts in confession, prayer, and praise ; always reserving the essential liberty and individuality of secret worship. A large store of such hymns in the memory is thus in its way a true means of grace in our silent room, or on our quiet walk.

But let me close with the appeal which I addressed above to my reader ; the earnest and affectionate appeal for a holy freedom in the utterance of Secret Prayer. In our private interviews with that glorious Master before whom we His purchased and surrendered bondservants "stand," in our private renewals of our conscious contact with that glorious Head in whom and from whom is our life, and who liveth in us by His Spirit, let nothing, no nothing, come between Him and us, Him and me, in this work of the simplest, the most artless,

the most individually personal, out-speaking of the soul to Him.

“When my soul is faint and thirsty, 'neath
the shadow of His wing
There is cool and pleasant shelter, and a
fresh and crystal spring ;
And my Saviour rests beside me, as we hold
communion sweet ;
If I tried I could not utter what He says
when thus we meet.”

CHAPTER III

SIMPLICITY AND DETAIL

STILL with the wish to be as practical as possible in our enquiries about Secret Prayer, let us take up in the present chapter the need of SIMPLICITY and of DETAIL in its exercise.

i. The word SIMPLICITY needs little remark in connexion with the subject of Secret Prayer. Most manifestly all prayer, whether secret, social, or public, whether momentary or sustained, whether silent or raised by the voices of a multitude, should in its true idea be simple. If simplicity means the perfect opposite to affectation, dis-

Joh. iv.
24.

play, grandiloquence, this must be so. The true worshipper, alike in the crowded church, and alone in chamber, or garden, or wood, on the hill-side or on the solitary shore, "must worship" (not only should worship, observe, but absolutely must worship, if the worship is to be anything) "in spirit and in truth"; and those divine words imply, in their very depths, an attitude of entire simplicity before God. But when I speak of simplicity in connexion with specially Secret Prayer, I refer to certain peculiar conditions and privileges of the hour alone which in their nature do not belong to the hour of united worship. In the hour alone, very plainly, whether we do use our own words and phrases or not, we may use them. We need not think for a moment whether they will also assist and convey the thoughts of other

persons ; and that is a question which inevitably modifies both the contents and the language of united prayer, whether in the cathedral, or in the prayer meeting, or at family worship. And this restriction and modification of united prayer is on the whole no mere necessary evil ; it is a benefit, so far as it more or less concentrates prayer at such times upon the main, leading, prevailing needs and petitions of a believing company. Still, it is a restriction ; and in Secret Prayer that restriction is quite gone. Whatever the solitary Christian has to deal with before God, whether the matter be the most personal or the most universal, he has no other mind and heart than his own to consider as regards the expression.

Hence there should be a quite special kind and measure of reverent outspo-

kenness,* in the secret hour with God. I am most free of course to use then the words of others, if they best express my soul's intention. But the point is that I *am free* to do so or not to do so, and that the special work of that secret act of worship is the expression, in the most individual way, of my own soul. And surely, the more I grasp the facts of the reality and the power of prayer, and the more I connect habitually *all* my circumstances with God in Christ, the more must I feel the inducement, the deep tendency, to use very freely my own words in a reverent yet truly artless simplicity in speaking to Him who heareth in secret. And this tendency will become a literal necessity when the prayer descends (we may rather say, in some respects, when the prayer ascends) to

* *παρρησία*

details, to the small things of daily life, to the particulars of spiritual and temporal need, to the names and interests of others.

What will be the best guide as regards the *manner* of such simplicity? Surely, the holy instincts of a soul which has indeed received the Spirit of adoption, and has access with confidence by faith in Christ, and which yet remembers that the beloved Father is the King Eternal, and that the blessed Elder Brother on whom the younger leans is Jesus Christ the Righteous, Jesus Christ the Master and the Lord.

Rom. viii. 15.
Eph. iii. 12.

1 Joh. ii. 1.
Joh. xiii. 13.

Those remembrances will result in a dialect, if I may call it so, perfectly unanxious, perfectly childlike and brother-like, yet never for a moment presumptuous. The holy freedom will never degenerate into a "taking of liberties."

A story is told of the saintly and learned Bengel which illustrates what I mean with singular beauty and pathos. Bengel had a humble friend who revered his deep personal piety and longed to witness his Secret Prayers. Somehow he contrived to get concealed in the good man's study, and watched him from a dark nook. Bengel was labouring that night at his *Gnomon*, his great Exposition of the New Testament, and worked late and yet later. At length he laid aside books and pen; and now, said the peasant, I shall see him pray. He did so; but the Secret Prayer was very short: "*Lord Jesus Christ,*" said Bengel, looking up as to One visibly present, "*things stand between us on the old terms.*"*

* *Herr Jesu Christe, es steht mit uns wie beim Alten.* See *The Child of the Kingdom*, p. 41.

And so he went to rest. Here certainly was simplicity, as of friend with Friend. It was also however the simplicity of the trusted servant with the profoundly revered but long known Master ; "LORD Jesus Christ." And observe that the brevity of the prayer was not that of the man who salves his conscience at the close of a self-pleasing day by casting to God the dregs of a wish at night. It was the voice of a man of God whose whole life, in its purpose and its work, was surrendered to the will of his Lord.

Let me instance, as at the opposite pole of the same true simplicity, the well-known incident of Martin Luther's prayer, offered at one of the critical moments of the Reformation (1530), while he was sojourning at Coburg, and overheard by his awe-struck friend, who approached the chamber door and then stood in the corridor, holding his

breath to listen ; a prayer, says the narrator, "full of adoration, fear, and hope, as if he felt himself to be speaking with his Father and Friend." "I know that Thou art our Father and our God, and that Thou wilt scatter the persecutors of Thy children ; for Thou art Thyself in peril with us. All this business is Thine ; it is only under constraint from Thee that we have put our hands to it. Defend us then, O Father."* So it went on, as that marvellous heart poured out before God itself and not another, pleading, reasoning, with just the same quality of address, as little formal, yet as little careless, as he would have used had he been pressing some great appeal upon Elector or Emperor.

The simplicity which I mean, in its

D'AUBIGNÉ, *Hist. de la Réformation*, liv. xiv., ch. vi. ; KÖSTLIN, *Luthers Leben*, p. 440.

essential character and attitude towards God, is illustrated equally by Bengel's one sentence and by Luther's out-poured and sustained entreaties. In either case, I know not in which most, we see the personality of the believing man laying hold as with arms and hands upon the reality, and grace, and power, and attention, of the personally known and personally beloved Lord.

Simplicity, in the intercourse of man with man, is the antithesis to shyness. I hardly need remark that in human society we may be shy where we do not respect, we may be entirely at ease in thought and in expression where we most deeply revere. So let our secret chamber witness that in our profoundest reverence for our Lord and King we are yet unspeakably at home with Him, our absolute and exalted Prince, our heart's inmost Friend.

ii. I have insensibly glided into the subject of *DETAIL*. What I would say further now upon it will be very briefly said.

Detail, as for instance in the enumeration of particular and shifting present needs, is to a great extent excluded necessarily from public prayer, and to a less extent from social prayer also. I heard a few years ago an incident from American ecclesiastical life which is in point here. The Protestant Episcopal Church was assembled in Synod. News burst upon the meeting that, far away in the North, Chicago was in flames. Moved by a powerful impulse the whole company fell upon their knees, and a voice began to lead in the Litany. Prayer after prayer of that great supplication went up, from many lips and souls. "We prayed," said the distinguished clergyman who

told the story to my informant, "for the afflicted, the desolate, the tempted, the imperilled; but for Chicago we did not pray." Whether or no there was a necessity in the American Synod not to pray for Chicago, most certainly there is no such necessity in Secret Prayer. "For Chicago," in secret at least, let us pray. In the hour alone let us speak quite out, into the Lord's ears, the very thing, the very need, the very temptation, yes, and the very discovery of the grace that is for us in Christ, which then and there is present in the soul. Let us name our friends, not formally, as if the mere naming of them had an efficacy in it, but as realizing the individuals before the Lord and so presenting them to Him. Let us be freely explicit about them, about anything. Let us take our blessed Master into

confidence. He invites it, He loves it.

In that most admirable book, well worth the reading of thoughtful and educated doubters, Dr David Brown's Memoir of the late Dr John Duncan of Edinburgh, "Rabbi Duncan," there is a passage fully to this purpose. Duncan had sunk, through a sad process of intellectual and moral perplexity, from a merely theoretical orthodoxy into Socinian and then pantheistic error. Brought upward and backward in a wonderful way by the grace of God, he entered on an experience most strong and vivid of the blessed Personality and Presence of the Living and True God in Christ. One first result of this was an instinct to pray about everything; in other words to take his known Eternal Friend into confidence about every-

thing. I quote from the Memoir, p. 155 :

“ ‘ Now the temptation to daily sin was gone. I had not even to fight with it. And I was in an almost infantile state of mind—so that when I mislaid a paper in my study, I would kneel down and pray about it, and then go and seek for it.’ In fact, night after night (as he told Mr Moody Stuart), he laid himself down to rest with the infants’ prayer on his lips . . .

‘ This night when I lie down to sleep
I give my soul to Christ to keep ;
If I should die before I wake
I pray the Lord my soul to take.’ ”

How full the Scriptures are of precedents for Dr Duncan in his study, and for us ! Read scene after scene of the inspired and all-truthful histories, and everywhere you find Secret

Prayer offered in simplicity and detail, because in spirit and in truth. Listen to that noble believer, Abraham's servant, at the Mesopotamian well, taking his master's eternal God into confidence about the well, and the camels, and Isaac, and her who was to be Isaac's wife. Listen to Jacob at Mahanaim, telling the Almighty One about his fear of Esau, and pleading about wives and children, and reminding his Friend of the old promise. Look at Hannah, while her lips move ; she is explaining to the Infinite Lord her longing to be the mother of a son. Look at Hezekiah, holding out the Pagan's insulting letter, as if asking JEHOVAH to read it word by word and inform Himself quite directly of its contents. Hear Nehemiah, in the secrecy of his heart, though the surroundings indeed were public, requesting the God of Israel to

Gen.
xxiv.
12-14.

Gen.
xxxii.
9-12.

1 Sam. i.
10, 11.

2 Kings,
xix. 14-
19.

Neh. ii.
4.

influence at that moment the will of Artaxerxes Longimanus. Watch St Paul as he details to the Father of his Lord the particular needs of the saints of Philippi, or of Colossæ, and those of his private friend Philemon, and as he tells Jesus Christ three times over about the thorn in his own suffering flesh. Read St John's prayer that his dear Gaius may be as healthy as he is holy. And let us address ourselves to prayer in their spirit, by the grace of God.

Phil. i.
9-11;
Col. i.
3-12;
Phil. 4;
2 Cor.
xii. 8.
3 Joh. 2.

It is a tenet of the Christian Mystics, from whom many precious lessons in the life of grace are to be learnt, that the truest prayer is "the Prayer of Silence"; not silent prayer, but the Prayer of Silence, in which the surrendered spirit lays itself, as it were, motionless and inarticulate before God with the single and exclusive desire

that His will may be done and His glory achieved in it.* The teaching holds, deep within it, an element of the purest truth. But nevertheless nothing must shut out from the Christian's actual communications with the Lord a loving and childlike detail, whatever be the entire submission to the will of God, the deep union with the will of God, which underlies it. For it is written, not by a Guyon, but by a Paul, that is to say by the Holy Spirit Himself, "In everything, by prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus."

Phil. iv.
6, 7.

* See MME DE LA MOTHE GUYON, *Moyen Court de faire Oraison*, ch. xiv., xx.

“ There is no sorrow, Lord, too light
To bring in prayer to Thee ;
There is no anxious care too slight
To claim Thy sympathy.

“ Thou who hast trode the thorny road
Wilt share each small distress ;
The love which bore the greater load
Will not refuse the less.

“ There is no secret sigh we breathe
But meets Thine ear divine,
And every cross grows light beneath
The shadow, Lord, of Thine.”

CHAPTER IV

CONFESSION OF SIN

OUR theme in the present chapter is at once most humiliating and most sacred—Confession of Sin in Secret Prayer. May He who seeth and heareth in secret, the heavenly Confessor and Absolver, be very present with us in the enquiry.

Let me introduce it by a few words on the great work and duty of Self-Examination. This is not identical with Confession, but it is vitally connected with it. In a former chapter, in a passing sentence, I suggested the rule that self-examination should be a

special exercise of our secret *evening* worship. I repeat the suggestion, and I would express my assurance that the maintenance of that exercise, in reality and in deliberate earnestness, whatever be the hour at which we practise it, is an all-important thing in a strong, watchful, chastened Christian life. And I cannot but add my fear that it is a duty not a little neglected by many even earnest Christians.

The self-examination for which I plead need not necessarily be very systematic, very elaborate or methodical in form. Certainly a mere routine of self-examination, a perfunctory asking and answering, must be of all realities the most sorrowfully unreal. But I do plead for a self-examination careful, thoughtful, unhurried, unreserved, and done in the full daylight of no less a manual and

directory than the Word of God itself. This last point is all-important. No mere handbook of devotion but the holy Word must be in our hands, and hearts, as we examine self. We must go to no inferior oracle to keep vivid in the soul an insight into the very nature of sin, into the unspeakable holiness of God, into His absolute claims and our blessed obligations as His purchased, conquered, and self-surrendered property, and then into the searching and most practical details of the intended manifestation of "the life of Jesus" in our daily life, in our common duties. Nothing short of THE BIBLE, read, marked, learned, and inwardly digested—I mean now the Bible picture of the Christian's life, inward and outward, as the Lord has enjoined it, *and provided for it*—will keep really up to the

true level our insight into and consciousness of whatever is really a "falling short," or a "passing-over." We must examine self as to motive in the full scriptural light of mercy and privilege, and as to practice in the full light of New Testament precepts.

Such examination will not be morbidly introspective. It will be severe, but healthful. Carried on as by those who search the Scriptures, and who ask for the full convictions of the Spirit through conscience, it will be a thing of the sunlight and the fresh air. It will abase, but it will not debase, the man in Christ who thus "examines" and "proves" himself before the Lord. Alone with God and His Word, he will so examine himself as that God shall examine him.

¹ Cor.
xi. 28;
² Cor.
xiii. 5.

Let me repeat it ; if it is to be thus,

if HE is to do this indeed, we need to carry on our scrutiny by no lower a standard than His own written revelation. It is a deep law of the ways of grace that they who would enter into the full light and peace of the promises of Scripture must be humbly willing to be searched by nothing less than its principles and its rules.

But, meanwhile, self-examination is not quite the same thing as the secret and direct CONFESSIO*N* of the Christian to his Lord. Looking in is not the same thing as speaking out, whether in itself or in its results. So let us always regard a true and reverent self-examination as just the step to a true, simple, unreserved Confession of ourselves to Him who seeth in secret.

Here let me go back, by way of mere reference, to what was said in

the previous chapter about Simplicity and Detail. The principle of simplicity in our secret prayers applies above all things to the work of Confession of Sin. In that work surely if it is to be rightly done at all, the most direct and uncoloured outspokenness must be our rule. Let me take as an example the scrutiny of *motive* in our self-examination, and its issue in our humble Confession. Have we found, have we been shewn, something of the ramifications of the spirit and life of SELF in our works and words? Have we been led to make as it were a chemical analysis of the ingredients that have gone into the doing of some deed of religious duty, perhaps, or of common kindness, in the day past? Have we remembered some sidelong wish for observation and applause for our own sakes? Some self-complacent

Luke
xviii. 11.

comparison of self with others, some
 “God, I thank Thee,” in the Pharisee’s
 tone, however soft the whisper? Some-
 thing not of the *spirit* of love in
 the action whose exterior look and
 character was loving? Such an analy-
 sis, in the white light of the Word and
 of the Spirit, is a very solemn and
 painful process not seldom. Well, if
 it has been so, let us *speak out* its
 result in articulate simplicity before
 Jesus Christ the Righteous, who, while
 “He loves us though He sees us
 true,” does not at all love our iniquity
 however subtle and evanescent its
 manifestation may have been, and in
 whom all the while lay ready the
 divine secret for us by which that
 particular iniquity *need not have been*.
 To say out to Him, and in our own
 hearing, plainly and definitely, what
 we have seen in His light, ought never

1 Joh. ii.
1.

to be easy, but it will be a sure and real means of grace.

“Whatsoever plague, whatsoever sickness there be,” let us speak out about it to Him, reverently, simply, candidly, without reserve. He is perfectly and eternally uncontaminable by our evil, and He is perfectly and eternally its Antagonist, and He, blessed be His Name, is perfectly and now the Bearer of its guilt for us and the Conqueror of its power in us.

Has there been one hard, judging, censorious, supercilious thought of others during the day? One indulgence of needless, loveless, critical expression about them? One allowance of mere prejudice against them? One remembered act of any kind, inward or outward, which has broken the laws of holy Charity? Has

1 Kings.
viii. 37.

1 Cor.
xiii.

there been any difference, or dis-sension, with friend or brother, in which we have loved self, and its claims and rights, perhaps under colour of a zeal for God? Has there been a swelling heat of pride? Has there been the wretched flutter of vanity? Has there been the sure complement and other side of vanity, the diseased ache of jealousy, or of envy, as another's name, perhaps a name not personally favourite with ourselves, has been warmly praised in our ears, it may be for excellence and example in things where we secretly know we have been weak and inconsistent?

Have we indulged in a foolish levity, very different from the pure and natural happiness and contagious cheerfulness meant to be habitual in the Christian? Have we been self-

indulgent in act or habit, lowering the tone of watchfulness and self-denial? Have we carelessly given trouble where we might have saved it, or taken it, in some little thing which would then have quietly shewn our Master's presence in us, at least to our own souls?

Have we trifled with truth, perhaps to embellish a story, or turn a compliment, or save a little trouble?

Have we been ashamed of the name of Jesus Christ, and more anxious to stand well with society as rational, sensible, liberal, than to be simply true to Him in some principle, or practice, which may label us as proper subjects for a little harmless criticism? Have we failed to keep up through the day the faithful bondservant's secret understanding with his Lord and Possessor, that He in all things—be-

ginning with the “springs of thought and will”—is to rule, and we to serve?

The detections are sad and sore, none the less because each detected thing “need not have been,” had we abode in Him. But let us tell the whole truth out, definitely, however briefly, before our Master and Confessor. Confess it all, articulately, to the eternal High Priest, in the Holiest, at the mercy-seat. Remember the blood of sprinkling; rest on the Covenant of remission and oblivion. But all the more for this, extenuate nothing; let the essence of the confession be a total renunciation and repudiation of the thing confessed. Tell Him, recollecting that it is He, tell Him all that you see. And so tell Him as asking all the while, with the humiliation and the rest of contrite faith,—the faith which receives in

Heb. iv.
16;

xii. 24;
x. 17, 18.

asking,—for present absolution, and for present and gracious deliverance.

The thought of Detail was before us in the previous chapter. I would apply it largely to our present subject, earnestly advising (as indeed I have been doing already, in effect,) the resolute avoidance of mere generalities in secret confession. Yet I would do so with one reserve. Has the Christian to make confession of imaginations of evil invading the unwatching soul? In that particular case, I solemnly believe, the utmost and most jealous *brevity* ought to be the rule, for his own sake. The evil is seen, is known. The Lord's abhorrence of it is certain. The Lord's grace to pardon is certain also; and so too is His power to cleanse, to cleanse *now*, by His indwelling Spirit, by His own indwelling Presence through the blessed Spirit,

the innermost thoughts of the heart as we give them up to Him. Embrace those certainties. Cast down the evil at His feet, beneath His feet, and at once turn away.

In the Confession by one sinful human being to another of what we call moral evil, hardly in one case out of ten thousand can much detail do other than harm to both minds ; such, at least, is my conviction. One of the deepest objections to an organized and systematic confessional system, of which Scripture says absolutely nothing and really primitive antiquity just as little, is that it tends by its very nature towards an unwholesome treatment of details in such things. We scarcely need the deplorable rules of a Liguori to bear witness to this. Under the fallacious assumption that spiritual diseases regularly

require a human physician because physical diseases usually do so, and under the consequent supposed necessity of a minute diagnosis by the supposed physician, it is terribly easy to aggravate by the intended remedy.

Experience shews that in certain states of temptation an eager readiness for detailed Confession may be an actually bad symptom. Now within certain limits this fact bears upon Confessions in secret even to the Lord, or professedly to Him. True, we cannot do HIM harm, as we could only too easily do to a sinful human confidant, ordained or not. But we may greatly hurt ourselves. Let us confess to Him everything with simplicity, not everything with minuteness. Only let us remember, as regards all Confessions, that without renunciation and self-surrender, and, where that comes into

the case, reparation, Confession is a name, is nothing.

One word, in closing, on a duty of Confession all too easily forgotten. Let our secret Confession, like that of a Daniel of old, often take in the sins of others as well as our own. The Christian in secret must not forget his connexion. Let the sins of his society be borne on his contrite heart, the sins of friends and brethren, the sins of Country, of Church.

Dan. ix.
2c.

Blessed, yes truly and really blessed, may be the moments spent by the wakeful believer in the auricular Confessional of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a place for deep and painful insights into self. But it is a place also for deep insights, in the "confidence of self-despair," into the power of "the peace of God, which passeth

understanding"; while it "keepeth Phil. iv.
our hearts and our thoughts, in Christ ⁷
Jesus."

"Search me, O God ; my actions try,
And let my life appear
As seen to Thine all-searching eye ;
To mine my ways make clear.

"Search, till Thy fiery glance has cast
Its holy light through all,
And I by grace am brought at last
Before Thy feet to fall.

"Thus prostrate I shall learn of Thee,
What now I feebly prove,
That God alone in Christ can be
Unutterable love."

CHAPTER V

ADORATION

WE have inquired a little into the work of Confession of Sin in Secret Prayer. We turn now to that exercise of the believing soul which is at once the opposite, the complement, and the stimulus of Confession—ADORATION. May He whom we adore be with us as we proceed, giving us in all our thoughts on secret Adoration the adoring Spirit in His remembered presence.

I ventured in the last chapter to express a fear that the practice of secret self-examination and confession

before the Lord is a duty, and a means of grace, too often neglected, or minimized, by true Christians at the present day. I cannot but think that the same may be said of secret Adoration. And yet I am as sure in respect of Adoration as in respect of Confession that the neglect of it, the failure to make a sacred reality of it in our solitary hour, is a very deep and serious loss and harm in the believer's life. It is all too possible, and too common, to spend habitually our season of Secret Prayer almost wholly in petitions for ourselves, more or less earnest, or in petitions for other persons or interests, perhaps with some admixture of confession and of thanksgiving, but without any real aim and effort to look off altogether to the Holy One Himself, to our blessed God and Father in Christ Jesus, in loving, adoring, con-

templation and prostration. But if this is so, we are missing one of the great purposes of Secret Prayer, and losing one of its great blessings.

In approaching the subject of such Adoration, with a view to new resolves and new action in the matter, let us first briefly remember what Adoration is ; then consider some preparations for it ; and lastly recount some of its manifold blessings.

i. What is Christian Adoration ? It is an action of the soul towards God, implying its contemplation of Him and, if I may use the word, its admiration of Him. But it is properly far more than contemplation, far more than admiration. It is abasement, it is prostration, it is submission, it is ascription. It is the kneeling down of our innermost spirit in deepest awe and solemn loyalty before the Eternal

and Holy One, conscious to some degree of the unspeakable *difference* between our creaturehood and His Creatorship, our darkness and His light, our sin and His purity, our lost estate in nature and His wonderful redeeming mercy; in one word, between our nothing and His All. Something of this sense of contrast underlies all true adoration, though it is not the first and leading consciousness in it. That leading consciousness is the sight, in some measure, of what HE IS. But that must always actually bear some relation, in Christian adoration, to the consciousness of what we are.

Adoration looks with joy, yes, with true joy, to the Holy One; but it never forgets that it looks *up*. It ascribes, it praises, in a sense it loses itself in God; but never as if the adorer were not related to the Adored One in bonds of

unspeakable lessness, dependence, and obligation. It rejoices in God for the sake of "His great glory"; but its joy is penetrated with the blessed consciousness of surrender: "I have said unto the LORD, Thou art my Lord."

Psal. xvi.
2.

ii. Then we come to think of some Preparations for Adoration. Here of course I must press the duty, the unspeakable privilege, of the preparation which consists in holy contemplation of God as self-revealed, above all as He has revealed Himself in His written Word. Here, as we have seen before, is a work vitally connected with secret worship, the work of secret Bible study, as we seek "in all the Scriptures," in the spirit of Adoration, for their inexhaustible materials for Adoration. Where shall we begin, where end, in such researches? Shall we dwell sometimes on the absolute Crea-

Luke
xxiv. 27.

torship of God as revealed in His ^{Rev. iv.}
 Book, that great foundation truth ^{11.}
 so far more distinctive of Scripture
 than many Christians remember?
 Shall we dwell upon His revealed ^{Eph. i.}
 sovereignty in grace and providence? ^{11.}
 On His unsearchable and awful while ^{Rev. iv.}
 most blissful and blessed Holiness? ^{8.}
 On His essential Love, on Himself as ^{1 Joh. v.}
 Love? Shall we look with the gaze ^{8, 16.}
 of faith upon the revealed certainties
 that on the one hand God loved the
 world, with such a love that He gave ^{Joh. iii.}
 His Son, on the other hand that the ^{16.}
 sheep of the Son, given Him by the ^{Joh. x.}
 Father, shall never perish? Shall we ^{28.}
 weigh, in their written fulness, the
 promises of eternal mercy to the peni-
 tent, awakened and "flying for refuge," ^{Heb. vi.}
 to the backslidden disciple returning to ^{18.}
 his Lord, to the faint and tired believer ^{Jer. iii.}
 looking up to Him for deliverance ^{14.}

Psal.
xxv. 15;
Isai. xl.
31.

from sin and for power to serve and to suffer? Shall we explore the outskirts of what John Howe calls "that vast and sacred darkness," dark with excess of light, the revealed existence of our God as the blessed Three in One, the majesty and bliss of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, "the Name" of the Christian's salvation? Shall we

Matt
xxviii. 19.

2 Cor. iv.
6.

look full upon "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," on God revealed, reconciled, united to believing man, imparted to believing man, in His dear Son, by His blessed Spirit? In every direction, and oh in this last direction indeed, the materials for Adoration will be inexhaustible. And we shall find, as we thus really search the Scriptures, that the work is not only a preparative to Adoration but is always and in its very nature passing up into it. To look upwards towards

HIM is also to veil the eyes of the adoring soul with its very wings, and to begin at once the song of heavenly Adoration, "Holy, Holy, Holy." Isai. vi.
3;
Rev. iv.
8.

I enter no further into details; there can be little need. The Scriptures are charged throughout with occasions and aids for the exercise of Adoration, just because their centre is God; their profound theme is His glory; they bless man not by praising man but by revealing to him God in Christ.

But while waiving details, I plead with my whole heart for the great general duty and precious gain of such Bible study, such study of God in His Word as shall always feed a direct and humble Adoration. For this, as for other elements of secret worship, we must give ourselves time, if we would "take root downward and bear fruit upward." We must re- Isai.
xxxvii.
31.

nounce hurry to the utmost possible ; we must renounce the *spirit* of hurry altogether. Our recollection of the blessed reasons for Adoration must be deliberate, and so must be our action on those reasons.

And as regards the special place of Adoration in *Secret Prayer*, I need not spend words on shewing how large that place should be. *Secret Prayer* is that part of worship in which we can be most deliberate, and most full, in the *particulars* of thought and supplication. And thus it is the occasion on which we may best hope, by the grace of God, to develope and enjoy the distinctively heavenly exercise of Adoration.

iii. Of the manifold *blessings* of secret Adoration I only point to some few.

First, this holy practice, diligently

followed, will both chasten and wonderfully warm and animate our whole experience, from the centre outwards. Does not the experience of true Christians, at the present day, in many and very various directions, greatly need either chastening, or uplifting, or both together? I believe that the neglect of the duty of tender secret Adoration lies very near the root of that need.

Again, this work of the soul in secret, just because it will lead directly to a deeper acquaintance with the Lord Himself, will be a powerful secret means to our growth in the peace of the Gospel, peace with God and peace in God, and so to that quiet power, that happy serviceableness and influence, which comes with and through such peace. The regenerate and believing soul, as it worships in

hallowed secrecy its revealed and blessed God and Saviour, learns lessons not otherwise to be learned of its nearness to Him, its rest under His shadow, its safety in His covenant sealed with blood, its present and eternal life in the risen Redeemer's life, its prospect of a heaven whose bliss shall be to glorify God in glory and to enjoy Him fully for ever. And such close approaches to Him, far from being out of relation to the wear and tear of the common day, are the truest preparation for it, and the surest safeguard in it. He who has seen, and sees, God is he who can face men. He who has indeed worshipped is he who is indeed ready to serve.

Lastly, the exercise of secret Adoration will afford a precious antidote to that distortion of the dear and glorious truths of abundant pardon,

of free salvation, of present and full acceptance in Christ Jesus through faith, which would centre and terminate thought and emotion upon our own benefit. It will tend to keep that blessed benefit, for which His Name be praised, always in its relation to the glory of the Giver, and therefore (the sequence is genuine and deep) always in relation to the needs and blessing of others. The true worshipper of the true God cannot live unto himself.

I close this part of our subject by the quotation of a few sentences from the remains of that great saint and servant of God, the Rev. Charles Simeon, who has now for fifty-three years rested with his Lord from a long life of toil and manifold suffering for the testimony of the truth. The duty and exercise of adoration was always

with Mr Simeon a leading and beloved theme. "There are," he wrote in 1819, "but two objects that I have ever desired these forty years to behold; the one is my own vileness, the other is the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; and I have always thought that they should be viewed together. . . . This is the religion that pervades the whole Liturgy, and particularly the Communion Service; and this makes the Liturgy inexpressibly sweet to me. . . . The praise all through savours of adoration. . . . I consider the religion of the day as materially defective in this point. I do not see, as much as I could wish, a holy reverential awe of God." In 1834, two years before his death, a death of such adoring peace and joy, he wrote again: "I have often wished there were more of holy

reverence in religious people when speaking of God, and of the things which He has wrought for their salvation. I see not an instance in Scripture of any remarkable manifestation of God to man which did not instantly generate in his heart and produce in his act a lowly reverence and self-abasement. . . . I would have the whole of my experience one continued sense, first, of my nothingness, and dependence upon God, secondly of my guiltiness and desert before Him, thirdly of my obligations to redeeming love, as utterly overwhelming me with its incomprehensible extent and grandeur."

Such be our experience, living and dying. And in order to it let us practise, by the grace of the Holy Ghost, as indeed Simeon did, late and early, in his rooms at King's College, the

holy duty and blessed privilege of
secret Adoration.

“ Clothed in Thy righteousness, washed from
my sin,

Hearing the Spirit’s voice witness within,
Lo, I before Thee bow and adore Thee
Ever the same.

“ Holy, thrice holy ! Thy pardoning love
Draws me to join the blest spirits above,
Whose never-ending praises ascending
Circle Thy throne.”

CHAPTER VI

SELF-CONSECRATION AND CONFESSION OF FAITH

IN the last chapter we have already touched the subjects which we now come to deal with more directly, secret Self-consecration and secret Confession of our Faith. In considering the nature and conditions of secret Adoration we could not but do so. But there is abundant room for a more deliberate treatment.

i. SELF-CONSECRATION. If Secret Prayer is to "have its perfect work," this element must never, surely, be wholly absent from it. For Self-consecration is

in some respects, from our point of view, from our side of spiritual action, not only an important thing in our dealings with the Lord, but the supremely important thing. Not for a moment do I forget the divine paradox of our justification by faith alone, by a trustful acceptance of the Lord our Righteousness, in His glorious merits, as our peace with God, quite irrespective of our own works or deservings, past, present, or to come. With my whole heart I believe and love the truth of our Eleventh Article, and of the Third Homily to which it emphatically directs its reader. But I am speaking now not of acceptance, but of that life in and for God for which acceptance is provided, into which it is the "wicket-gate," and of which it is also and, to the end, the floor, the walls, and the roof. I am speaking of our reception, for work,

suffering, and witness, of the Lord's inworking presence and its virtues; Christ in us by the Holy Ghost, our daily and hourly secret of deliverance, peace, readiness, serviceableness, in that life which is the one true Christian life—the life lived by and for Him. And for this it is all-important that we should not only praise and pray, nor only even act faith on the promises of acceptance, but should “YIELD OUR-^{Rom vi. 13.}SELVES unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and our members,” our faculties for contact with the world, “as instruments of righteousness unto God.” We are saved, to serve. We are bought, to be employed. And inasmuch as we are “*living* chattels,” personal and conscious, we are called, in order to be fully serviceable, to a conscious heartfelt acceptance of that fact, in the power of the Spirit,

In other words, we are called to a perpetual spiritual Self-consecration in deliberate willingness and purpose.

I say, to a perpetual Self-consecration, Self-surrender. I do not forget the reality and importance of a decisive crisis of it. Our baptismal covenant vow is such a crisis. The deliberate, conscious, spiritually real, taking of that vow over again in Confirmation is another ; for such indeed every true Confirmation ought to be. And in that biography of the soul which no church ceremonial can ever *necessarily* tabulate, there may be (I do not say there must be) in your soul's past and in mine a time, a day, an hour, whether coincident with a first saving "coming to Christ" or not, when we did most specially say to our Master, in a way never to be forgotten, or confused with other times, "I give myself

wholly to Thee for Thy will and work ;
I will not go out free."

Exod.
xxi. 5.

Yes, truly. But such a crisis works itself out from a point into a line. Its issue is a continuous and habitual repetition of that decisive avowal, as each occasion for it comes. Thus our baptismal vow has its glorious continuation and development at each reception of the holy Supper, when we "offer and present to the Lord ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice," though we have done it again and again before. And so our every deliberate worshipping approach to the Lord ought to involve some such renewal of the decisive vow. And so such renewals should enter into every hour of secret daily prayer.

And what will be the *speciality* of such Self-surrenders done in secret ?

Surely the answer is evident. In our own "still hour," as at no other time, we are called to study the precise incidence of great spiritual truths *upon ourselves*. You are called; I am called, just then, to enquire, in the light of the Lord, what for you, what for me, is meant by a grave, genuine, loving, Self-surrender; what it means in our individual case to own the fact for instance that every hour and minute of the new day belongs to Him to whom we belong; what for us it means in sober practicality to own that possessions, position, faculties, knowledge, influence, belong to Him who, having bought us, has of course bought these things in us. Here as everywhere generalities are the death of prayer, particulars its life. And let us speak out in some true measure these particulars in secret, thoughtfully, de-

liberately, and with simplicity of soul.

What seems to me to be a most important point in the matter is that such outspakings should be uttered not to ourselves but to our sovereign Master, under a full conviction of His blessed presence. Do not be content to muse on the matter, to reason with yourself about it, to preach a sermon as it were to your own soul. Confess to HIM that you are His, and that in this thing and in that which is deeply personal and special for yourself you do, in His Name, and by His indwelling Spirit, "yield yourself" indeed, not to an abstract principle but to HIM.

"My Possessor and Sovereign, I will not go out free. Thou hast pierced mine ear at Thy door already, and for ever; but let it be done again, as it

Exod.
xxi. 5.

were, now and for the little life-time of this new day which I open with this morning watch before Thee. For its whole course, hour and minute, morning, noon, and night, I own myself Thy personal property. To Thee I render, for it is all Thine, my time, my position and reputation, my acquirements and resources, my tongue, my imagination, my will, yea, my spirit, and soul, and body. And I apply my surrender to this particular thing, and to that, which affords to me, being what and where I am, the precise occasion for a genuine exercise of it. I surrender myself to Thee, not in dreamland or poetry, but in the commonplaces of to-day. Thou knowest my path ; my cares and joys, my tasks and opportunities ; my home, my circle, my profession, business, handicraft, household service ; my pulpit, my mission, my

literary or scientific calling. And in these things now specially, as long as they are Thy will for me, I do yield myself to Thee, whose I am, in this secret hour."

Let not your acts of Self-consecration be a matter for "consecration-meetings" only. Let every season spent in secret worship be a meeting for Consecration, a meeting face to face between the bondservant and his Lord. It will be a happy thing to go out, day by day, from such an interview of renewed allegiance, to live it humbly out in the next thing, and the next.

ii. CONFESSIO OF FAITH. I once heard, and shall never forget, a precept spoken on a very solemn occasion to Christian men seeking for a closer walk with God: "*Give yourself believing time.*" The necessities of the soul's life since then have indeed impressed

on me the importance of those words.

You see at a glance what they mean. They mean that the Christian, in his personal dealings with his Lord, and very specially in secret, is not only to ask and cry for grace, as indeed he must do, but also deliberately to exercise faith, to rest in faith, in face of God's promises and guarantees about grace. He is to say his creed over, solemnly and attentively, as well as to plead his necessity. And by his creed I do not now mean those priceless treasures which we call Apostolic or Nicene ; those wonderful summaries of the mighty objective facts of the Nature of God, and of the Work of our Incarnate Lord, and of that of the Holy Ghost the Comforter, which grow only more precious with the developments of time. Great can be the blessing

of the deliberate and frequent use of these in secret. But I mean now rather that sort of creed which the humble, watchful, Scripture-searching disciple may most lawfully make for his own inmost use out of the mighty promises to faith. I mean that sort of reverent avowal of our blessed possessions in Christ which is only the vassal's recognition of the sincerity of his Liege-lord's amazing bounty. This creed of the individual spiritual life is the confession, as distinct from the petition, of present life, grace, peace, strength, for us and in us by the Holy Ghost; a sober certainty in the matter, because of what is said about such things in the Word which cannot pass away. It is my ceasing for the moment to request, in order that my requests may be all the stronger, fuller,

and more expectant, after a confession before the Lord of what, by His grace, *I have.*

“O my Lord, I, a poor sinner whom Thou hast redeemed, believe in Thy Name, all-perfect and sufficient Deliverer and Preserver. I trust Thy Word. I entrust to Thee myself, bringing my guilt to Thy righteousness, my sin and failure to Thy life and victory, my worse than nothing to Thy all. Therefore, for Thou hast said it,

Joh. vi. I am not cast out; I am welcomed
^{37.}
 1 Cor. vi. into Thee; I am joined to Thee, one
^{17.}
 1 Joh. v. Spirit; I have the life eternal, having
^{12.}
 Thee. Teach me to pray; but also teach me to say in secret a blessed *Credo* concerning Thee and what for me and in me Thou art. I believe that in Thee I have for humble and happy use all that is Thine for me.

I believe that Thou art my perfect Righteousness this hour for my acceptance, and that Thou art also my mighty internal Life, and Liberty, and Sanctity. I believe that in me dwelleth the Holy Ghost, who imparteth Thee to me, and that in me He lusteth against the flesh. I believe that in Thee enabling I have strength for all things that are Thy will for me ; Thy grace is sufficient for me, then when I am most truly weak. I believe that for every temptation I have a provided way of escape, into Thee, who art mine, and I thine. And this my spirit's creed, O my Master and Redeemer, I hold to be true to the uttermost for me in all the circumstances which shall make up life for me to-day. I have yielded myself to Thee in view of them, which is my bounden duty

1 Cor. i.
30;

vi. 19.

Gal. v.
17.
Phil. iv.
13.

2 Cor.
xii. 9.

1 Cor x.
13.

and service. But now I humbly expect what I cannot give to myself, even Thy divine enabling for the results of that surrender. My void Thou wilt meet with Thy merciful and peacefulfulness, hour by hour, in toil, in leisure, in privacy, in company, in success, in adversity, in things sacred, in things secular, in great things, and in least. So I go into this day, this hour, myself and not another, to live by faith in Thee, O Son of God. And I believe that in Thee this present day can be, and in Thy mercy shall be, a day of lowly yet divine victory and prosperity in the secret soul and in the walk of service ; a day of peace, of love, of truth, of loyalty to Thee, of power by Thy Spirit to do and to bear for Thee. On Thee I rest, and in Thy name I go, Lord Jesus Christ. Amen."

“ Upon Thy promises I stand
Trusting in Thee ; Thy own right hand
Doth keep and comfort me ;
My heart doth triumph in Thy word ;
'Thine, Thine be all the praise, dear Lord,
As Thine the victory.”

CHAPTER VII

INTERCESSION

FROM exercises of Secret Prayer which have to do altogether with the maintenance of the Christian's own spiritual communion with his Lord, we pass now to that in which he labours for others in the secret place of blessing. We come to speak of secret INTERCESSION. This order of thought and enquiry is just and natural; the Christian who would indeed plead for others with spiritual reality and success must be one who in holy truth is watching over his own relations with his Master and Friend.

I need say little on the duty and privilege of Intercessory Prayer in general. It stands before us, in ample fulness, and in gracious beauty, all through the Scriptures ; from the mysterious scene where “ God hears His Abraham plead ” for Lot in his awful peril, down to the repeated precepts of the New Testament ; “ Pray for one another, that ye may be healed ” ; “ He shall ask, and He shall give him life for them that sin not unto death.”

The Bible reader who gathers together the whole witness of the Bible, in example, direction, and encouragement, to the worth and power of intercessory prayer, will find that he has indeed accumulated a wealth of spiritual gold. I will accordingly offer only a detached remark or two upon the subject.

Gen.
xviii.
23-33.

Jas v.
16.

1 Joh.
v. 16.

And first let me point to the eloquence with which the precept to intercede for

others witnesses to sometimes forgotten truths about the nature and work of prayer. It is a main proof that prayer, as we have seen already (p. 16), is so very much more than merely a means of good to our own souls in the way of solemnizing, calming, and putting in tune ; in fact, a mere form of meditation. Intercessory prayer has regard to persons and to causes which are not at all ourselves. It seeks to compass blessing for them in ways which have no necessary connexion with the reflected action of the prayer on our own hearts. It goes out, simply out, to the Lord, and asks Him in His own way to act in other directions, in other regions, than our own. St Paul, praying for the Ephesians, kneels to the Father with the entreaty that the Spirit may so work in those hearts that in those hearts Christ by faith may dwell,

Eph. iii.
14-19.

and that those believers may "be filled unto all the fulness of God." True, the prayer for them was a most fit and blessed vehicle for joy and power flowing into the Apostle's own heart. But most plainly that was not essential in the matter.

Then, again and on the other side, Intercessory Prayer *is* a powerful means of grace to the praying man. Martyn observes, I think it is in his Journal, that at times of inward spiritual dryness and depression he had often found a delightful revival in the act of praying for others, for their conversion, or sanctification, or prosperity in the work of the Lord. His dealings with God for them about these gifts and blessings were for himself the divinely natural channel of a renewed insight into his own part and lot in Christ, into Christ as his own rest and power,

into the "perfect freedom" of an entire yielding of himself to his Master for His work.

Intercessory Prayer, again, is in its essence a witness for the holy sovereignty of God in providence and in grace. It is a deeply practical acknowledgment that to Him all hearts are open ; that He holds the key of all wills and lives ; that He can indeed make "all things work together" for His glory and our blessing in Christ Jesus. Prayer for the conversion of a friend, or for the revival of his soul, or that he may be brought to a more entire surrender, or for such exterior blessings as his safety on a voyage or his recovery from illness, is a significant testimony in this direction. So is prayer for the Church, for the World, or for any agency or cause of good.

And Intercessory Prayer is of course

a tender living testimony to two great and precious facts, which run up into one. It witnesses to the Christian believer's living spiritual union with his brethren in Christ, and indeed with all men as potentially such. And it witnesses to his wonderful and blessed spiritual union with his Lord in new birth and new life, that immediate conjunction with the Head through which he has union with the members.

Oh for more full, more vivid, more continuous recollection of this holy spiritual solidarity with Him, and with them in Him ! Let us expect to find in Intercessory Prayer a very special means of this personal blessing.

As I touch upon this subject, let me say one word more in connexion with it. It is this, that with a deepening insight, in the light of the Word of God, into our vital union with the

Lord, with a growing sense of its reality, wonder, and joy, we shall surely, by a spiritual instinct, feel a growing disposition towards Intercessory Prayer. Living oneness with the heavenly Intercessor is a strong and holy encouragement to intercede. I do not reason about it. It is a matter for the intuition, and the experience, and the enjoyment, of the life of grace. May the Holy Spirit give us a larger and larger entrance into this open secret, constraining us, as we abide in the presence of our Lord, to speak more and more fully there to Him for others !

Thus far I have spoken on the general subject only. Let me come at once to our special theme ; to Intercession as a part of Secret Prayer.

Here first observe that much of the

work of Intercession has a peculiarly fit place in Secret Prayer. As soon as Intercession begins to go into detail, it must be so. My reader will recall the incident mentioned above (p. 56), the meeting of the American Synod, in which "for Chicago they did not pray." Undoubtedly Intercession for the most particular objects can be public, can be liturgical. A nation can pray for a person; all Christian England prays collectively for the Queen. But of course such cases in public prayer are exceptional in a high degree, and inevitably they stop short very soon in details. And just because Intercession for persons *tends*, in the nature of the case, to deal with details, Intercession should have a large place and most loving use in Secret Prayer, with the special freedom and independence of secrecy,

So let writer and reader renew their recognition of that fact. Let us resolve in the Lord's Name that our work of secret Intercession, whatever the past may have been, shall henceforth be full, persistent, earnest, and also methodical, so far as method aids us towards reality and thoroughness.

Let us carry into Secret Prayer a deep and solemn recollection of the great permanent subjects for Intercession: World, and Church, and Country, and Home, and School. And let us be watchful not to slight, not to forget, promises and undertakings to pray in secret for these or for more special objects. Are we, as so many Christians now are, members of a Union, or of Unions, for private intercession?*

* The Cambridge University Prayer Union, founded in 1848, now numbers 1,600 mem-

before God, seek to carry out the promise implied in membership, remembering that it is not only a duty, but an action rich beyond all our reckoning in blessing. Or have we been asked by individual friends to remember them in prayer? Few earnest Christians fail to be so asked from time to time; and alas it is only too possible to make promises in reply which evaporate into what is practically nothing; into mere vague good wishes to some extent religious, perhaps never carried at all into a definite act of prayer as before the living God. By His grace it shall not be so with us henceforth.

All this leads to the remark, so
bers. The engagement is to pray about such great matters as the Universal Church, the Church of England, the University, Missionary work, &c. (besides occasionally more special interests), every Saturday, especially some time between 6 and 10 o'clock in the morning.

obvious but needing repetition too, that we must seek to methodize our ways of Intercession in secret. As one practical suggestion to this effect, I may recommend the use of a memorandum book, or card, as a register for promises of special prayer. It was the practice of the late General Gordon to enter in such a register the names of persons who asked for his prayers, or who were in any way laid on his heart as needing to be prayed for. Only lately I was told of the deep emotion with which a young friend of Gordon's, on some occasion when in the course of conversation this list was produced for another purpose, caught sight of his own name in it.

A little care in the *distribution* of names and subjects for Intercessory Prayer among the days of the week, or the times of the day, will greatly aid us

in making such petitions a reality. The Church Missionary Society issues a "Cycle of Prayer," adjusted to the days of the month, and invites its members to distribute their special Intercessions accordingly, taking each day one country, or one large district, in the great mission field for particular, detailed recollection before God. A similar method may be applied, of course, in almost any direction. Each member of our family may have his or her day of the week. Each regular prayer-time may carry with it the special remembrance of some friend, or group of friends. Godchildren, Sunday scholars, parishioners, servants or dependants of any kind, all may have their day or hour. So may the solemn interests of our Church and of our Country.

Such suggestions might be multi-

plied indefinitely ; but it is enough to emphasize the principle, and to recall how abundantly worth while is real painstaking in this true and fruitful work.

Let us thus pray for others indeed ; let us live the life of intercessors joined by the Holy Spirit to the eternal and heavenly Intercessor. Let Epaphras be often in our thoughts, loving and mindful Epaphras, who
Col. iv. 12. “laboured always fervently in prayer” for his Colossian brethren, “that they might stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.” Let us often visit blessed Paul in his Roman prison-chamber, and listen to him as he prays for his scattered converts and friends in
Philem. 4. Christ, making mention of them, setting before himself, and then before the Lord, their individuality, and its surroundings, and its needs, with intense

and tender detail. There are many followers of Epaphras and of Paul in our day. I was told a few years ago, by one who well knew, that it was the practice of the late venerable Head of a College at Oxford to pray every day by name for every undergraduate member of the College. It is beautifully significant, for it indicates the harmony of sanctified habits in a truly Christian life, that the same man also made it his practice never to open a letter without a moment's prayer that in the reading and the answering he might be kept and guided.

We Christians need continually to remember that Intercessory Prayer must always enter into the very life of the work which we seek to do for others, in and for the Lord. A devoted Sunday-school-teacher of whom I have heard was the means under

God of bringing scholar after scholar, with always growing frequency, to the feet of Jesus in living conversion, evidenced by a new life of love and consistency. After her death her simple diary was found to contain among other entries the three following, with some intervals between: "Resolved to pray for each scholar by name"; "Resolved to wrestle in prayer for each scholar by name"; "Resolved to wrestle for each by name, and to expect an answer."

How much we may do, by the Lord's mercy, by the mere fact that our friends know we are praying for them! A dear missionary friend of my own has found not seldom, during hours of danger, exhaustion, and illness, in the heathen solitudes, when the mental effort of praying seemed too great to be sustained, that the

shortest way to an answer of peace was the brief petition, "Lord, hear my praying friends in England."

"Before our Father's throne
We pour our ardent prayers ;
Our fears, our hopes, our aims, are one,
Our comforts and our cares."

CHAPTER VIII

PRAYER WITHOUT CEASING

THE phrase which heads this our closing chapter is derived, as the reader will remember, from 1 Thess. v. 17, where it stands as one bright link in that chain of precious precepts with which St Paul closes his earliest Epistle. *Ἀδιαλείπτως προσεύχεσθε*: "Without intermission, pray."

In less precise forms, the precept and the idea appear largely elsewhere:

Luke
xviii. 1.
Rom.
xii. 12.
Col. iv. 2.
Eph. vi.
18.

"Men ought always to pray, and not to faint"; "Continue in prayer";

"Pray always with all prayer."

What does it mean?

The minimum of its meaning is

manifest, and all-important : Pray very often. Make it a habit, the result of very many acts, to pray. In your praying, pass far beyond any limits of stated times, even of frequent stated times. So set the Lord before you, Psal. xvi. 8. so remember that He is at your right hand, that it shall be impossible to lay a limit upon your heart intercourse with Him. “The companions hear thy voice,” O favoured bride of the heavenly Bridegroom ; “cause Him Cantic. viii. 13. to hear it.” “The companions,” your earthly friends and associates, hear your utterances of thought, will, and affection, your consultations, and thanks, and requests, and words of love, not by rule and formula, not in the way of mechanism and routine, but freely, overflowing, as the thousand occasions of life bring the call. Even thus, with only the

difference caused by remembering the glory of your unseen Friend, a glory which only enhances every thought of His personal reality, His attention, His tenderness, "cause Him to hear." Pray to Him, converse with Him, confessing, praising, requesting, "at all times, and in all places" ; without intermission or interval in idea.

In this, which I venture to call the minimum of the message of our subject in this chapter, have we not a call, an offer, a privilege, a blessing, to which we Christians give, as a rule, far too slight attention? Is it not sorrowfully possible for the truly regenerate and believing soul to pass through a whole long day, from the morning watch to the evening, and practically, as regards secret communion with the Lord, to keep silence? Yes, it is possible ; and possible even

when our day's occupation, our work of pastorate, perhaps, or study, may have had a close external connexion with Him. But what proves to be thus unhappily possible through a whole day ought to be impossible to the believer for a single hour. For such is intended to be our living and loving contact of heart and mind with God, and such is the provision for us in Christ in order to our bringing the blessed ideal into reality, that every incident of life may afford a natural occasion for some spiritual converse with Him who heareth.

Let me take an instance from a very humbling quarter; from the region of self-discovery, of conviction of sin. The disciple is made aware through the conscience, by the Spirit, that he has sinned, that he has transgressed the blessed will of God, that

he has been at variance with the Lord of love, truth, and holiness. He is made aware, perhaps, (for we will suppose a case of what the world may call trivial faults, but they are dark sins in the light of God,) of a moment's impulse to impatience, or of a silent swelling up of self-exaltation, or of a movement of self-assertion, or of a deviation from the rule of absolute truthfulness of word and act, or of a tacit avoidance of some little call to self-sacrifice and loving help. He has spoken an unkind word about the absent. He has caught himself passing on, *without real need*, an unfavourable judgment, a clever sarcasm, a discreditable story. He has surprised himself wasting the irrevocable talent—time. What shall he do? Shall he content himself with a regret? Or with a strong word of inward self-

condemnation, and virtuous resolve? He is to do something very much better. If only an almost momentary act of internal prayer is possible, he is to turn straight to his God, definitely owning the sin before Him, and laying it on his Saviour's head as to its guilt and beneath His feet as to its power.

The virtue of the propitiatory blood is present, then and there; let him in that secret moment humbly claim, and receive, its cleansing. The indwelling, renewing, Spirit is there, by whom the man is one with his Head; let him humbly and at once remember, and derive, and use, and rise up again to walk in obedience and in liberty.

It is open to every Christian to learn the blessed habit of such secret dealings with his God in moments of self-detection, dealings instantaneous indeed but the very opposite of careless

¹ Joh. i.
7; ii. 1, 2.

or presumptuous. Let not the idea of the process be mistaken. The thing I mean is no easy and convenient prescription and direction how to trip lightly over an inconsistent day, making self-indulgent arrangements with the holiness of God. The persons I have in mind are precisely those who thirst and long "to walk and to please God," and to "abound more and more" in so doing, throughout the details of life; not only doing right but doing it rightly, because doing it "in God." And to them I do say, as earnestly as I can, pray thus habitually, keep yourself in the habit, daily and hourly, of these prompt, deliberate, decisive, turnings to the Lord and contacts with Him, not least on the smallest occasions of self-discovery.

Such "prayer without intermission," without really prayerless interval, will

1 Thess.
iv. 1.

Joh. iii.
21.

tend directly and powerfully both to holy tenderness of conscience and to the intended liberty and strength of the soul in Christ.

I have dwelt upon this particular case of unintermittent Secret Prayer, the case connected with secret instantaneous confession of sin. But the principle, and the practice, is to be carried out along the whole round of our experience. We are meant by the Gospel to converse with the Lord about everything. We are to confide to Him, secretly and habitually, the particulars of sorrow and of joy; the inmost things dealt with by affections, and by understanding. We are to look up to Him in spiritual simplicity as each occasion of conversation, or reading, or memory, or anticipation, brings its problem. We are to talk to Him with whom we walk, about the

temptation, mental or moral, about the bliss of home, about the cross of solitude, about the snares of success, about the would-be stings of neglect, or slander, or disappointment. We have seen above how Duncan prayed when he lost a paper in his study, and how the aged disciple at Oxford prayed when he opened his letters. Their habits may be ours. Their principle is meant to be ours, beyond a doubt.

Such ways and their results, it would be folly to deny it, do not come without holy discipline and pains. We must *think* over the need, aye, and we must think over the possibilities and the supplies which meet it. We must *labour* in secret, with more deliberate exercises of surrender and of faith, and with more exploration of the Word of God, which is alone our solid warrant for faith, if we would live in public the

hidden life of divine contact, that blessed life which the Psalmist, in the Spirit, tells us is "laid up," and is also "wrought," prepared for present use, for those who "trust in Him before the sons of men." Yes, we must "labour" in one respect that in another respect we may both "enter into" and abide in "His rest." In the state of the Fall it has become a sad instinct of the human heart to shun *close* and *habitual* conversation with the True God, ever since Primal Man hid among the trees from the approaching holy Voice. Grace, that is to say the living Lord working in us to will and to do, can wonderfully counteract the gravitation of that Fall. But we must *seek* that grace, in its blessed developments; "let us have grace," in the sense of "possessing our possessions." For myself, I would venture to avow, it

Psal.
xxxi. 19,
20.

Heb. iv.
11.

Phil. ii.
13.

Heb. xii.
28.
Obad. 17.

needs often a very distinct effort, during a solitary walk, for instance, whether in field or street, to summon home the idle thoughts, if thoughts they deserve to be called, and not rather dreams and wanderings of the mind, and to get them to settle upon the presence, the personality, the attentiveness,

Heb. xi.
27.

the love, the faithfulness, of Him that is invisible, or rather upon Him present, listening, loving, indwelling, faithful. But oh, is not that effort worth the making? It must, it shall be made, in the simplicity of obedience and of faith resting on His Word. It is infinitely well *worth the while* to be speaking personally to God in Christ, in the secret of the soul, very often indeed, "when we sit in the house, and when we walk by the way."

Deut. vi.
7.

Not for a moment do I mean that such direct intercourse with God must

be the only secret action of our spirits. The Christian, like other men, has to devote articulate thought at various times to many various interests. But all the while it is possible, in Jesus Christ, to leaven and qualify with secret divine intercourse *all* our other internal work and experience.

There is a word of David's which I love to regard as a watchword for this maintained secret intercourse, this faithfully kept secret understanding of the servant with his Lord: "Thou, ^{2 Sam.} O Lord GOD, knowest Thy servant." ^{vii. 20.} It is a word said from the soul in a moment; it is just a look into the MASTER'S face. Let us often with that word meet the little things of life, as well as the greater ones, when in any way whatever they tempt us to forget whose we are, and who is ours. A life thus kept in secret contact, in

secret understanding, with Jesus Christ will be a "hidden life before the sons of men"; hidden as to its secret, as to its experience, but not hidden in its influence. It will diffuse a happy atmosphere of rest and purity. Its secret will be a secret not to baffle but to attract; and others, finding the fruit, will seek and find the root for themselves with joy.

I spoke of the minimum of the message of those words, "Pray without ceasing." What is its maximum? How shall I attempt to express what it seems to me to be? To use words which I well know to be elastic and in some respects indefinite—this precept to pray without intermission points towards the inmost depth of the believer's life of union with his Lord by the Holy Ghost. It indicates a life penetrated in its whole material and

texture by the gracious power of "Him who dwells within." It points to a "growth into Him *in all things*," the work of the Spirit of God, so that below and between all our articulate prayers, however frequent, there shall be suffused, as it were, a living recollection that for the soul, for the life, so united to its true Head, God is in all things and all things are in God. Such a recollection will not annul (see above, p. 62), will not supersede, articulate prayers; but it will go beyond them, it is more than they. It will be to them as the fruitful underlying soil out of which articulate actions in the life of prayer will spring continually.

How shall I venture to speak of it? It is as if the soul had seen this fair land in glimpses through the clouds, or touched the edges of it on the deep. But one true glimpse, or touch, is

Eph. iv.
15.

enough to certify to ourselves its divine reality. There is such a thing as this habitual life of prayer, hidden with Christ in God. Shall we not find it, or, having found it, shall we not explore?

So our course of thought and enquiry on Secret Prayer draws to its close. Fragmentary and "in part" it has been indeed, even within its own limits. But at least we have been reminding ourselves "whence cometh our help" amidst the difficulties of that "life in the flesh" in which, whatever are its difficulties, we are invited, and in Christ enabled, to walk and to please God. Whatever the result of our special study has been, let us rise up from our gaze upon the SUBJECT, each for himself, before and with and in the Lord, to live the life

Psal.
cxxi. 1.

Gal. ii.
20.

and to do the work of men of SECRET PRAYER, "in the name of the Lord 1 Cor. vi. Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." 11.

PRAY, always pray ! The Holy Spirit pleads
Within thee all thy daily, hourly needs.

Pray, always pray ! Beneath sin's heaviest
load
Prayer sees the blood from Jesu's side that
flowed.

Pray, always pray, though weary, faint, and
lone !
Prayer nestles by the Father's sheltering
throne.

Pray, always pray ! Amid the world's tur-
moil
Prayer keeps the heart at rest, and nerves for
toil.

Pray, always pray ! If joys thy pathway
throng
Prayer strikes the harp and sings the angels'
song.

Pray, always pray ! If loved ones pass the
 vail,
 Prayer drinks with them of springs that can-
 not fail.

All earthly things with earth shall pass away ;
 Prayer grasps eternity ; pray, always pray.

Bishop E. H. BICKERSTETH.

PRAYER makes the darken'd cloud withdraw,
 Prayer climbs the ladder Jacob saw,
 Gives exercise to faith and love,
 Brings every blessing from above.

Restraining prayer, we cease to fight ;
 Prayer makes the Christian's armour bright ;
 And Satan trembles when he sees
 The weakest saint upon his knees.

COWPER.

BEHOLD the throne of grace ;
 The promise calls me near ;
 There Jesus shows a smiling face
 And waits to answer prayer.

That dear atoning blood
 Which sprinkled round I see
 Provides for those who come to God
 An all-prevailing plea.

My soul, ask what thou wilt,
 Thou canst not be too bold ;
 Since His own blood for thee He spilt
 What else will He withhold ?

Thine image, Lord, bestow,
 Thy presence and Thy love
 I ask to serve Thee here below
 And reign with Thee above.

Teach me to live by faith,
 Conform my will to Thine,
 Let me victorious be in death,
 And then in glory shine.

NEWTON.

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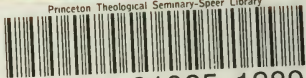
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